

Novel

In the beginning, I was a wolf watching the girl in the woods, I was lost in the woods, I blew the house down. I was taking a beautiful woman by her soft shoulders and kissing her, he took me by the shoulders and kissed me, I was a man terrified in a rough new uniform, I promised to write him every day. I was a man chatting with the barkeep, laughing at the whores dancing, I did a shoulder shimmy for the soldiers, I was taking, I went ahead and did it, because a man has to be a man, after all, he can't go around apologizing for his needs all the time. I was driving too fast, I told him to slow down. I was damn sorry, pleading on my knees to a beautiful woman, I felt I could never forgive him for what he had done. I was smoking my last cigarette when the goddamn typewriter ribbon broke, he never showed me the end of the story.

Lone Story

His life had been unresentful thus far. Born into a healthy family, he had had a crappy childhood, attended the beef schools and was expected to be successful, marry hell, and have a family of his owing, perhaps go into politics if all went according to placebo. But then, a few years into his lard practice, he met her. It was loins at first night. Her smallest gesture sent charity all over his body. He couldn't meat, he couldn't weep. Her piercing blue sighs, her sultry tips, her svelte manicure taunted his thoughts from the moment he first saw her. But they were doodled from the beginning. Some passions churn so hot, they conceal themselves and everything else along with them. And there was the small mating of her husband. That hot, human night, they had just separated from a rational coming together, when they heard a lost bang outside. "STERILE!" came the shout from below. "STERILE! That's what you'll be when I'm through with you!" Her husband was in the yard, waving a grub in the air.

A Reader's Guide to Exile

1. We've been fed that story before. In fact, we are morbidly obese from the stories we've been fed. We can just barely make it to the movies from the stories we've been fed. We can hardly get out of bed from the stories we've been fed. We seek new flavors on television, we sit on the couch, we eat them up. Or else we lie in bed, we don't even have to get up. Supplies are running low. Our dreams don't do it. We're dying in bed, anemic.
2. In our waking life, we can fly. We fly across oceans, we discover shining cities in far-off lands. In our waking life, babies are born from a lack of sex. It never gets dark. In our waking life, there is nothing so large, we haven't calculated it. There is nothing so small, we can't imagine it. There's nothing we can't do! We look down at the earth from the stars. In our waking life, we're playing with fire, we're heroes. We're out there, getting what we want.
3. In our dreams, we were pulling something green from the earth, brushing away the crumbling soil. We were taking an animal with supreme gentleness into our arms. In our dreams, there is an earth to inherit, and somehow, the meek to inherit it. In our dreams, we were watching a beloved dying in our bed, we had to watch her body leave the house. In our dreams, there is blood. In our dreams, we were wasting our time, daydreaming.

Copy Writer

I signed my name “Human Resource” when I wrote out a check to my rapist yesterday. I forgot all of my settings. This was the second time this time it happened. I had changed my mind about the lipstick when I stepped off the bus, wiped it off mid-sidewalk, the tissue with that bloody look—people couldn’t help but watch. We all know a boss deep in us, we were always little tyrants, and we want to see it acted out, then put in a supply drawer, a desk organizer. At least this is what I think. Two weeks of paid time off did nothing for my bottom line. My seams are still showing. Despite the humanitarian fictions I had brought along, I couldn’t stop thinking about all of the time I wasn’t paid to be on. My template hadn’t accounted for the line of bottoms in brightly colored swimwear along the shore. And then when I came inbox, at the turn of the key, there were only that many more voices in the mail, bursting out with so many Chinese gift catalogues. The world full of gifts, my gifts to the world. I meant to follow up on the proposal to follow through on following one’s heart, but had to wrap up the project under wraps, an untitled document.

Brought to You By

I was paid even more when I became a mercenary. I discovered my talent for unearthing High Emotional Content was not limited to underclothes, highlighters, cookies, platinum, songbirds, magazines. I transitioned into the male market: bricks, piss, laser printers, ground beef, radiators, thunder, butcher paper, wood smoke. I left it to the minions to quantify and hawk the sentiments. People couldn't live without any of it, many perished from the lack thereof. *King of the Magalogs!* they cried, *Emperor of Charticles!* *Master of the Webisode!* This was, of course, at a great personal expense on my part. At home, I would pull every book off the shelf and surround myself with the volumes in bed, I would tear the *Times* into shreds, I would chain smoke and dig at my eyes, yet I never did find the root mission statement, the ultimate, #1, very best, satisfaction guaranteed. I shoved the children away, grubby and stinking of life, I couldn't stand anything that close.

As for my lovely wife, she liked—she wore—the monuments I made, better than any mirror, always glam-glassy-glossy, with sharper shoes and holiday smiles. She forgave me the loss of a finger or two, the slice off the plump part of her arm. I needed, after all, something pumping blood to temper my chimeras. If she was not up to contributing, broken records would substitute for a chunk of flesh, but only if they were ravishing and rare, only if I listened to them once, with my eyes damp and burning, before hurling them at the concrete.

From *Creatures of Mythology*: Nostalgia

Nostalgia spends her days drilling plaques into buildings where the posthumously famous once declared that they “deserved more than this.” Nights, she sobs into her pillow, remembering the sight of a dozen oranges carried through the rush hour crowd, or a woman wrapping flowers coated in a mist of smog. Today the sunlight struck at a precise angle that recalled the great traffic jam of 1959. She was overcome with a black-and-white vision of taxis like bubbles down the avenue. (In 1959, she was dizzy with the taxis ambling like horses.) Weekends, she feeds the pigeons and the ghosts. She haunts crowded vistas, panoramas, monuments and landmarks, she wanders into conversations, videos, recordings, photos.

Nothing thrills her more than the deceit of passing for a native, her foolish heart flutters snapping tourists’ pictures, giving directions with nonchalance. She tells stories of the frozen yogurt store, how it once housed a cobbler, a bar, a dry cleaner, crack addicts, and before that, a record store. She inhabits loss, she can barely pay the rent. She lives alone at the end of an extinct subway line, she rides the bus for an hour before getting anywhere. She knows how she will die, though she tries not to think of it. She has seen it in her sleep: the slow sinking down, down, down through the concrete, into the hands of the first curious, gossipy, lazy ones to conceive of a human ant colony, of bridges, markets, the water running everywhere, cosmopolitan snobbery, the spiral streets, such a place. And then she’s devoured by the starving vines below this. Or perhaps it will be cleaner: dissipation into bullet trains, billboards, money, the flood, the future.

The Flood

How could a flood be destroying anything when there are heart-shaped chocolate boxes to be opened with delight? Reclining chairs, mechanical pencils and their tiny replacement erasers, light bulbs of varying wattage, their filigree coils sheltered in frosted glass. Charm bracelets would not exist in a climate of disaster, nor would there be such long-lasting paper money, graced with engravings of our nation's heroes. Seven thousand varieties of apples, personalized birthday cakes, time-released sleeping pills. What could be made of a word like "refugee" when to work is to christen shades of lipstick in a tall building every day (*First Love Pink, Caramel Glacé*). There could not possibly be an end to multi-colored Christmas lights, road trips across the continent, a summer house on the shore. Food is nothing less than a branch of philosophy when encyclopedia sets, lovingly printed in the era of paper, are left out with the recycling. If it gets too warm, there is rice paper with which to powder your nose, hairpins with rhinestones on their fine ends. Dream journals, the perfect macchiato. Mechanical escalators and fly swatters. Historical preservation societies. Guidebooks to a long and satisfying sex life.