

The Borrowed Dress

But in writing fiction something had changed. She had changed. In poetry she had lived in a state of desire, always thinking on her past as her whales to harpoon with her pen and so render them dead to herself, but not before she had glorified the fat of the matter, and lit a lamp all night and so doing rendered the whale, her past dead, but also magnificent, and mythic as she rendered everything else dead, denying existences, denying whole worlds with the flick of a pen. For, if she did not write about something, it meant she had not thought about it a moment more, and so it did not exist.

Now in writing fiction she was unsure. Believing her past was perfect because she could not think otherwise for to think otherwise would be to name it good or bad when perfect was just as it was neither good nor bad—those hindsight qualifications of the seediest, insidious sort like cheap imitation handbags that didn't hold up under scrutiny, oh no her past was just so and so in this way, perfect. These states of perfection she placed under the heading *Experience* in the only page of her narrative that kept growing on account of its rather inconstant form (mind you this inconstancy did not render *Experience* non-identical to perfection—that was a myth visual artists had created when they were worried they might die, which was foolish for they certainly would die and all they had left were colors and dots and lines, which not being uttered in sound were totally unable to move the masses and so the artist was said to have left a style as if it were substance on this earth when it was just that—a style—not even a moment in time, not to be reiterated in the voice of another, and so constancy of the most unfaithful, cheapest sort). Julia's state of perception allowed the Future—that amalgamous borrowed dress, and if she was lucky, those moments when she was fearless, to be where she lived, most notably crafting dialogue in her mind before it happened and so it was she could craft her Future, which was also, generally-speaking, and sometimes before it even happened, to be filed away and categorized under the same heading *Experience*—the same heading as Past—not mind you filed in a large and overarching Dewey decimal system in the 800s, and so as it happened and it did happen, neither good nor bad, but just so, and so make her Future, like her Past, perfect.

But because it was growing, anything under the title *Experience* was not yet rendered dead. And now Julia was confused. For to write about her Past was to make it dead unto herself and so, too, make it perfect. But her page *Experience* kept growing and growing and so she did not make her Past cease to exist. How could it be dead if the page of experience kept growing? But she had been sure of it, for to be Past was to be neither good nor bad and just so, and so, perfect. And so, now in writing fiction she was unsure.

Before now her control over words was limited to her own mouth and pen. Before now she had felt as if extended to all that was nameable, for once named, she possessed it, and in naming herself, Julia, she too was self-possessed. She was known to say, "Don't quote me on this" and at the next moment declare, "I am immensely quotable". She quibbled over what she had said and yet said so much of it, one was at odds, especially William, to discern what of it she meant was quotable at all. Oh dear, she did not want to be like Theo, that hot air balloon, who spoke so little, yet when he did, was unstoppable, his hot air balloon gaping airs and ascending as if to a point until he quieted off after a

few miles and one was exhausted from listening as if craning one's neck for fear it might combust, as did that zeppelin that burst over the Atlantic. No. She wanted to be a plant a little plant that whirred in the breezes when it must and shake its cocklebur seeds into the minds of all its listeners. Her words would be cockleburs. Subtly, they would land as in the fur of dogs, yet not Darwinian and competitive, no, no that was not her way. No. They would spread in beauty in autumn at the advent of Death's season; they would spread in perfect wholeness, her cockleburs, fertilized already as they were being the union and thus, the dismemberment of the masculine, feminine voices in literature, for they sprouted from Julia and so they were primed for germination in whatever soil they landed in—although not just any soil was best, she thought, for she liked soil to be as rich as it sounded, loamy and thick, with sand that reflected its pragmatism and steely indifference, but could grow food and flowers and fungi. And her cockleburs did not need the fur of dogs or loamy soil for that matter, for her cockleburs were happy to rest until a heavy rain came and planted them in the hearts of her listeners as they went to bed at night, for she hoped they ran the day's dialogues through their minds as she did, hoping every word stuck with the force of a rolled-top desk slammed upon one's fingers. Oh she was cruel! She was quotable!

She was once told, "Do not write in the past tense. It is dull for your readers." And yet, now she must, for who truly, if ever did anything but utter gruff commands in the present indicative, and perhaps *a let us* if the person was lucky to soften the command, which was only a command, which was to will another self, equally stuck in her past and future, although regrettably perhaps not so categorized, only a command, but never the present for its own sake? That was her self: she was the point on the line.

Language could never give her the present, could never make a gift of itself as did her past, just so, and her future, just so. No the present was beyond her command—only commanding others and so her point would never align with its enunciation and so she limited herself as she did now to the use of past, future and of course, the conditional. She would do this today! No *I am*s about it.