

Pieces of Time

Bus. Cold December evening. An unmemorable day, a footnote in history.

A wasp had been circling around the figure of the man with the silver hair. K had been observing its movements in her head, hoping that the insignificant entity would shatter his masquerade. He stood still and proud, like an archaic statue preserved for centuries in front of a backdrop of grey, second hand things, refusing to grab onto the railing.

She was sitting alone, roughly two rows in front of the suited statue. The interior of the bus was condensed with a concentration of things she loathed: the glaring eyes of men, dirt, chewing gum and a sense of familiarity. The man was still absorbed in his own reflection, choosing to ignore her penetrating stare. K studied him furtively: over sixty; ostentatious suit; and wearing steel rimmed glasses. He was still refusing to return the glare. Probably, still enveloped in the golden era where all women were considered stupid and subordinate. The pig eyes and strong features reminded her of someone...

She remembered Ian Stein. A man – biologically her father – with unyielding principles. She saw Tom – the scruffy marmalade cat she used to feed. His habitual wailing greeting and malting ginger hair tattooed the heart of the seven year old girl that used to be her. Stein always expressed an active malevolence at ‘second hand things’: too oppressed by his unfounded feelings of grandeur for any of that. He hated Tom. He hated not being in control. One day after she returned from school, Tom was sprawled out, surrounded with his burgundy blood and the moulding of victory carved on that reptilian face. He shot him. He shot Tom. She remembered the way Stein looked down at her like an alligator; and she was once again reduced to a crushed butterfly.

The bus stopped. The suited man departed with ease and a new flock entered. K assumed her new role as the voyeur – it was a comfortably numb feeling. The congregation consisted of twelve hooded men, laughing. Then she recollected that suffocating, perpetual cackle.

...K drifted into oblivion. Their demonic cackles sparked memories of her marriage. K was married to the devil once: Joseph Lawrence. That spoilt, rotten monster inside his small, stalky structure complemented his bestial eyes. He still prized the boyhood medals of being Daddy’s favourite. Like most rich heirs, he was under the misconception that he had God-given right to rule; but, playing the crooked king is always bound to go to one’s head. K replayed hell. The constant visceral inkling. The vermilion pool. The vines in her skeleton hands were intertwining, tightening, until she was breathless. Then she saw Louise.

Shivering, K woke up to the stench of cigarettes. The bus was now the abode to only her and a girl who was sitting diagonally opposite; the previous phantoms had all vanished apart from Louise. Her glass eyes only saw the remnants of her decaying hand. All the perfumes of Arabia would never sweeten her skeleton hand. The girl stared at her with disdain.

There was something unsettling about her. The creature had a mouth too wide for her small head and her lips were bloodless. Her physiognomy was artless and tremulous; encouraging a carefulness around her. That artless countenance and the lanky, dingy

blonde hair, alluded at futility. Her available face radiated cheapness – giving her the lost look of a heartbroken adolescent. She looked like the type of girl who would move in with an older man who would abuse her generous nature, who would leave her for a more buxom woman who knows how to dress. Her milk of human kindness inevitably turned sour: life poured anguish into that sullen, meagre frame.

Both cast off dolls were locked in a fixed stare where a mutual understanding was somehow reached through the silence. K pictured Louise adopting that expression; Louise should address her with resentment. Louise should have never witnessed those things and now K had nothing, apart from the prediction that she would end up the mirror image of the homeless girl sat opposite. K leant against the window, closed her eyes and tried to float away....

Everything was now in a lens of red. The spectres of her past were still alive but they were no longer human. They had reverted back to animals. Lawrence had a gait of a rogue bear, an appearance of mingled ferocity and stupidity. He was pulling the railings from the ceilings and smashing the windows with his paws. Stein seemed muted. He was sitting at the back, in the right hand corner. His senses seemed heightened and his eyes were flickering. He gained the appearance of the same alligator she saw many years ago but there was an element of absurdity about him. He was carefully, methodically flossing his teeth and flashed a predatory, smile at her. Louise's dingy blonde hair had transformed into a shield of gold; making her look serpentine. The glimmer in the alligator's eyes were amplified and glowering at the bear. With sudden antagonism, the jaws opened and the bear was gone. Like always the smug look of victory was stained on his face. His moment of supremacy only lasted for a second. The snake had curled on top of the head of the alligator, and with a single bite; life was gone. There was a vampiric manner about Louise, she possessed a look like she had defeated mortality.

The enmeshed memories time now felt meaningless. They were gone. The memory of Louise had gone. It was all gone. Everything but her and the bus.

The bus continued driving at the same mundane pace. Behind, she could hear a vehicle revving, getting faster, getting closer.

CRASH! SKID! BANG!!

Smoke filled the bus and K's lungs. She saw sun through the window. For the first time in her life everything was clear. Ian, Joe, Louise: alligator, bear, serpent – all of it. She smiled and inhaled the fumes. Then...nothing.