

Coming Out Of The Fog

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Who is this, coming out of the fog? Whose face is this, emerging from the steam, the vapor, this live thing, this thing of a face, this bone of the nose, the cheekbones, this bone of the brow, whose is this tip of the chin, this grim set of the mouth, this hollow, this mountain, this vine of a countenance, running down like earthenware, like pottery, veiled in the droplets of fine rain, rain of a sage hue, of a greenish and deeply humid nature?

Addie. It is the man they all call Addie, the wielder of weapons, the warmonger, the wild man from up over the mountain ridge, wrestler of snake and cat, his necklace of bear claws, his hands like bricks, his ankles wrapped in gaiters of rabbit skin.

I'm rushing in to make coffee, a sliver of anxiety kicking up in my heart, which will become a thick palpitation shortly, and here my hands are fumbling, nervous, and here is a quick tipping of pain at the base of my skull, Addie is coming down, coffee is to be made, books are to be kicked into the dusty corner like rats, to lie stunned and vacant and loathed. The diary is now stuffed under the mattress with tremors in my fingers, the wool blanket is thrown over the bed for good measure. Coffee. Pull the tin percolator down, count the spoons-full, hurry, be quick about it, yank down the sugar canister, find his mug, find it. The very floorboards quiver underfoot, creaking warping in the damp, where is Addie's mug? Here. Found. Perspiration at my temples. Books skidding off the table, off the chair.

Addie's arrival is exhausting. It is a surge of adrenaline that makes my body feel as if its very organs are pooling and

melting, this slow approach of Addie from off the mountain ridge. His face is emerging in primordial timelessness; I have lived this over and over. I have seen the dissatisfied grimace of his mouth more times than I know.

And the dreary wickedness of Sundays in this shack. September has gone to milkweed, filaments blowing like bumblebees through the air, the world is biting down with the pains of Autumn's onrush, a harbinger. I need to be on my toes around him. I need to walk as if on eggshells.

Alone, when Addie is not here, I read books. The cabin is spilling with books, books in the dark dusty corners, books going yellow and moldy, books with my scrawls all over the margins, books referenced to other books, books with stars and exclamation points dotting them, paperback covers curling back, spines bent, jackets torn, books I have had longer than memory, over and over I dip in, finding revelations each time, finding how books fit and fold into other books, finding the common thread of books that once seemed random and now seem to speak of all the worlds.

And the diary. The diary is what I cry into. It's under the mattress, sometimes it's up behind the tins on the shelf, sometimes it's stuffed in the rafter of the outhouse. It's never left laying round. It's nobody's business.

Addie is coming out of the mist. It is always a surreal moment, each time. It is always a moment of utter beholding. No matter how nervous he makes me, the power of Addie is stunning.

This morning he is empty handed. The woods have yielded nothing. The woods, to Addie, are a place that gives up food and essentials. They are not the playground of God, the smile and promise of Paradise, the shifting of green and of miraculous snows, no, Addie's woods are utilitarian,

holding not one droplet of romance, of otherworld, of mother-world. The woods give him what he needs or not. I don't have the heart for that kind of view. I need to see the useless, the sketchy run of a doe, the weave of knee-high grasses.

I hand him his mug of steaming coffee and sugar as he steps now into the gloom. Addie sniffs the shack before he drinks. Addie always sniffs the shack, as if to say, woman I don't trust you, I don't trust you to be faithful.

But I am, Addie.

"No game?" I ask him.

"Nothin'."

He is reaching into the pocket of his greasy and threadbare wool jacket.

"Found this, though," he says. "It was in some foundation ruins, down under that rusted out camper that went to fire, years ago? You remember? Made the back side of the mountain stink. Anyway, here, I got no use for it, but you like this kind of stuff."

Addie draws out a small leatherbound book.

"Oh!" I exclaim.

Addie extends it to me.

"It ain't a proper book," he says. "It's one somebody wrote in, you know, a notebook, like, I guess, their diary."

"Oh!" I exclaim harder yet.

"Mice been at it," he says. "But it looks readable. I can't make heads nor tails of it, but you probably can."

(Addie doesn't know how to read.)

I take it from his hand. I flip it open at random. Blue ink, fading off to a brownish color. The handwriting is impossible for a moment, but it is for sure a woman's. My

eyes settle on a single word in the mess of scrawls: Homesick.

"Wow," I whisper.

Addie shrugs.

"I thought it was a prayerbook at first, with the leather cover and all, but then I saw it ain't."

"No, Addie, it is. This is a prayerbook."

But I've said it more to myself than him, for Addie is out the door, grabbing his axe by the threshold, heading for the woodpile, for the pieces too big for me to handle.

The front pages are torn out. No names, no dates. The book starts midstream that way, with the half-sentence: ...it here. Hate this. Last night it snowed. I need yarn and a pound of nails. I need to die.

I close the book. My hands have the shivers. It is as if my eyes want to fill, but they won't, they don't.

If she had stayed, leaning into I need to die, into the very words, written into a diary, crying inky words, her eyes streaming the salt of them, would that woman have found the 'yarn and the pound of nails' needed by life, the life of soul, to warm her hands and shore up her roof?

Instead, she set fire to her house, her drafty and insubstantial camper in the woods and fled.

And I want help. I want sexual help. And I have no idea what that means, coming up out of the fog of me, like sudden summer thunder, heat lightning, bizarre flashes that run the sky, patternless, shoots of energy, the business of God, and my loins hurt, because Addie will want something, and I did burn my own interior camper awhile back, and I did flee. Where he would suspect me unfaithful, call me so, I would say I have been very faithful, to my own body and its rhythm, to a sleepiness there, to an aversion, not even

around the man they call Addie, but around a woman's need to stop. A woman needs to read. A woman needs to not fly into a tizzy, a nervous uproar, to make the coffee, Addie's coffee, to make it right, on time, perfectly turned out, a woman need not whore herself out to nerves over a man. A woman alone can put this down clearly in a diary, but a woman attached, if I can even call it that, cannot, even in the house of an illiterate man. Instead it must burn her loins, dig in her body like a knife, causing her lights to go out with its very sharpness. I know myself, Addie.

And now I know a woman who fled. She has left me a map.

I hear him out there, thumping the blocks of wood, hacking at them, flinging them about.

I am no block of wood, I am full flesh.

There is wood and there are matches.

And I, too, am homesick.

Will I burn it down? I am nothing but a question mark. I am reduced to a duality that shudders and rattles the very windows as I hear him, coming, stomping, in his way, in the way he is with me. Where I want and weep onto the page for love, I am rendered as utilitarian as the thick woods all about us, you don't hug the woods, no, you master them, in Addie's world. You get what you can get out of them, you scoop them dry, you drain the blood of them, and boil them down to survival. And I am prey, listening to the axe thud to the ground. I can't, not without love, not with suspicion.

But there he is, the man Addie, framed by the flimsy door, in the thickness of the mist, and here am I, scrambling to hide my diary.

"Is it any good?" he asks. "Is it worth anything?"

It takes me a moment to realize he is speaking of some other woman's diary, found in the mud of a burnsite.

It's slow motion, the way I nod.

"Yes, Addie. It's worth a great deal," I say.