

We Are Very Little Things (by MW)

The aftermath of Persephone's kidnap by Hades

They ask me at the clinic *where did he touch you*, say *point on the figure* so I break it in two and hollow it out, point to the chest cavity and the skull base and the soles of the poor doll's feet, muttering *here* and *here* then *but he smelled like dried thyme*, like the fact his eyes bore as deep into mine as my mother's is enough to pick him out in a line up. They ask *when did you first try to call us* and I say *as soon as he'd ripped the first camelia to shreds in front of me* but they say they need a date, a time, numbers. They say the windows must stay shut so nothing flutters off the shrouds I'm stood on, but I can't give them what they want so I break the window and leave via the fire exit, no shoes, the alarm screaming like he did.

I'm a train ride from heaven. I have no fare. I sit on the platform reading the graffiti on the side of the phone box.

these are the days that must happen to us

md & sw 4 ever

on est bien peu de choses

is anyone listening

I imagine calling home.

p. Hey. Mum.

d. Baby?

p. It's me. I'm on my way.

I don't let it get any further than that.

I try to explain my situation to the guy at the ticket booth, how I was lying in the sun and there was a mackerel sky like jagged teeth and everything was gorgeous, like red earth after a heat storm, and then it all ended but it's finished ending now, I'm back, I'm here and yes I have no shoes, I forgot to double-knot them, but I promise they were there and he's looking at me like I'm asking to drive the damn train. He mutters that minors ride for free.

Minor.

The carriage is all flickering neon light and Chanel No. 5, hanging in the air in silky tendrils around its owner. I wonder if she knows Coco Chanel was a Nazi. Her t-shirt bears some faux-feminist quote, *moi aussi*, like the patriarchal paradigm is an aesthetically pleasing designer collection. I suppose over the past months I have averted my attention from my own particular reductive iteration of gender theory but I survived, didn't I? Principles come and go, breath doesn't. He was there but I wasn't, I was floating somewhere in the walls, a trapped moth in the dark. I watched my body move around his rooms. I was not my body. I am not my body. I remember that skin regenerates entirely every twenty-seven days. In four weeks, the air he breathed won't have touched me, tickled every impurity on the skin of my forearms, licked the back of my neck, an ice cube on hot wax. I dig my nails into my palms

and there's a shrill masochism to it, like blood on a dry tongue. I'm seven minutes and a bus ride from heaven.

The amber glow of the omnibus headlights reaches me before it shudders into view, honed and metallic, two rusted pennies. The woman in the misogynistic shirt gives the driver an extra coin for my ticket. Our eyes touch for a second. I sit across from her, the grimy window to my left tinting the landscape pink, a view with cataracts. I wonder if this woman has a mother, if a therapist might one day label her puppy twitch as 'indicative of complex trauma', or whether she just has nerve damage in her left leg. I wonder if she bought the t-shirt because it was the cheapest thing on the rack. I wonder if she ever thinks about her sex, her gender as a whole, the concept of 'woman' as more than breasts and a womb. Our sex is synonymous with light, our gender with colour. I wonder if she was born in her body or if she grew into it.

Heaven is a three-minute walk from the bus stop.

Before I walked to the clinic, I painted methylated spirits on the soles of my feet to harden them because my shoes hit the floor like maracas. I feel the moss in the pavement cracks soft against my toes, dirt caking the rivulets in each one, a hundred tiny rivers of freedom running over my skin as I eddy the puddles with my heels. No one stops me.

I think of her, goddess of cornflakes and muesli, capricious muse of a negligent husband and I am three feet away now and I feel it, the thumping of her fists on the March ground –

PERSEPHONE

thump

SWEETPEA COME HOME

and later, once the crying has ceased and the damp brown petals have been ladled from my pockets, my skin scrubbed and exorcised with bathroom steam, my hair shaved to a buzz because the matts were too stiff, we lie in my bed, curled around the same infinity.

I unhook her arm from my side and pad to the window.

He's down there now beneath the parking lot, bludgeoning down walls and spitting pips and I might never be free of him but I am back, and my body is alive and glowing, and I know who lies in my bed and she is kind and soft and full of glittering stellar grit, and I write our names on the glass with lipstick, backwards so he can see them under the salmon canopy of morning –

PERSEPHONE

DEMETER

and my synapses are pulsing like cicadas and the night is seraphic and pure and I don't sleep, I just watch my mother pretending to and she watches me pretending to until we both stop pretending and the dark hugs us, dumbstruck, and the last thing I am aware of is that we are small, so small.

[987 words]