

## Viridian

*I want everyone to know that he is not to blame for this.* This was the first and only thing she told everyone after the incident. Funny how “incident” seemed to be such a tiny sounding word for things that are considerably dire. It made it seem as if she merely slipped and fell instead of what she actually did. It also seemed to erase all that came before and chalk it up to a random and isolated act of anguish. No, this was no ordinary act. Unlike the day she met him, which was otherwise entirely ordinary.

She met him with her gaze while lounging in her seat in Studies in Experimental Narrative, a brilliant seminar class, waiting for her gregarious professor to wax poetic about James Joyce. It was after she had chewed a chasm into her pencil that a distinct sort of male swept into the room with a finesse of a figure skater, gliding toward his chair. Or perhaps, like a hockey player. More aggressive, masculine, athletic.

“Sorry I’m late, Dr. M, I got caught up in the Starbucks line.”

She couldn’t peel her eyes away from him. Her new discovery. His tallness set him apart from the other classmates, who were mostly women. Even so, he dwarfed the few men in both height and looks, just as she did with the women. This boy, this man, had a stern, yet playful countenance that suggested both depth and mirth. Even his slouch, like a beautiful goblin, set her ablaze. She found herself curious about the feel of his strawberry curls which were a very similar color to her own hair but slightly lighter. Except his hair was unkempt and spontaneous, unlike Caroline’s which was styled not to leave a single auburn hair out of place.

“No problem, Mr. Becker, I understand the struggle myself.” Dr. M replied jokingly, holding up his coffee cup. He laughed at himself for a little too long then cleared his throat before stepping to the front of the room.

“Class, this is Erik, your TA for this semester. He can help you answer any questions you may have if I’m unavailable.”

Erik turned toward the class, smiling invitingly.

*Erik Becker...*

She leveled her gaze toward him, wondering if he would notice. Once he did, the classroom then turned into a vacuum and he was all she could see. She wondered what he saw with his bright eyes, and if she was contained within them. Was she his firefly in a jar?

Class that day ended in nanoseconds. All she could recall was her hand raising up and down and her answering Dr. M’s questions as if she was on autopilot. That and also the way the back of his head looked. She was curious about that head. She wanted to carve into it like a pumpkin and see what was contained inside, to see whatever light fueled that jack-o-lantern smile. She felt odd about these desires. She had never felt so strongly about basically a stranger.

Then, the note happened. She got up to sling her tote bag over her shoulder. A swift brush of wind and sandalwood alerted her nose to a nearby presence. Before she could address said presence, he was within the door’s threshold. She swore he gave her one last glance before he departed in a haze of motion. The air in the room was thick with the ghost of him. She choked on seemingly nothing before the wrinkled visage of the note fell into her line of vision. The edges were frayed from being torn out of a notebook, some of the loops making an appearance. She picked it up with the same level of care as one would when holding a bird’s egg.

The note read:

*You have a lovely voice.*

She unfolded it to see if there was any more to read than that simple phrase.

The simple, yet endlessly flattering phrase. There wasn't anything else. No signature or any identifying marks besides some surprisingly feminine handwriting. She thought about the women in her class, if they were likely to write any note like this. It didn't seem improbable that none of them would find her worthy of their fancy, but Caroline knew that there was only one person who could have given her such a forward sign of interest.

That night, she went back to her house feeling a mist of intrigue around her. Her vision was blurred with thoughts that reminded her all too much of a childhood memory. An incident in which a blush-cheeked little pre-adolescent found herself wandering into a room she shouldn't have. Her palatial estate's deepest cavern. Caroline came from an affluent family that wanted little to do with her which was perplexing especially considering her only child status. Apparently, based on her findings, all they wanted anything to do with was each other. She went about her nightly routine, her body completing its motions but her mind arrested by these recollections and others....

All she remembered was green velvet and objects that you strike horses with. Visions of green velvet and echoes of pleasure forbidden to her eyes. She had been plagued with the memory to this day. Yet, while slipping beneath her exquisite fabrics, she found herself endowed with fantasies tinged with the aura of her childhood misadventure. Caroline grasped at her comforter with both hands and drew it close to her, sweating from perturbation.

She was titillated but also close to vomiting as she visualized Erik before her. His porcelain skin reflected the moonbeams from her window in a hypnotizing way. It was an enrapturing sight, almost too enrapturing. She willed herself to look down his body, thought she would know what she was bound to see, and she did see it. Except, to her horror, it was surrounded by coarse fur and before she could stop herself, she continued to scan his legs with

her eyes. His legs were blanketed with wiry, animalistic hair and they ended with blunt hooves. She looked back up again and blinked profusely, hoping to blur away this obscene image but instead found the horns of a ram spurting from his cherubic head. Nothing could have prepared her for this, not even the most aberrant of Greek myths. Her eyes rolled back into her head and she collapsed onto her silk pillowcase. The last thought before her head hit the pillow, however, was not of wordless terror but a message, a message that she sent despite herself: that he could do whatever he wanted with her.

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The notes persisted every week for about a month and a half. They started off with more innocent musings, things that would be said to a princess in a fairy tale or flattering compliments about her intellect such as:

*You look wonderful today.*

*Your knowledge of Woolf astounds me! She is my favorite.*

*You dress exquisitely, you could be a model.*

Eventually, the notes started to turn. It was inexplicable how they turned to reflect Caroline's thoughts about him, but it was uncanny how they did. The past notes gave Caroline a minor twinge of guilt. The contrast between her deviant fantasies and the innocence of the notes weighed on her psyche. When she received the next note, however, something inside her bubbled up. Dr. M's usually engaging lectures became literary background noise.

The first note read:

*I know you crave me, I crave you too.*

After this note he waited in the doorway to see her reaction. She turned back to look at him and imagined the horns protruding from his curls. He licked his lips, still not saying a word.

She swore he noticed her hand clutching the edge of the desk with the other holding the note in a vice grip. Then, he smiled and walked out into the hallway. She trailed behind him slightly to see if he would turn back around. He didn't. Yet she still felt the urge to follow him. She left significant space between them and watched as he walked out the hallway doors. Her heart skipped a beat as she speed-walked to catch the door. The door collided against her hand with a thud as she pushed it open. She caught him going around the corner to where she knew the bathrooms to be. Waiting for a few moments, she imagined him unzipping his pants and revealing goat-like fur, creeping out like vines. She shook the thought away and caught her breath and turned the corner. The men's bathroom door swung closed and she noticed a hint of his black jeans through the crack. She would memorize this routine of his as the notes grew more bold.

Still a word hadn't been said to her. After the last note, she decided to push past him through the door, feeling his hot breath on her neck briefly, and she bolted into the hallway. One would think that she was running out of fear and maybe she was. One would think that she should report him to the professor of the school. But, as she glided around the corner, and into the men's bathroom, she knew that this is exactly what she wanted and needed. Nothing could take this away from her—away from them.

She hurried into one of the stalls to catch her breath. She sat down on the toilet, her behind feeling the fridginess of the toilet seat. She had opted today for a green plaid skirt that flew up upon sitting.

The creak of the industrial looking steel door nearly made her squeak. It was a relief to her that the only squeaks came from black oxfords which she immediately recognized to be his shoes. She peered through the crack in the door, licking her lips with anxiety, and focused her

vision on the urinals diagonal from the stall. He unzipped his pants at what felt like a snail's pace. She could viscerally hear the metallic teeth unfurling away from each other. As the zipper unfurled, something inside her began to knot up and push on her insides. She developed an unknown urge that felt like arousal but it seemed animalistically adjacent to it. As Erik began to release his urine, she found herself knowing exactly what that urge was.

She began to urinate into the toilet in tandem with him. As she released the contents of her bladder, she sat back and did a large intake of breath just quiet enough for him to (hopefully) not hear her even though he would undoubtedly hear her stream.

A new feeling in her began to spread from her brain to her stomach, then continuously down. This feeling was pure envy. She wished she could be the liquid inside of him to be consumed then emptied. She was horrifically jealous of the urine coming from his most sacred place. Biting her lip, she finally finished as his tinkling stream ended. She cursed herself for finishing so late. He would surely discover her now.

He didn't. He simply stayed with his back turned to the stall in front of that urinal. She wondered what his delay was. Was he listening for her?

Caroline wiped herself then got up to flush the toilet, not taking her eyes away from the boy between the cracks of the door. He didn't even appear startled about the sound of the flush. He simply remained with his back turned to her. She opened the door and stood within it. She was sick of this inaction, finished with the game she loved.

“Turn around.”

This was the first thing she had ever said to him. He froze up for a second, but then recognizing that it was truly her voice, turned around as she commanded. To her surprise, she was greeted with his erect penis, surrounded by regular pubic hair and not goat fur. Her face

flushed, doe eyes widening at the sight. She looked back up at his face and gasped. There was a flash of the image of curled horns coming out of his head. She shook her head and blinked repeatedly. The horns went away. Her heart rate then returned to a normal.

He stalked toward her, closing the gap between them and Caroline knew what would come next. It seemed so quick. In an instant, there was a mashing of faces and lips. She adored the feeling of his small stubble scratching against her face and his lips felt baby soft against hers. Within minutes, they were crammed into the tiny bathroom stall together. She was delighted to feel his hardness pressed against her clothed stomach and knew that this was because of her, that this was for her. Then, within what felt like seconds, they made use of Caroline's lack of underwear. She bit his shoulder as he penetrated her then looked deeply into his eyes, the same eyes that she caught that first day of class. What she saw were those gorgeous, dark-circle rimmed baby blues. Except, his pupils were horizontal. Her heart jumped into her throat but her body only allowed her to continue. Nothing could pry her away from this. Nothing could pry her away from him. Not now, not ever.

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They didn't communicate for that entire next week. It wasn't like they ever truly communicated in general. But that one week felt like the longest week in Caroline's life. She replayed the events that happened in her head on a continuous loop almost every second of every day. Every position was burned into her brain and she couldn't walk near bathrooms without a tingle spreading all throughout her body. She would also look at the notes he gave her that she put into a special box and reminisce about how her heart felt after reading each and every one of them, a different rhythm for each note.

Finally, the next class came about which passed by in what seemed to be a moment's time. He came up to her after class, this time to give her the note himself and not leave it on her desk. She tried to hold in her gasp as his large, soft hands brushed hers upon the delivery. He then gave her a knowing look and slipped by her, slightly checking her shoulder as he passed. She looked back up to see if Dr. M had seen and it appeared he didn't. He was involved in his notes for the next lecture.

Caroline strolled out of the classroom, not opening the note until she reached the hallway. This time the note was different.

The note read:

*Follow me.*

As if she was under a spell, her head looked up for her and saw him at the end of the hallway. He gave her a nod and then turned around to walk out the hallway doors. She followed suit. He decided to skip the bathroom this time to her surprise and then just walked down the stairs to the ground floor. She went down the stairs as well and continued to follow him as we went out the doors of the first floor, into the outside air. The real trek began after that. They filtered past students who were in a trance just like she was, except they were hypnotically involved in the journey to their next class whereas she was transfixed with keeping him in her line of sight. She only broke from looking at him once to see which direction they were going. They were headed towards the barren, dirt lots that extended a little past campus where there were some small houses, seeing that the campus used to be an air-force base. The base housing had been converted to student housing. She crunched along the gravel behind him. He gave her the occasional glance over his shoulder, probably to see if she was still behind him. And of course, dutifully, she was.



At last, they reached his house. It was a muted, burnt pink, the color of the Arizona desert. It still had remnants of the standardization that characterized military housing. She wondered how someone as unique as him could fare in such a standard place. She scolded herself for even thinking this and knew this was her affluent background pondering for her.

He looked over his shoulder one last time then went into his house. She felt a sense of apprehension about going into his home, but decided to swallow that feeling as she turned the knob. It turned slightly in her hand, then halted abruptly. He had locked the door behind him. An expression of puzzlement eclipsed her previously fascinated countenance. She mustered up the courage to knock on the door, hearing the hollow thuds of the cheap wood, and then she listened to see if she could hear footsteps approach the entrance. To her dismay, there were none. Caroline felt a tinge of humiliation, but mostly exasperation.

*What sort of game is he trying to play with me?*

A movement out of the corner of her eye shook her out of her frustrated state for a split second. It was a slight noise made around the window. She directed her gaze toward said window and saw the blinds leisurely lifting their slats like the opening of tired eyes. But was this for her? His eyes beamed through the glass straight into hers. He gave her a smirk and then turned around to disappear within the confines of the house. She attempted to follow as if she could walk straight through the window but paused so as not to slam her face against the glass, though she desperately wanted to.

She remained at that window watching him for at least a few hours. Caroline wasn't keeping track of the time but she knew that the sun had set behind her, with the sky turning from robin's egg blue to blushing pink to midnight black, and yet she didn't care. The only color that concerned her was how green his interior was. Every piece of furniture was a deep, forest green.

No, much more deep than that—his furniture was viridian in hue. Faint echoes of her past rattled about in her head. But this time, she was greeted with a wanted discovery.

She then ecstatically watched as he nonchalantly prepared his broiled salmon dinner with sauteed asparagus and her mouth watered as he ate it. She was starving in more ways than one as she could smell the meaty, pink fish through the window. All her senses were filled with want but all of her emotions were comprised of confusion and annoyance. After more tortuous minutes of waiting and watching outside the window, she knew what she had to do: she was going to knock again.

This time, she knocked violently--she knocked how a prisoner would shake the bars of his cell and the door rattled as such bars would. A bruise would form on her hands later for sure. She paused and finally heard a shuffling sound and his oxford shoes pacing toward the door. Her heart shot up to her throat as she heard the lock twist open and she stepped back accordingly as the door inched open. There he was before her again, waiting for her in another doorway. Her in-between boy.

“Come in.” he requested.

That was the first thing he ever said to her. She granted his request and then stepped over the threshold into his home. It didn't even take one moment for them to be at each other. They scrambled with each other, messily fumbling with clothes and touches and lips. Yet, to the outside viewer, their union would look as a choreographed dance. They moved as if they'd known each other for centuries and yet to them, it felt like ravenous clawing. His hands made a point of putting every one of her hairs out of place and then he buried one hand into the back of her hair, tugging slightly, using his other hand to hold the small of her back and pull her close to him. He trailed hot, wet kisses down her throat and she in turn entwined her fingers in his hair,

holding him to her. They ended up making it to the edge of the couch where she pushed him onto it and boldly straddled his lap. She took one last look into his eyes before resuming her actions. They were his normal blue with very human pupils, much to her relief.

Moments passed and then both their clothes became property of the emerald carpet. Caroline felt herself begin to transcend with each motion and his encouraging grunts and pants carried her along like the ferryman in the myths. All language became foreign to her and letters flashed across her imagination in a tumultuous flurry. Her body was commanding her to speak what was filling her mind to capacity. But something in her, a niggling voice told her she couldn't. The pressure built and built and her body was triumphing over that voice. She had to scream out her phrases.

A perfectly executed stroke of his then sent her over the edge and the words--the incantation spilled out of her mouth. It was almost as if she was speaking in tongues and perhaps she was. At least that's what it sounded like to Erik who came himself but looked at her with astonishment after the fact. Caroline was still muttering as she came down from her bodily high. But it wasn't only her body that felt high. She felt an unmistakable bubble of something in her chest, something that expanded and swelled, reaching every part of her soul and brain. Caroline loved him. She barely knew what that was herself. So she expressed it in the only way she knew how at that moment: she took his chiseled face into her hands and then planted a sensual kiss on his forehead. The feel of his sweat dewed forehead against her lips was intoxicating but she knew she had to pull away to see if he felt what she was feeling too.

She took another look into his eyes and gasped in horror, completely ignoring his reciprocal expression. Once again, his pupils turned horizontal. He looked at her puzzledly, being obviously startled and started hushing her.

“It’s okay, Caroline. It’s okay...”

He brushed his hand along the side of her face and then started screaming himself. She jumped backwards off of him, landing naked on the floor. She wondered if he knew that was happening with his eyes but there was no way he could unless he looked in the mirror. Then, to her horror, she saw blood dripping down both sides of his forehead and him holding his head in pain.

“Erik, what’s wrong? What’s going on with you!”

He removed his head from her hands and gave her the look of someone who has seen hell. She screamed again when she saw two tiny, burgeoning horns growing out of his head.

“You did this to me!” He bellowed at her, eyes wild.

“No...no!” She shook her head in disbelief.

“Get out!” He ordered her, throwing her maroon sweater and black skirt at her.

She threw on her clothes while he continued to howl and moan at the red-hot pain in his forehead.. Hot tears streamed down her face at record pace. This was unusual since Caroline was never prone to crying but she never felt her heart more violently breaking. She finally got her clothes on and he proclaimed to her in a distorted voice that he never wanted to see her again. She choked on her sobs all the way to her car. Her bare feet abused themselves on the jagged gravel as she carried her heels in her hand, all the way to the parking lot on the other side of campus. She wanted to bleed out but most importantly, she wanted him to see that she would never forgive herself.

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Caroline layed in bed with her thoughts swimming about like festering guppies. A note draped across her chest like a crumpled scarf. She had gone to class earlier that day, expecting

Erik in different spirits. He had two large bandages on his forehead which he attempted to cover with a plain black ballcap. She recalled that she couldn't do anything but stare at the back of his head that day. Dr. M had even called her out in front of the class for “staring into space” which was unusual due to their congenial relationship. Still, he was generous enough not to reprimand her about what she was actually doing, which if he couldn't sense it by then, he had to be blind. She supposed she had to be slacking on her academic career due to her new fascination. It wasn't until then that she realized that she was not the only one who could see that.

Nevertheless, she continued through class as if he wasn't there on the surface, but underneath it all she was pining for him. She felt herself become uncharacteristically desperate for a sign from him that everything is okay between them. This feeling gnawed at her heart like the most petulant of rats and she felt just as dirty as one. The beige walls of the classroom began to close in on her and the dust in the air felt asphyxiating. Class finally ended within the next torturous hour. Erik gave her a dark, devastated look and unceremoniously dropped the note onto her desk. The note that she clutched to her chest on her bed.

The note read:

*I meant what I said*

Caroline had to fight back tears as she walked to her car that day. She dissociated from pure anguish while driving home. As she saw herself outside her body, she couldn't help but berate the person she floated above. When she, at last, got to her bed. She laid there pent up, unable to release the hordes of tears that were ramming against her optical gates. The note crumpled into a ball as she held it to her chest. He was the only person she could have possibly ever loved and he wanted nothing to do with her because of something she did. She ran over the events a plethora of times in her mind but she still couldn't quite discern exactly what happened

that night but she knew it was her fault. Walking over to the box to put her note away, she felt a pull toward the box that felt as if someone tied a rope around her spine and hoisted her forward. The last damned note was going to go with the other damned notes and then she would set the box on fire, literally and figuratively damning them all to hell.

But as she opened the box, she heard a pinging in her brain that sang all the way down her person. She dropped the most recent note in and then swiftly shut it with a deafening crack. She willed herself to pick up the box and take it outside, but the contents within struck the deepest chords in her heart upon sight. Like the frayed edges of the notes, she was quite torn. She never wanted to see these notes again, yet she couldn't will herself to get rid of them. There was an unexplained kinship she had with them that bothered her to no end. Then, like a divine interruption, her stomach growled. She hadn't eaten anything all day due to her incessant suffering—her tearless suffering.

The cure for her hunger and suffering then came down over her features like a black veil. Her alienesque eyes turned more unreachable, as she walked back over to her bed trancelike. She sat up against her pillows and headboard, legs spread with the box sitting between them like a child's Christmas present. Her mind created white noise as she creaked the box back open again and wrapped her fingers around the first note she saw. She brought it up to her lips and gave it one last flutter of a kiss.

*Goodbye...*

Her jaw unhinged like a serpent's and then she shoved the whole note in her mouth. The paper crackled underneath her teeth and her mouth threatened to dry up like the Arizona desert, but she kept chewing and chewing with abandon. The first note became pulp and she swallowed the disgusting substance like it was her final supper. Then, it was the next note's turn and she

repeated the same actions with the first one, the only difference being that her pent up tears finally started to crack through her eyelids and bolt down her aching cheeks.

While she chewed on, all her mind could do was curse him incessantly. This also manifested itself verbally between chews. All the while, she continued to shove the notes into her maw and reduce them to a mushy, white paste and then swallow eagerly. The curses and tears flowed. She wished for things she would never wish on any person and that same language that struck her brain while they were making love paraded through her head once more. This parade was going as if someone had pointed a controller at her head and pressed fast forward. The chaos was unimaginable and her stomach was sated but suffering profoundly. Her mouth and pink lips were dusted with tiny cuts that she didn't think could be possible.

After consuming the final note, she flopped down on her bed and fixed her eyes on the ceiling. Her tears stung her cheeks and her breath coiled, stuck in her chest like a snake had slithered down her throat and built its home behind her sternum. She knew that there was no discernable way that any of this could have been good for her yet she was satisfied in some inexplicable way after her "meal". She wasn't upset about what they had done anymore--what *she* had done anymore. No, she had concluded that she was profoundly devastated that they had not done enough.

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Caroline was discovered vomiting up blood in her toilet later that evening. It wasn't her parents that had found her, however, it was her maid. She had been alerted by the sound of deathly bleating outside of her window. The sound dissipated when she finally made it to Caroline's room. When asked what she had done, Caroline replied that she only wished she could do more and that he wasn't to blame for this.

But he was to blame for his cowardice. Despite this, she loved him anyway.

She was taken to the hospital promptly. Her parents visited only once.

Who was *he*? Everybody asked her. She never answered. He was hers to know and hers to know alone.

Now, in the hospital Caroline stayed at, they tried to keep the patients away from the news, but she came across (she stole it from an orderly) a wayward newspaper one day that told of sightings of a monstrous figure with goat horns lurking across campus. On a different page, was a missing persons ad for Erik Becker. Strangely enough, this photo of him was the most gorgeous she had ever seen him: slightly smudged against a beige background.

In that moment, she had cracked the first smile she could muster in ages, a smile of unbridled glee. They were together again in the sense that they were both the monsters they were destined to become. Caroline sipped at her juice box, caving it in with the strength of her suction. She followed the directions of all of her doctors and the psychologists down to a science and chalked up her experience to a brief lapse in judgment as a result of an intense emotional outburst. Her parents blamed the school for stressing her to the brink of insanity. Regardless, within a month's time, she knew she would make it out of that facility. She also knew exactly what she would do the moment she got out. The viridian would return to her in droves. She hoped the full moon would be ready for the sight, but knew it wouldn't be ready for the sounds. Taking one, last look out the stormy window, she exhaled a mirthful laugh as she saw the purest sight before her. Then she heard the purest sound—the sound of the monster she loved.