

The Father, The Daughter, and The Holy Ghost

The funeral: And so their words filled Rachel's ears as dirt and clots of soil, for what is a parent's knowledge but the soil in which wisdom may strike root? Their words smothered her as clumps of earth, but she was want not to know it, and so loved them. Down into the shaft of their life together, and now but she remains, and with but few salt tears to connect flesh to memory. So they were wed as we are wed at funerals, the shaft is aisle and we are beautifully betrothed to the ghost of our pain, a holy ghost summoned by another caring hand.

Back from the dead she drove, and wept but little, her heart dared the profane and beat with a shameful laughing hope for all that still lived beneath their earthen words, but soon a guilty shovel restored her shame, and her mourning heart was recovered. Still, that evening the day was light and restless within her, and so she struck at her heart with the familiar reproachful tongue long enough her own, that she saw not that it was borrowed of the dead. "You are a disgusting thing. A laughable thing. A selfish stupid little girl, to imagine you have any business trying, or even dreaming such a frivolous thought, so useless to dream it, or laugh as if you might succeed where you have no business. Mind your limits, and honor those who gave of themselves to show them to you." Shame spoke and covered her happiness, so she accepted them, and so accepted herself and pushed quietly off to where sleep lives, as a lover lost between night and memory.

Each day we wake, open our daylight eyes and cast out our heart as a net into the day, so we see all which we can not know. And in turn, each night we close our eyes and wind in the net so we may then pour it out into the sea, which swallows all things into its depths to know all things, but behold none.

So Rachel found herself before the sea, and the gentle foam shed the breath of its bubbles around her feet, and knew her. The sands opened having been kissed by the knowing sea, the dune folding back over itself, until a sweet air and golden light invited her to step within. The walls received her and arched up to form a marble chamber thick with the scent of pine and cedar. Her very soul was born into the air and light therein, and returned to her as tears. An alabaster light, white and pure as milk drew her toward the chamber's end where a pedestal of stone curved under as the back of the sea reaches upward, but in mirror. So Rachel beheld her father, cupped thusly in the palm of time's loving hand.

Her tears drew their curtain of gauze before her eyes and loved him, for he was beautiful. Her memory welled up within her, as warmth rises up above cold things, and she knelt down and kissed his forehead with a daughter's warmth, and knew he was beautiful. His lips no longer seemed blue and ashen, but now as her own, and his eyes opened but were not his eyes, but were as her own, and weeping.

Her lips spoke to her from him and said, "Go to the sea and be safe, for you are loved and safe within my shadow." For he had placed within his shadow his wisdom, a father's wisdom: Keep close to the earth that which casts an ugly shadow. So he had suffered to learn, and then to teach. Fear is the shadow of suffering, and the child might bear the mark of the wound and so never know it. His shadow rose up from his body and carried her back to the sea, where the waves had receded to reveal a wondrous marble statue, its stone as pure as light, and whiter than the palest ivory. In its delicate hand was a slender vase with a narrow neck, as might receive a single perfect flower. There was a golden script encircling its neck, ornamental and graceful as the vase itself. The statue and the vase were familiar, and she knew that her daylight eyes would find them. Suddenly, the statue turned in the sand to reveal that its left arm was missing, and a deep pain, as from the marrow itself, came to her left arm. A stifling grip exerted itself upon her throat and breath. Now Rachel's chest tightened and a horror fell into her as a hot stone from the heavens. Even as she was dreaming and could not see, she felt her pained arm, and as the moon finds its light of the sun, she knew that there is day in the night, and night in the day, and was afraid.

When Rachel awoke she opened her eyes and cast out her dreams with the net of her heart, so thought little of them. The statue with its slender vase came to her thoughts, and she went to look through those treasures her father had bequeathed to her. A hardwood jewel box inlaid with mother of pearl, lay hidden beneath the profusion of many old musty cardboard cartons. The inlay was of such magnificent quality as to be a perfect portrait in opal and pearl, every detail of the statue was perfectly presented, including the vase with its cryptic writing. Within the box was a brass necklace, a band adorned as light on light with gold leaf on brass to form the script lettering. Its beauty and ornament all but obscured the cryptic letters, which Rachel discovered spelled, "*slhoavmee*." Although she did not understand its meaning, the necklace was a masterpiece of caring and craftsmanship become artistry of the highest order, not to mention a loving gift from her father. So she clasped it about her neck, and felt it snap fast in a perfect fit.

All those who knew her noticed how beautiful the necklace was, and the glow of her days was marred only by the ever worsening pain in her arm. A strange sympathetic vibration with her dream? A nuisance to be sure. "I can not stand the ache, and it feels as if the bone itself atrophies. See how thin, tender and useless it is—I have come to hate it!" Her doctor seemed thinly amused himself, to hear her complaint and remarked a bit too glibly, "Maybe it is not a good thing to hate your arm. Maybe it is your arm, which hates you! Ha ha ha. Well we will see who has been disappointed to know who soon enough. The x-ray will be back shortly." So the bad news came after such levity as this, and a cancer of the bone which all could see dampened the mood to blackness. A surgery was scheduled.

She cursed her withered dead arm, and with each black word the arm hurt more, as if it had ears, and malice in its marrow. The days passed and she cursed the arm and hated it even as its torment answered her words with pain's terrible vengeance. So the day came and the mask was placed upon her face and the potion injected so sleep might cover pain

which remains unseen, and the arm was gone. However, when she awoke, Rachel found that the pain was not.

And where the arm had been the air hurt her, and she thought, "How can what is no longer here hurt? What is pain but an imagining?" And she was comforted by these thoughts, and felt not her arm. So does one think and speak who is in the daylight, and can see but does not know. Rachel lived her life and told no one of it, and so thought she heard not herself. An empty place, a silent place broke the happiness within her, and she saw nothing of it, so busy was she remembering how happiness looked, that she forgot she knew nothing of it. A smiling one, bright for the eyes of others, and to know her reflection in place of herself, the appearance and mask were happiness, were they not? So did her daylight eyes tell her, so far was the net of her heart from her days. Those who wear masks fool others by coincidence, and themselves by design.

Rachel knew the mirror held a strange thing before her soul, but she knew not what. Her father's eyes looked upon her but she saw her own, his lips spoke within her but she heard no voice, and so passed the mask of her days. In the daylight she could not see her empty heart, and its brittle barren net, for her eyes were not hers to know, the eyes of a father hidden beneath shades of daylight. The holy ghost is invisible before the sun.

So she could look upon herself but knew herself not, and pushed quietly off into the sweet ink of night, where sleep's arms are as a lovers outstretched. The sea swallowed the empty corners of her heart into its tumbling depths, and so knew her, and wept unseen within itself, salt in salt. Again the sands were opened before her, and again she saw them fold over themselves, but now she was pulled in their undertow into the mouth of the dune which closed hungrily behind her, sealing her in a long narrow corridor. The acrid scent of venom and the snap of hard scales catching scales, as a beard rubbed against the grain, a clicking vibrated the air and she beheld a row of giant scorpions, each as a man in length, preening themselves in the firelight of a dozen oily wrought iron torches fastened to the walls like ugly flaming spines. A golden light invited her, spilling from the chamber at the corridor's end and she knew, it was the golden light and scent of cedar and pine from the chamber of her father's enshrinement which beckoned her. Her goal was clear.

The scorpion spoke within Rachel's heart, and loved her. Its rattling sting told of scorn as a mother whose tongue scorches and scorns. For one tender who is scorned, soon learns not to hold forth target, and so is safest from scorn. Laughter filled her breast to banish shame, and she leapt over each insect in turn, over one and over the next, until the scorpions were crackling, snapping and showering each other with venom, much to Rachel's amusement, and her laughter increased further still to enter the sacred golden chamber, which was as before but for the echo of her happiness off the still marble walls.

Now standing before her father's corpse, she saw her eyes, the eyes she so sorely left in him, pleading, abandoned and weeping, sparkle but sadly in death's unseeing head, and she knew that in like she had left her lips and their words unheard, but to grace its gray ashen face. At once she understood and cursed the dead, and so loved them, "I spit on

you oh honored dead thing, I laugh to know myself and drown your shadow in light, my higher laughing light which mocks you and so loves you best to curse you to eternal contempt and devotion!"

The sea knew she had heard, and so washed into the foul chamber and buoyed her upon its waters and tenderly set her upon its shore, for she was wise. The necklace fell from her neck, as its clasp was born in two, its inscription separated even to even, odd to odd, the letters rearranging to reveal its components: *love* and *shame*. She found the vase now pure white in her slender fingers, and knew her happiness was the perfect flower it would contain, and she wept in gratitude to the sea, and wanted to repay it with a vision of its beauty. She spoke to the sea and recounted to it the lesson it had taught her. "Only those who surpass the dead may honor them, for to continue an ascending course, we must rise above that which gave us limit. So we may honor best to dishonor, and continue best not to follow. One who follows does not lead and so may not be trusted with the future. We the living, must earn our rightful place above the dead. We honor them best, to tread upon them."

Now the sea, which knows itself, found mirror in Rachel's words, and so beheld itself plainly. She gazed upon its waves, once bashful, now dark, tender and serene, hued of a hidden ink as if a black violet shroud passed deep beneath their majesty, where what knows itself and beholds, is born to sea.

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