

where sea meets silt an ugly thirsty hound: no shame, no shame at all

heart-hand: no shame in the thud of run

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I was in a big house where my dreams still lingered after I woke. I had dreamt of something volcanic, something with an earth-deep shudder. All morning, I felt the violence of it peel out like a bell. If I keep you, I keep you at arm's length.

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Let me tell you something. I rent a small rectangular room in a big rectangular house. The room is twice as tall as it is wide. It is quite deliciously symmetrical, full of straight lines. In one corner, mould blooms out onto the ceiling in coy curves, with a sweet-earth smell if you get close, all damp and sweaty. There is a string of cobweb that hangs just off-centre above the wall facing east. I have noticed that it moves coquettishly each time the door opens. I know the ceiling well by now though I have not lived here long. As you may have guessed, it's an old house, I decide 18th century but there is no real reason why I make this assumption other than the blank and ghastly height of it. To keep warmth in over the winter, I never open the curtains and so a dull glare just filters through the fabric and the flesh-pink of the walls curdles in the grey light .

It is ugly, this bloated salmon colour, though more exotic than magnolia, the off-white ennui quietly epidemic in the rented bedrooms of this country, and perhaps the world over. But this room brought aspirations towards renewal, and I've tried a thing or two. It depends on the time of day. I've been told I'd do better not to assign places such unfounded superstitions, that I tend to burden space with faulty esoteric significance; that I expect too much, when a staircase is often - just a staircase.

Now. With this in mind, I'll divulge to you one of my most recurrent fantasies: the white room. Empty and still. A small and perfect square, quite bright and boxlike. A clean and violent white. It's lavish, this fantasy, I'm sure I just ooze with it. Sometimes I dream of orderly rows of linen-clad beds, all parallel and identical, and I have to sigh. Other times, even straightjackets. Mostly, however, it's just the heady draw of the complete and utterly empty that I crave. this need for blankness - it's almost erotic. In this new white room I imagine I would stretch my arms to the ceiling, they'd be thin and limber then. I would wear new clean clothes with my hair winter pale and my teeth straight and I would feel no need to address anyone in a voice like splintered rocks. I would stand in waifish curves with limbs all arched and pointed, pose with the taut control of a ballet dancer. I would have no need for binds then, for reassurances, in this white room, I would not know the meaning of the word shrill.

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Chopping, absolutely manic chopping. Onions, garlic, various stem and green. It's nice to break thin spaghetti into a large and rattling pot of brine.

At the kitchen table, a splash of orange paint meets white paper and spreads out like a quickening wound. I watch and the joy I feel catches me quite by surprise. The pleasure of the colour is almost unbearable. Orange! It sends a jolt of heat down my spine and, hands gone clammy, I resist the urge to moan. You know, after the little earthquake happened in me, an alarming obsession with red foods followed. It was almost pathological: fresh fig, cranberry, blood orange, and then soon afterwards, with red things in general.

(I want to tell you about this new sensuality, the bodily pleasure of colour. I want to tell you about the new death-red of a pomegranate.)

Now here's another thing: I found a lover. Yes, I did. A new one at the close of the year, the very last thing we expected and I can tell you I was just as appalled as anyone. In the mornings he was here, we lay on our backs and acknowledged the blooms on the ceiling. This room, you see, I thought I would make it a sanctuary. When we talk, we talk mostly about his work. I listen and make myself small and beautiful. He tells me I am interesting when I agree with the things he says. When he tells me I remind him of himself, I burn with a bright and yellow pride. He watched his reflection in my face and said that I was made from glass. He tells me he has not felt such want in a very long time and I feel useful, I feel like a vitamin supplement, something pastel so quaint and compartmentalised. Syruping. It was only afterwards and with surprise that I noticed how tightly I had coiled myself, vine-like, around him.

In my white room I would never think to climb a man the way you might a staircase. All morning we are slow and clouded, and move as though through cement. He tells me that this house is weird, that it brushes past with strange, ghostly fingernails I visualise icicles and tell him this. He looks at me the way one might observe the contents of a museum cabinet. When he leaves, and he does, he does leave, he dresses quickly and goes traceless before the sheets dry.

Some mornings when I wake I scan the room for movement. I think about hands, and words like caution. When he put me back (intact, crystalline) he looked down at his coarse wide hands with the knowing nod of accomplishment.

In my still room I imagine my eyelids are petals. I decide I am a very small and frail thing, perhaps glass is not incorrect after all. Slippery. Just more tangible than ghost. That day I ran to the sea. My whole body an open wound, you see, something was to claw out of me so white hot and all-consuming that I was appalled the rest of the world couldn't see it. Briny salt smell, the sharp bright

silt of it. Remember the arc of voice against wave: chest tight and irregular thud of rubber meet sand, meet pavement, meet me ungraceful, careening. Salty sea, thunder thunder thud of me.

Mouth: water! Water as blue, water as a cure, water as cause of death, water as element, water as bodied, water as sanctuary, water as compulsive, water as cool shock, water right up to the neck, water as the expanse, water as contained, water as warm and shallow and pushing your fingers into my mouth. In this strange box, dry now, the words come out whole and perfect spheres. This is how I want. This is what I want.

So I'll tell you about the dream now: when I dream, I dream of a body suspended in blue light. Quite ravaged by it: this blue, a hot cerulean, it really takes hold. It runs in the blood stream like a heavy metal. A strange toxicity. In my dream I watch the body convulse with it. I acknowledge a growing pleasure that I do not have the language to verbalise. In this dreamplane words are invariably ugly things. Dropped with the same dull consequence of boulders. Observe: a body in pain, a terrible thing. Nothing more than a layering of skin - really, the frailest thing, the most fragile, most treacherously delicate thing - this thin, fleshless membrane. A body is a thing that just happens. From my dream-perch I can see this and I understand: a body undergoes. In this cavernous blue, love grew in me something ulcerous. Shame as a sadness to be sung: I might still, I would lick up melodies and wear them on my tongue like pearls. In the blue of my dream, I open my mouth, just to try it; the sound that comes out is foreign, a peeling and strangled melisma. I think of treacle, I think of gravel.

And when I wake, the house a-shudder, a wild delight comes with the sudden compulsion to really put my hand to something, to pull meat quite literally off the bone. The day tasting faintly of fennel.