

In Lord Paltrey's Time: The Hex

Along the road she skips, aged and creased, over puddles which seem malevolent in form and content, cold and clear, reflecting her face and a bright, sheer day in November, blue and orange. Today she could stomp her body, light and voluminous in rags, on a dry field till her nose and snout were choked with floating, grey-brown dust and everything were shook dusty for three miles from where she stands in the yello, strong road. The rags on her are grey and blue and purple and wherever visible, are soiled with bits of yellow, greasy food and dirt, with a spot on her collar from her drool when she sleeps. The rags themselves are tucked up under ropes, wrapped and tied around her misshapen torso but layered with the top ones underneath and the bottom ones on the outside last so that she resembles a wilted bloom with a sex-rod for bees to pollenate. Her sides bulge with bags holding smaller bags with smaller bags again inside of them. She waivers and waddles as she walks, her torso moving twice as fast as her feet would stride, and her head moving in time with neither but nodding and singing a circular song: "To Hell, I hate Yuletide, ye slovenly bitch, to Hell . . ." She twitches her hunched shoulders with a flea bight and her hair scratches dry and brittle the cloth on her back.

She stops and clicks her mouth and sniffs at something in the martial-cool air; she listens in to the wind. A crow flies just barely over her head from behind. From her pocket she pulls a ball of dried dog dung and hurls it, the wrinkled, deep enclosure of her mouth screaming, "Away wi' ye shit! Shit, shit, shit!" She stares after the bird for a while to her liking and then wipes her throwing hand up her forehead and over her hair.

correspondence from the waxworks

I spent all morning
in bed and in the afternoon
I had to go to my sister in-laws

look at the house
in the Obstgasse it's quiet
no one in or out

on the apartment door
a padlock but the
bell still rings with impunity

originally I had meant
to go to the cemetery
that would have been the right thing

ice snaps off the
telephone lines frozen
speech broken like a statue

I put my shoes beside
your shoes and chase you
barefoot into the yard

I go to cafe arco where
I haven't been for years
to find someone who knows you

my bruise has grown from
a purple spot to a red
blemish the size of Jupiter's

I could see my mother's
mistrust examining some little
pieces found on the coffee table

stiff and hard and still
a great man despite
the wrinkled pyjama top

I laid him to sleep with
his judgements and touch the
inscribed lines on his head of stone

a granite slab of mispronunciations
it speaks in a stuttering
foreign tongue

of course my fist was not
enough to bust his head that
is why I picked up the clay woman

but see her little
nun head turned to
dust against his face

barry mandelker

It is another while later when she wakens up standing in the deep, dry yellow grass between the field and the road, and her body is wandering over and off her feet, as without bones. The way they feel, her eyes are still in bed, but she is awake soon fully with walking and hopping over puddles discoloured and clear, stenching and cold. Stones and dirt roll under her shuffling feet; and the sun and shadows barely changed.

She approaches the little stead of rattled out cottage and the shirts on the line ruffle tiny cuffs to the belly of a field-huge breeze who tolerates the disturbance. The grey, dry bag farts, working the dung in her ass, and smiles that the doors and shutters are closed. And the smile quietly works guileful: a work in flesh of sixty years as her lips are pursed. "Nook, nook, nook." She clacks across her teeth, flat from chewing hides; "Nook, nook, nook!" A boy-child, two years old, crawls and waddles his way from the back of the cottage where he plays with a rake, around to the front to get a candy.

The mother of the boy is weary and carries the large basket of sheets back up to the house when the boy has toddled off to the side of the house and around to the front. The sheets are dry for a winter wind, she thinks; they have been stretched across the branches of lifeless trees for three days. She drops the basket down inside the back door of the fieldstone-made cottage still smelling of breakfast and she moves to the front, to the south, to open a shutter to the sun.

The child is pulled across the old one's left leg and he shews the candy with his dirt-cobered fingers testing sticky redness and dribble rubbed by his tongue. The old woman pulls up the back of the boy's sweater and shirt, and with a brown-stained leather back, she smacks him, his soft bare back, leaving a dripping, brown stain of reek.

The mother of the boy, standing weakly behind the window facing the road, shivers and collapses flat with nausea, clutching her belly for the lead animal of humour and torment. She is pregnant again and her breasts dribble as they motion to her convulsive sobbing. "Jamie, Jamee . . ." she moans. She rolls her head on the hard, cold, and dirty wood floor, drooling from the side of her mouth bound with weeping; the sparse furniture standing over her.

The old surly, to her back she straps the boy and gives him another of the hard, red candy stones. She turns her feet in the dirt and faces full front the blank stare of the low cottage. "I'm off wi' yer boy to the Jew's!" throws she forward with her belly. She pulls from her green bag two corpses, small and bled. "Dead rabbit, dead squirrel!" howls she like her dog, hurling these bodies in opposite order as she says them against the door to rattle draughty. Here she turns, her face veined red, and continues her meadering along and up the straight road.

Storm

It felt very wrong.

Maybe in the hint of
mens bodies

or the thickness of the
snow.

I didn't see until later
the wire draped across
a small car

and no one inside.

afw

In the house, in the woods, the new, young bride minces saffron so quiet in a front room new to her, aching and twitching with her ears to the road and her head lonely shouting inside. She sees through the small, deep window of colour and bending panes, the driveway well-worn by the wheels of drays and the one that went daily out this morning. She shakes at the sight of the peasants making crosses from sticks to carry on the road in front of her new home. She trips at the sight of the haggard, old filth who curves across the road, in to her new yard with a boy on her back. She stops moving and is fixed to the high-backed chair. All of her gifts lie still all around the faded-cloth room.

The young mother pleads into the cuffs of her husband's soiled leggings, with their rasp of unwashed feet. He shivers with an unfinished bowl of soup in his stomach and tries to resolve in his favour Bad Maggie's matching of corpses with his door.

His wife cries: "Hounding the Jew and his new wife? The dotty, young thing, here as a bride and ill sent she was to steal the corn. Never seen her she hides. And knelling Bad Maggie on us, like the monster she is, to have our son by her pale, cold ways and heavy with painful sin! Jesusmaryandjoseph, amen." She sniffles the tears in her nose; "Help him Jamie! Kill the witch and the wee Jewess!"

He stumbles up blank and heaves his wife into the chair. Outside lies the broad-axe and he wraps it wildly with his spit to whet it and runs.

The old woman unstraps the boy, and he bounces down to his heels, then his ass and sits, too surprised and scared to cry as yet; his eyes welling up. The catty, she throws a handful of dust and stones at the small window set in at the height of her own eyes and with the clicking says, "Jewess! Ye've come from afar hitherto, but ye'll ne'er bear babes to this one, this man who hexes my fields to a plot. Against my own magic he is and ye . . ." The front door a bit opens and with the swiping flash of a pale, thin wrist, a knife flies drunk, crashing short in leaves of red and soundless and stopping unto the ragged, worn feet. The door shuts wondered and banged. Screams she with her wrinkled, jawing mouth, "Aaah! . . . And ye in turn shall barren be!"

She belches from her belly up and pulls the child across her knee that cracks and is shaped like a pear. She pulls down his pants, scratching down his bare ass; and pulling out a spiceball from her black bag, she puts it into his mouth of candies and mother's kisses. There is a whimpering in the little monster as Mag hoists him aloft and blows on his ass. The boy screeches a scream like shot nails; a clear and yellow-gold stream arcs out and down from him, landing dumb in the leaves.

Inside the cottage walls, the young bride gasps on her hands, crawling and heaving, having thrown the saffron onto the table piled high with presents. She retches once more and faints flat into her own cooling bile and lunch.

Maggie circles little circles with her feet and her head clicks circles of the circle around the four-sided house. The words that she mouths are silent and voiceless, whispering nonsense to a breeze foretold to be still amidst the trees, where the boy's father hunches quiet and darting. He drops down the axe and leaves it; he is running with his breath and grunting in fear. He snatches back his one screaming child, pained in the groin, and holds it facing away and running still. Maggie is maddened into a thunder of quivering rage and brandishes her knife from her pocket pulled. Jamie into the house is run; a frightened wail and wobbly cry is crouching behind a chair. He locks the door and pulls from young James' mouth a warm sticky spice ball and the paining and pissing stop. He sees by the chair the small, young, dark-eyed woman crying her own sad spell in the low westing sun's breath and he can only wonder into her piteous messed hair and smell the strange house smells strong with vomit.

In the centre of the yard, Bad Maggie is squatting her own onto a piece of three-day-old bread and her piss is splashing magnificent warm onto the inside of her legs. She finishes and puts the mess to her lips puckered, flacid from spells; she lobs it onto the door and it slides down onto the threshold soggy.

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