

The Master Bedroom

I am absorbed in the curve of his upper lip as he smiles. A gentle wry shape, where the upturned edges of his mouth hold a playful secret. I am watching him eat and talk across from me in the warm morning light. Holding my coffee with two hands, I find myself surfing the thin wave of his upper lip as he breaks off pieces of scone still warm from the oven. Dipping them tenderly into the mounds of cream and jam on his favorite chipped plate, the one with amber colored roses. Something in the way he holds the scone in front of his mouth for the briefest moment before popping it in, something in the shape of his mouth as he savors it. I am lost. His sparkling hazel eyes catch me peering over the rim of my cup. He scoops a bit of the cream with his forefinger, swiping it across his mouth.

“Do I have something on my lips?” He pouts, leaning toward me.

As his crooked smile reaches for mine something black begins to ooze from between his lips. The viscous substance dribbling down his chin. The rippling darkness spreads to his eyes as they sink into his skull. Gelatinous clots of dark blood spray from his mouth, splattering my face, dousing the table. His hands clasp over the gushing orifice and when they fall, his blackened mouth has been sewn shut.

I awake panting and gasping, droplets of sweat clinging to my brow. The image of his maimed mouth imprinted behind my eyelids. *As always*. Rising with a shudder from my tangle of dampened covers, I gaze blankly about the room. It takes me a few moments to recognize the space in the pale morning light creeping in from the solitary window.

Once spacious and lush, the room has grown cramped and disheveled. The coffee table we found together on one of our many walks, down the alleyways of our neighborhood lay buried under piles of half started paintings, innumerable books and magazines covered by empty cigarette cartons. The futon permanently kept down, blankets and pillows strewn haphazardly upon it. It's here that I sleep, if I can at all. I can't sleep in our room. My eyes glance at the hallway on the other side of the room.

No, I tell myself. *Don't think about it*. Shuddering again, I wander into the kitchen. Avoiding the threshold of the hallway. The formerly cozy kitchen now lack luster, dingy. Across

The Master Bedroom

from me his chair sits empty. Sipping at the cold coffee from the mug on the table, but the bitterness makes me nauseous. Crossing the kitchen, I drain the cup in the sink. Balancing it on the jenga tower of dirty dishes. They wobble threateningly. Holding my breath, waiting for the crash, but it doesn't come. *Maybe later.*

I return to the sitting room, settling myself on the window seat, pushing aside my notebooks. Countless pages with two or three lines of prose followed by scratched out words and many scribbles. Drawing my knees up to my chest, I wrap my worn robe around them. Outside the gloomy cloud-choked sky looms. Streams of orange and burgundy whirl past the window. Leaves flutter in flurries, drifting back down into the yard or else carried further, beyond the overgrown hedge, into the road perhaps. I watch a spider in the corner of the window, spinning her gossamer threads. Reaching for the nearest notebook.

Woe is mine eyes

to see such horrors

Pursued by his

ghost

Down darkened corridors

My pen falters and my chest tightens. I can't let myself think about it. Startled to my feet by a high pitched ringing from the kitchen. I don't remember the last time the phone rang. Fervor growing, I know what I will hear. Raw emotions rake through me. Disgust, a deep disgust for the excitement I still find within myself. Excitement to hear the voice that will greet the caller and prepare them to leave their message. His voice. Only a few more rings to make my choice. Immobilized by the powerful longing building inside of me, and yet am uncertain if I can endure the sound. *What fresh hell will his voice bring?*

I start forward, rushing to reach the receiver before the ringing ceases, to prevent him from speaking, to save myself from the pain of it. Slipping on my fallen journal, catching myself

The Master Bedroom

I hurry into the kitchen. Arm extending, fingers ready to grasp the cord on the wall. The recorder clicks, I am too late. A shiver shoots up my spine as he speaks. Every articulation, each inflection in his dulcet tones makes my heart flutter and my stomach churn. I inhale sharply as he finishes, my gasp echoes from the room at the end of the hallway. Eyes cast down, as I pace between the two rooms, a shadow forms in the corner of my vision. I find the notebook, pages sprawl open on the floor. Words flood out.

What is this

specter

That crawls forth

from the void

Angel of nightmares

No, stop! Don't look. The book slips from my trembling hands. A woman's voice calls from the kitchen.

"Sibby. Sibby it's me." I had forgotten there would be someone on the other line. Recognition comes slowly.

"I know you're there. Just pick up." Drifting back to the phone, staring for a moment. Tentatively I for the receiver, grabbing it with the sleeve of my robe to catch the dust on it.

"Liz? Is that you?"

"Of course it's me, does anybody else call you Sibby?"

"Oh, no, well I'm just surprised. I thought you were still traveling."

"I told you I'd be coming home on the 5th. That was 4 days ago and when I didn't hear from you I started to worry. So I called Aunt Elaine." Together we hold our breath. I know she'll speak first, she always does.

"She says you called off the wedding and no one has heard from you in weeks." Impaled by the double edged sword of Aunt Elaine's mouth.

The Master Bedroom

“Now, don’t you go cursing auntie. She did the right thing.” Liz has always had a way of knowing exactly what I am thinking. Especially when I don’t want her too.

“Well, what do you want Liz.” The initial shock abates, I want to end the conversation as quickly as possible. Before she decides what is best for me.

“I want to know how you are doing. I want to know why the wedding is off. I want to know what happened with...”

“Stop! Stop it! Don’t say his...” My strangled yell falters. I had to stop her, I knew where she was going, I could tell the next word on her lips would have been his name.

“Jeez Sibby, you really aren’t doing well, are you?” Her voice a strained whisper.

“Look, Liz I’m alright. I’m just busy is all. I’ve got a lot of writing to do. Maybe we can catch up another time.” Playing with the tie of my robe, half torn and dangling from my hip. Praying that will be enough, praying she won’t push the subject.

“No maybes, Sib. I’m coming over.” She knows.

“No Liz plea...”

“I’ll take you to lunch. See you in a couple hours.” The line clicks. The phone drops from my hand. As soon as she steps foot in the house, she will know. I can not hide the truth any longer, not from her, not from myself. I collapse face down onto my bed, landing on the open pages. Tears and ink stain my face.

From whose maw

pours

A fountain

of fears

A ghastly

geyser

The Master Bedroom

A deep droning begins in my ears. I clamp my clammy hands over them, but am unable to block out the noise. It builds into a wailing throbbing sound. I hold my breath and slowly lift my gaze to the hallway, a pulsating abyss. From the master bedroom a shadowy figure crawls. Sinew dripping like tar from its glistening onyx skeleton. Flesh falling to the floor. Leaving crimson pools of it in the hallway as it claws at the carpet, dragging itself closer. Its visage absent of a face, with empty sockets and mouth sewn shut. Tormenting wraith, I squeeze my eyes closed tight against the sight of it. Heart hammering my ears, battering my bones as a guttural voice breaks through the dull roar.

Sibyl it moans. Spider-like fingers reach for the threshold of the hallway.

Sibyl! It screeches louder. The fervent pounding echoes through the house.

“Forgive me, please.” Burying my face in the pillows. *Don't look.*

Sibyl

An abrupt knock on the window banishes the shadow. I lay panting for a moment, silence broken only by my heaving, rasping breath. Another sharp knock pulls me from my bed. A figure stands outside the wide bay window, in a descending curtain of mist and vapor. A familiar young woman.

“Sibyl! What are you doing? Let me in!” She strides out of sight. Scrambling to my feet, my legs shaking violently, I stumble toward the front door. At the hallway, my leaden body halts me, flicking on the light. It offers no solace, casting a languid glow on the wood paneled walls and thick gray carpet. No trace of the phantom, the master bedroom sealed. I turn away, reaching the front door as the woman does.

“Jeez didn't you hear me knocking? Or yelling?” She pushes past me into the entry way, dripping wet. I stand in the open doorway breathing in the crisp scent of rain.

“Sib! What...is that what you're wearing to lunch?” I glance down at my threadbare robe, barely covering my stained cotton dress.

“And your hair! When was the last time it saw a brush?” My fingers gingerly graze the top of my head, where thick mats have begun to form.

The Master Bedroom

"I... I'm not quite ready to go."

"Well I can see that." I try to block her path as she advances toward the sitting room. She moves around me easily, putting one hand on my shoulder and gently maneuvering me aside.

"I mean to say that I just don't think today is a good day for me." I side step, blocking the hallway. She scrutinizes the room, reaching the coffee table and picking up a magazine. On the cover a woman with flowers in her hair and a long white dress flashes her dazzling smile. Clenching my fists, resisting the urge to rip it from Liz's hands. A crash from the kitchen causes her to jump, dropping the magazine, scattering refuse to the floor.

"What was that?"

"The dishes probably." My voice quavers. She turns on her heels, marching out of the room. I drift in her wake. She flops into his empty chair, wincing I sink into my own. I can feel her stare boring holes in the top of my head as I inspect the lines and curves of my hands. The pervasive silence between us grows heavier and heavier, it presses in upon us. I don't know how much more I can take.

"So are you gonna talk to me or what?"

"What do you mean." I can feel it coming. The moment when a torrent of truth will stream out of me, when the river will jump its banks leaving devastation in its wake.

"C'mon Sib. You're clearly not doing well. Look at the state of this place, and you. What's going on?"

"What oh nothing really. I mean I guess it has gotten a little unkempt."

"Unkempt? Honey, this place is a bio-hazard. You're smoking again? You were doing so good before I left. I don't even know what happened with you and Toni. One second you're planning a wedding the next I have to hear from aunt Elaine that you broke it off. I mean aunt Elaine? You couldn't even call me, your own sister?" I try to focus on Liz, all but one word fades away. His name, echoes. His name reverberating in my ears.

The Master Bedroom

I catch it in

my hands

His blood

My sins

“When did you last shower? Why are you sleeping in the living room?”

The humming grows louder. No longer just in my head, its coming from the hallway and the room at the end...

“I... well it’s just.” The knob on the door jiggles, something wants out.

“Just what?”

“I can’t go in there.” A numbness engulfing my chest, my vision blurring.

“Don’t be silly, why not?”

“Liz... I...” A muffled moan in the darkness as the door to the master bedroom swings open.

“Sibby, I love you. Please, just talk to me.” The vibration from the hallway reaches a fever pitch, rattling inside my skull. There is no Liz anymore, only the shadow creeping out from the bedroom beyond. Flinging my hands over my head I scream.

“No please!” A roiling cry.

“Sibyl! Sibyl!” My sisters voice breaks across my cheek, or maybe it is her hand. My face stinging, my breathing ragged and disjointed. The silent hallway bare and empty once more.

“Oh Liz,” I collapse, sliding from my chair to the floor.

dissolving

phantom weight

upon my chest

The Master Bedroom

dragging me down

anchored in the depths

through watery view

her chalky face floats

cold hands reach

ice on my cheeks

“Sibyl. What is it?”

“He’s still there, Liz, in the bedroom.”

drowning

water in my lungs

choking on my tears

my own saliva

Run

between my fingers

Unbidden

Undammed

She opens the door to the master bedroom and a putrid scent, rotting decay, hits me harder than she. Unable to hold it back any longer. On my knees I wretch, the carpet wet beneath my hands. Dark blood oozes from between my fingers as I grip the gray fibers, saturating my palms. A distorted cry catching in my throat.

“Sibby there’s nothing here, there’s nothing in the bedroom, just a lot of dust.”

“So much blood.” I murmur

“Sibyl...” ***Sibyl***

presenting my palms

The Master Bedroom

sins laid bare

from my hands

dark red

drips

drips

drips

flowing down

my wrists

rivulets run

along vertical

scars

"Everything is going to be okay, Sib, just stay here. I'm gonna make a quick phone call."

Somewhere beyond myself

a vibration pulls

me into the void

her voice rises in the distance

smothered by screeching

an echoing scream

wailing

A droning pound

Resonating sound

The yawning abyss,

the precipice

The Master Bedroom

I awake to flickering light, a beeping at my bedside, a tugging on the skin at the crook of my elbow. I roll my head to the left, my sister stands next to a woman in blue.

“How are you feeling, Sibyl?”

My senses scattered. Loosely strung thoughts, glimpses of memory flash, the sickly scent upending my stomach, the damp carpet under me. I stare at my palms, they are bright pink, but unstained. Questions weave in the frayed fabric of my mind.

Have they found him yet?

Were the police at my house?

They must be by now, they'll see what I've done.

And where I left him on the bed, scene of two crimes.

Oh what have I done.

The beeping beside me increases rapidly. Voices murmur. My family, his family, what will they do when they find out? What will I do? Through rushing blood, an alarm rings in my ears.

“Sibyl, are you alright? Talk to us.”

The floodgates open

the truth flows freely

shackled no more

“I killed him.” a choking whisper.

I see it now, my home filled with officers, holding their breath. Averting their eyes, from where his body lay. Spread-eagle. Arms and feet lashed to the bed frame, mouth sewn shut to cover those lips, to silence the lies.

“Sibyl, we need you to calm down. We're here to help you.” The woman in blue reaches for the tubes connected at my elbow, syringe in hand.

“Just breathe Sibby.”

The compression intensifies, lungs sink into my spine. Ribcage tightening. Razors in my chest cut as I try to inhale. The alarm, the voices, all drowning in a growing drone, pounding on my ears. The pressure of it swells in my head. Screaming darkness suffocates me.

The Master Bedroom

Woe is mine eyes

The aching

emptiness

What he'd become

What I had done

Gazing at his lips once more. He is speaking, but I cannot hear the words. Entranced by the ellipse on the left side of his upper lip rising high above the right as he speaks. Ebb and flow as they move. They remind me of a wave on the ocean. Until they stop, abruptly. Not his usual coy pout, a wariness beneath the surface. I know what is coming. I try to reach up, aching to touch those lips, before they change, before the tide of blood comes. Any minute and they will be blackened and bound. Yet my hand remains unmoved at my side, the impulse to reach out stifled by the weight of my limb. Pain in his eyes, it must be soon. His hand grasps mine, the warmth of it dispels the fear.

could I really be here, with him?

Yet where is here?

Through a heady cloud, I survey the room, bathed in light. Warm golden hues stream from the window to my right. Out of which I can see an enormous wall, a curved bowl cradling a smooth lake below us. The glassy surface ripples gently, reflecting the distant city buildings. Over the edge, down further still, water filters through small holes and continues on its path, toward a sea, perhaps.

“Sibby?” A familiar voice. My reverie breaks. The room in which I lay fades into a sallow gray color. Through the haze I glance from Liz to him, his pout pallid, but un-marred.

“How are you feeling?”

The Master Bedroom

Inky stains swim in and out of my vision. Blotching their lurid faces. They argue in hushed tones, as if I am not here.

Am I here?

“I told you I shouldn’t have come. This is too much for her.”

“No, she needs to see you aren’t dead. The doctors said it could be beneficial.” Turning my head through the fog, near the door stands two men. Mute paper dolls in long white coats.

“Sibby, look he’s here. He isn’t dead.” Liz grips my hand tightly. I am preoccupied by his lips. They twist into a pained smile, but a darkness is forming in the corner, a small sinister orb. Staring fixedly at his mouth. He pulls his lips into a tight seam, waiting to be stitched. Pursed like the dam outside my window, holding back the river.

“I’m alright Sib.” The crimson droplet falls as he opens his mouth, my gaze follows it. A perfect gleaming bead, lands in my open palm.

“I think that’s enough for today, she needs her rest.”

I bear it

no longer

This existence

I am

delivered

unto the void

Trembling in the dark. Shadow shrouds the room. At the foot of my bed, he hovers, a bubbling on his lips

tripping on my feet

ripping at the walls

flickering lights overhead

The Master Bedroom

out of the building

and into the night

he follows

At the edge of the dam, a glittering liquid meadow flows. Thousands of tiny diamonds merging city and sky. Below, an impenetrable vortex bids me welcome. A gale races up the stone embankment to greet me, whipping the hem of my gown. I surrender it to night's keen breath

billowing away

luminescent whiteness alights

delicately in the water

a linen apparition floating

in a sea of stars

howling winds call my name

crying voices in the dark

Sibyl

to my left a figure stands

hazel eyes glistening

"Sibyl, I'm sorry. Please don't do this."

Sibyl

to my right, shadow wavers

the void inviting

"Forgive me."

wind bears that

which I cannot

my body embraces

cold empty expanse

The Master Bedroom

There I find

cream

on his crooked smile

I yield

To feel

his lips

meet mine

Woe is mine eyes

To see such horrors

Pursued by his

ghost

down darkened corridors

What is this

specter

That crawls forth from

the void

Angel of nightmares

From whose maw

pours

A fountain

The Master Bedroom

of fears

A ghastly

geyser

I catch it in

My hands

His blood

My sins

Run

Between my fingers

Unbidden

Undammed

A droning pound

Resonating sound

The yawning abyss,

the precipice

Woe is mine eyes

The aching

emptiness

what he had done

what I'd become

I bare it

no longer

The Master Bedroom

this existence

I am

delivered

unto the void

There I find

cream

on his crooked smile

I yield

To feel

his lips

meet mine