

Two Stories

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draft excerpts from
a novel-in-progress
6.2023, Tyrol, Austria
as part of Medienfrische

I.

A Satin Dress

High in the mountains after the world changed and she left her life and gender behind her, a woman dreamt of a party with everyone she used to know, and it was a kind of reunion though no one else had the dream and it had been many years. At the party was a woman wearing a green satin dress. The woman in the green dress was older now, everyone was, and age had taken nothing from her but given her a power and a freedom that made her shimmer with that charisma someone has when they are really free. People were drawn to her and her ass shone like an emerald in the dodgy party lights. The lines on her face gave her willowy beauty an empathy, a way in to that beauty, that touched the dreamers' heart, now that she too was older. What was there to say to the young, in any case. Having been an asshole once, leaving a growing love behind in the depths of an illness, the dreamer was afraid to talk to the woman at the party, just as she

had been afraid at parties past, despite the woman's looks across the room now, as she entertained her admirers and consoled her gossiping friends, but the dreamer was as clueless as ever, wrapped in her shame; and in the taxi on the way home, packed with miscellaneous souls who might or might not have done or made anything important in the intervening years, the woman in green let her arm and the softness of her satin dress brush the dreamer's skin, just so, like that; and the dreamer didn't move or glance, though she'd been staring at the woman's curves all night thinking no one was looking, though they were and she was and nothing was hidden, because nothing is ever hidden.

And the woman in the satin dress got out of the cab in the soft summer rain with a sad look the dreamer didn't see, and the taxi drove into the night. But for the first and only time in the dreamer's life, then, she knew she was in a dream; and she saw herself standing there alone in Bed-Stuy watching the car lights fade, and she said, "No, not this time, not again."

And the dream rewound like an old home movie, and the dreamer was back in the taxi, and when the green dress touched her skin she looked into the other woman's eyes, blue as a star at morning, and she said, "Lauren, let's keep going." And the women and their friends drove to the seaside, the old Vice Magazine buildings from long ago, where another party flowed on, lubricated by what drove every party; and the lights were bolder and their skin met under the purples and greens and she remembered the first night they made love, the slight touch of a hand on her waist in the rain that was when she knew they'd go home together, and many nights and basements since, the forests, the park bench they'd broken, a bikini tossed into a river, beers and poems and many mornings after across continents, a little video person to wake up with over mist and oatmeal, her little

rescue dog, sigma-tier shitposting, it all had lit each day, and they'd spent the season talking, down by the southern ocean and in the Northern California mist, and she bought a flight she never boarded, but the strange melody of the other woman's speech was still the same, here in the dream, out on the Brooklyn waterside with the dock cranes silhouetted against the city lights, tongues of city rolling out like cartoon dogs' across the river. And in the dream their lips touched again and the rest, and it was alright that the dreamer was a woman now; nothing was different, just everything had changed.

Then a ghostly boat docked and their ghostly crew got on, raucous and spectral, and the boat crossed the river as slowly as they touched each other, at least at first, at least to try. The boat docked at a Manhattan canal, the people left, and the woman said, "I have to go," and she walked with the crowd into the mist under yellow calcium lights. The dreamer ran and called her name and lost the strength in her legs and hips and crawled on bloodied elbows across the pavements but there was no one awake, no one was left, and she laid spent in the dogshit grass in some nameless micro-park and everything faded but a faint grid of white lines and the hum of window air conditioners in the disappearing brownstones above, and the dreamer woke up in a sweat before the sun had risen. She hadn't known this still lived in her, but now she wondered if it would ever leave, and it hurt.

She took a mug of day-old coffee and American Spirit rollies to a balcony and outside were huge mountains and the roar of an Alpine stream. The river flowed on. "What a stupid fucking metaphor," the woman thought, and she wept.

She wanted to say “Sorry, I’m sorry, I didn’t know, I loved you, I’m sorry, I was afraid, I was afraid,” but she said nothing, and the sun rose over the granite and what was left of the snow.

Later she told her best friend. “But why don’t you write her,” he said, “you have an excuse now, you’re a girl.” She wrote the letter and an email pinged three continents away. If it was ever read she never knew.

Maybe, she thought, it never mattered what happened in love, what mattered what was happening, and what was happening was always bigger than anyone knew or could speak about, leaving memory like the ghost of hands on one’s hips, like spectral kisses on one’s lips, and with every hand a weight, and now so many hands were gone and holding on, holding so much weariness, so much vanished splendor, under any stars.

II.

The Mist

A man in his forties was walking with his oldest friends on mountain trails his father and grandfather had walked, and he with them, as a wide-eyed child long ago. Since then he'd had the kids and the wife and some money, money enough, small successes and big ones, and the friends sipped their radlers from metal bottles on the trail, exploring in some lazy boozy way. Then suddenly they took paths they didn't know and stumbled into a strange burst of passionate energy and climbed stream rocks past meadow after meadow and the marmots whistled nervously in the trees near the snowline. Near a peak, he laid apart in the grass, buzzed, surrounded by whatever glory, he thought, that one might hope for on this earth that isn't on or in or from a woman, and the world spun, the grey peaks shifted by some inner, impossible angle, and he was gripped by a sudden desperation; he felt trapped inside something he never agreed to or really understood, it had all just happened somehow, and his eyes watered gently and he whispered to no one he could name, "Please, I'm tired, I want a new life, I've done everything, everything, I'm tired, I want a new life, I'm done with this one, I want a new life, please, please, please." But nothing changed.

They hiked down and he remembered his old trail-running muscles and hopscotched nimbly over streams and rocks and hurt his knee and they passed his grandfather's hunting stand in the pines and came to his fathers cabin and cracked open some beers. He sat

outside smoking. The sunset through the ridge pines cast a fistful of rays down its mountain and the village and each pine cast a huge arcing shadow as a fine mist blew in from the East, and it was not quite rain but the suggestion of rain, sheets of shifting drops between the village and the cliff, a moiré pattern in layer after layer of speckled static. His eyes focused on one sheet of rain only to feel the movement of other flows behind them, and behind those, and behind those, all shot through with gold and grey, like endless flocks of birds descending. Then the light fell and the twilight covered everything.