



Voices

An Excerpt From 'Entered From the Sun'

by George Garrett

Hunnyman Examined

“Are you acquainted with Christopher Marlowe?”
“The poet?”

“The same.”

“I am surprised you do not speak of him in the past tense. He has been dead for some while.”

“Since May of '93, as it happens.”

“Well, then,” Hunnyman tells the young man. “At that same time our company was performing in the North.”

“On account of the Plague.”

“That summer we went as far north as Carlisle.”

“Plague did not kill Christopher Marlowe.”

“So we heard.”

“What news did you hear?”

“One thing and another. That, most likely, he was killed in a drunken brawl.”

“Did that surprise you?”

“The man had a choleric temper and more than a full share of bad habits.”

“True enough.”

“Besides which by then I had already arrived at the age when any truly surprising things are few and far between.”

“Do my questions surprise you?”

Hunnyman chooses to answer this time with some caution.

“I confess I am troubled by some doubts. I cannot conceive what it is you want to hear from me.”

“Only the truth.”

Here Hunnyman allows himself the relief of a faint, brief smile and the slightest kind of shrug.

“Why, then, I am happy to oblige you,” he says.

“If, as it seems, you are seeking to find someone who knew Marlowe well, why, you have made a mistake. It is true that I am . . . or, more truthfully, that I have been from time to time, a player. And I think it would be remarkable to find any player alive in England—be he apprentice, hireling, or full sharer—who is altogether ignorant of Marlowe’s plays. Is there any company, large or small, celebrated or obscure, which has not, one way or another, and in one version or another, performed his plays and earned both profit and applause for their efforts? I doubt it. Is there a living poet in England who has not flattered Marlowe and

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honored his memory by trying to imitate the matter of his plays and the thunder and lightning, the drums and trumpets and gunpowder blasts of his words? Not to my knowledge. There was a time, believe me, sir, and it has not yet fully dissipated, either, when all that the managers wished to see and to consider for performance was something or other, anything really, which had at least the counterfeit sound and echo of Marlowe in the lines and some shadowy copy of the astonishing spectacle of his fables.

"I am telling you no news there.

"For a little time, not for longer than that in this foolish age of fashion, when fashions in all things flare and blaze and, poof!, are gone forever, for a time the poetry of Marlowe was the very model and fashion for most of us. Not many can or ever will equal that influence.

"And though it may seem to you, sir, as it does to many men (who can say which?) that there is a kind of army of common players and suchlike, men without honest craft or employment, in this weary kingdom, though it may well seem to you, sir, that we are as thick and noisy and annoying and dangerous to the good order of things as a cloud of locusts on the wind, the truth is (and you asked me for the truth, did you not?) that we are few enough in number and, despite many differences of degree and of good fortune, are joined together in a kind of shadowy commonwealth. We are brothers in general disrepute if not always in adversity. And because we are few, we are much concerned, indeed fascinated to the edges of obsession, by all the bits and pieces of news of our little world. Rumor, bruit, and alewife's gossip, these are among our greatest pleasures.

"Sometimes, to the more notorious among us, this can be a kind of tribulation. For I do believe, sir, that there is no man (no woman, either, for that matter) in all this kingdom, perhaps in the wide world as well, who would not relish the prospect of good report, good repute, and good fame among his fellows.

"Consider that we live in an age in which, shall we agree on it?, good fame seems to be desired by almost everyone, from turnspits to dancing masters, from jakesmen to great Lords and even, God save us all, by common stageplayers.

"But if it is good fame that we desire for ourselves, it is nevertheless the ill fame of others, our enemies and rivals, which gives us most pleasure. Good fortune is not half so happy as it is when it can be, like the sweet rose in its nest of thorns, surrounded by the misery and bad fortune of others."

"I think you may be wrong in that last supposition. But never mind. Pray continue."

"I have reached the age—and I am not old yet by any means—when I never feel quite so much fully alive as when I hear the news of the death of one enemy or another. Sometimes it even pleases me to contemplate the death of my friends."

"Marlowe?"

"In that case, believe me, neither my friend nor enemy, but someone else, someone celebrated for the good fame of his words. But, why deny it?, the old black trumpet of ill fame loudly saluted many things he said and did."

"Are you thinking of the buggery of boys?"

Most cautious again. Who could tell what the habits and

frailties of this handsome young man, his abductor and interrogator, might be?

"I am well aware, sir, that the practices you refer to, together with others of the like, are widely known to be unnatural and, in the eyes of every kind of Christian church and sect, to be mortal sins. And in the Law are most grievous crimes and most grievously punished."

"But?"

"Sir?"

"But what?"

"But, sir, I have lived long enough in the wicked world to know that there are many creatures of God who are so swept and overcome by strange hungers and sinful appetites as to be undeterred from these practices by fear of any earthly or eternal punishment. It's a pity, but the truth."

"And was Marlowe one of these?"

"I have heard so, but have no evidence of the truth or falsehood of the rumor.

"It is undeniably true that he earned himself considerable ill fame on account of what he was supposed to have said and done. And we often talked of him in those days as if he were a kind of player playing the role of himself. In our talk and minds he became one of those paradoxical beings who so often seem to be appropriate emblems for our wicked age, these dying times. He was a stranger whom we came to imagine that we knew well.

"**H**aving said all that, I have to say, also, sir, that I have indeed seen the man in flesh and blood, when he still had living flesh to wear around his bones. Perhaps a dozen times in a dozen different places. Taverns and playhouses usually. Yet only as a face among a crowd of faces, somehow seeming oddly familiar because of his fame. In all my life I spoke to him only once or twice, exchanging maybe a dozen or two of inconsequential words. If he had outlived his last brawl (if brawling was truly the death of him) and if he were here instead of myself, I am certain he could neither recall my name nor my face. Not even if he were being tortured to encourage recollection.

"In long and short then, sir, I find I knew a good deal, much of it indifferently true or false, with myself not caring ripe figs or farts to distinguish between the two, about Marlowe. But no, sir, I did not truly know him nor could I, in any serious sense, claim him for an acquaintance."

"Were you surprised at how he died?"

"Well, sir, it did seem . . . how shall I say it? . . . a fitting end for his story."

"And you felt neither sorrow nor regret?"

"Why should I?"

"Not an answer to what I asked you."

"Very well, then. I felt nothing at all at the time and have felt nothing since then. Other deaths have moved me and wounded me. When Marlowe died, I had no place in my heart to mourn the fate of strangers."

"And did you ever hear anything as to why Marlowe might have been murdered?"

"You are asking me to try and remember what was of no consequence to me at the time."

"What was it you heard?"

"Well, finally, after all the rumors and wild tales, only what the Coroner's jury found. That it was self-defense.

That the man who killed him — his name escapes me now, if I ever heard it or knew of it. . . .”

“Frizer. A man called Ingram Frizer.”

“If you say so.”

“Does the name mean anything to you?”

“Nothing at all. I reasonably assumed at the time that this man (Frizer did you say?) was not likely to be a worthy fellow of an enviable good repute.”

“Upon what grounds?”

“Kind of place it was. Kind of company he was keeping.”

“Please continue.”

“All that I ever heard was that a jury found Frizer acted in self-defense when he killed Marlowe.”

“Do you believe that?”

“There is nothing for me to believe or to disbelieve. I take it for what it is, the finding of a jury in a certain case. So be it.”

“Do you care?”

“You keep prodding me in the matter of my caring or not caring. How can I make this clear and simple to you, sir?”

“Look you. You — or, anyway, in your name and at your orders it has been done — have had me seized off the street and dragged and carried away against my will, and in dire peril of my good health and welfare, to this place, this cold bright cellar. Here you have told me more about myself than you have any good right to know. Here you have threatened me in plain fact and by implication. Here you have kindly served me strong wine — and a very good sack it is, too — to loosen my tongue even as it clouds over the brightness of my

mind. And you have examined me closely concerning my knowledge, and the lack of it, of a dead man, a dissolute poet, a man of great gifts and many serious vices. A man who may be sorely missed by someone or other, but not so by me.

“And now, sir, do you know what I have come to think?”

“Pray tell me.”

“I have learned that your interest in me derives mainly from the matter of the life and death of Christopher Marlowe. And I know for certain and can cheerfully tell you that you have managed, by an easy enough error, to take the wrong man to serve your purposes. If only I could serve you, I would gladly do so, if only for the sake of my hide and hair. But since I know nothing beyond what I have already said, I can only plead with you, sir, to acknowledge your error and let me be. Let me go about my humble business. Please, sir, give me leave to depart this place and I do solemnly promise to forget that any of this happened.”

“Are you finished speaking?”

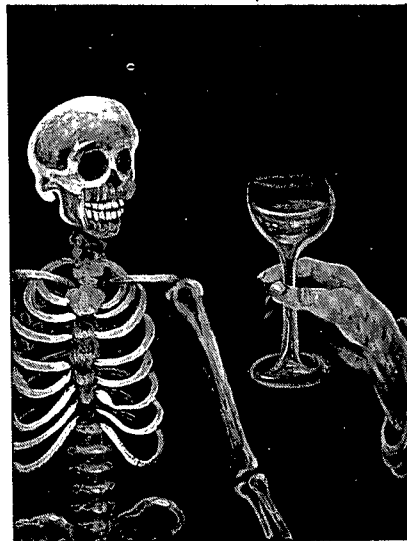
“Is there anything left to be said?”

“Not by you, John Hunnyman. And now it is my turn. To tell you that you have somewhat misjudged us and our intentions and have under-valued yourself. Everything that has been said here tonight confirms that you are the man we hoped that you would be. And so I deem that you are precisely the man to perform the task at hand.”

“What is it you want me to do?”

“To find out how Marlowe was really killed. And why.”

Captain Barfoot's Tavern Talk



Like so many people, great and small, virtuous and wicked, young and old, in this late age of the world (and there are many who profess to believe this world will end with the old century and with the reign of our old Queen), like so many others, William Barfoot is not what he seems to be. It is his way to pretend to be, in truth, something more and less than he is. And what he truly is no man alive, perhaps not even the Captain, himself, knows

with any surety. He is probably a dangerous man, considering the size, the look, the style of him. But who knows? Who would ever wish to find out?

Meantime, however, among his handful of tavern friends, he is taken to be a creature of contradictions. Taken, also, to be a creature of habit. But he breaks his own habits and customs as often as he knows them.

The Captain is not, in truth, a man of idle talk or many

words. And facile or clever talkers, together with tellers of elaborate tales, will fust his face into a frown.

Captain Barfoot has a frown which can silence a tavern.

And yet he has been known, stepping into the very silence he, himself, has created, as if he were a man stepping out of the dark and into lantern light, to talk as if the only thing which stood between him and sudden death was the shield of his words.

Here, for example, is one of his digressions on the subject of the wisdom of wounds:

"It is the folly of most healthy men to consider that those who have suffered from long illness or those who have earned a rich reward of scabs and scars (if nothing much else) in this vain, hurtful world, are somehow more fortunate, as if blessed with an acquired coat of hardness like a snail in his castle or a turtle in his shell. That they may be perhaps somewhat like the saints. That is to say, enabled to be careless.

"Having lost so much to predatory time and tribulation, they are left with much less to lose now. Precious little to fret over or about. Having tasted the worst which fever and chills, cuts and bruises and broken bones can offer a man, why they are imagined, deemed likely to be fearless ever after. Having met with the dark man in the dark and wrestled him to the very edge of the pit of hell, then risen up again, not from the dead, but, anyway, risen up into light from darkness, and not whole, either, but touched and changed by the closeness of Death, just as Jacob was

touched and shriveled by his Angel, they are believed by others to be in possession of a rare kind of knowledge, not wisdom, but a deep way of knowing taught in and by the school of hard experience. Which knowledge, it is believed, leaves them somehow or other less vulnerable to future wounds than others who have been spared. Leaves them, after all is said and done, blithely willing and able to embrace any kind of pain and discomfort.

"Leaves them on good terms, then, if not intimately friendly with Death. Who having failed the first time will now be kind, no doubt, and take them away, bootless, in their sleep, with no more noise or shuddering than a cat's breath.

"It is a pretty kind of fiction.

"Do not believe any of it."

By now this hard-faced, scarred and battered man has all who are present staring at his visible scars and lumps and hurt places. Almost in envy.

"You want to know the truth of it? I believe, deeply and sincerely, that old Death has spared me thus far and this long for the sake of something truly terrible. That those of us who have endured so much and been left alive enough, if not entirely hale and whole, are being prepared for something worse than any of us is able to imagine.

"And what do I say to that? What can I say? What should I say?

"I say let us fill our cups and drink to this moment as if it were to be our last!"

Ghost Voice



Now you know the two chief actors of the story. Witnesses who will give testimony. And it will be, as you will see, mostly a matter of observing them and listening to them, to their thoughts and words, separately and together in consort, a duet of voices making their own music. Whispers fading in and out of the darkness.

Ghosts, no more and no less, we cannot be clearly seen by daylight. Vague and brief as frosty breath on coldest days, we float through time. No, say instead that we float upon the

surface of time as you might float on a lazy stream on a soft summer afternoon. That's an image which is true enough. Except that, for ourselves, the lost and almost forgotten time of our living and being, our brief time to suffer and to rejoice, is now and always an eternal February. It can be summer again only in your memory.

You will have noticed how I have said *we*. Claiming a place for myself. For though I play no part in the events of this tale, I am nevertheless ever present, at once the teller of

it and the principal witness to it all, first to last.

The other two must speak for themselves. Believe them as much as you care to, bearing in mind that even though there were saints living and dying then, in my time, as there may well be, no surely *must be* some true saints alive in yours, there are no saints to be found in this story. Coming from anyone less than a saint, or a truly innocent good heart (of which there are none to be mentioned here either), the truth, even if it accepts an invitation to be present, is likely to be somewhat tainted and confused. At the very least it will be twisted into strange shapes by whoever tells it.

Well now.

One of these is a common player. Need I say more? Truth is not dear to his heart. Or, if I may put it to you somewhat more precisely: truth is dear to his heart mainly because it is so much of a stranger to him. Plain truth is such a stranger that he often might not even recognize it, though it should come, transformed into a large, barking watchdog, to snarl and snap at his running heels.

Something of a clown, then. You see what I am getting at. Pray remember, though, that like every other fool and clown since old Adam, himself, crouched down with Eve amongst the leaves and hoped, thereby, to be hidden from the burning eyes of God, he sees and takes himself most seriously. At times most solemnly. His life's no comedy. His aches and pains hurt him as much, perhaps more than Hector's. His rages at Fortune's blessings of bad luck and injustice are, in their own way, the equal to those of proud Achilles. And he is like unto neither one of these. Not noble hero nor kin to any, although—and give him this much with full acknowledgment that it is much more than most of us will ever have the privilege to claim—he has played the parts of both of them and of many other great and proud men also. In his time, the best of his times, he has hushed unruly crowds to attentive silence and aroused their enthusiastic applause. He has moved fellow sufferers to shed tears. Oh, to be sure, he has failed at it also. Has earned his full share of hoots and jeers and other rude noises. He has been pelted with orange rinds and nutshells and gnawed bones. He has run, fleeing from the stage—though that stage may have been no more than a piece of yard, of green grass at the edges of a church fair or, maybe, the far end of a smoky hall in some draughty castle or crumbling mansion in the far country—has left the stage in a hurry and with tears in his eyes. Deeply wounded and ashamed. Well, tell me, how else can you learn and practice a mystery, a craft, except by the constant doing of it and sometimes doing it all wrong? If there have been plenty of bad times, there have also been moments of pure glory. Those times when he left the tiring room of inn or playhouse, surrounded by smiles and good wishes, his hand swelling from warm, firm handclaps, and himself secure in the certainty that the magical sound of applause which has just sent him on his way like a ship running with a fair wind behind her, has now at last and once and for all, as in some child's tale, transformed him from common anonymity into a very prince among our English players. Never again to be ignored or to be relegated to stand, rigid with envy, in the shabby shadows well beyond the pools of brightness wherein his luckier betters do splash and dance in all the joy and shine of this world's good fortune.

I have to be first to tell you (as you may, in worldly wisdom, already have guessed) that at just such a triumphant time, in triumphant and joyous mood, head held high, shoulders back, his best pair of shoes shining, he is almost certainly liable to step down firmly into some fresh dog s—t or the steaming droppings of a cart horse. As well as he knows and is sure of anything, he knows this will happen. It tends to take the keen edge off even his finest hours. He is most apprehensive when he is most content.

You see what I am saying. Bad luck is his constant, dear old companion. Dame Fortune may love him well enough (who can tell?), but, love or not, she has chosen him to be her faithful clown in cap and bells.

So often so unlucky in life and in love, he possesses one great strength, one kind of magic. Whether it may be foolish or not, he chooses not (not yet anyway) to allow himself to surrender to despair. In his heart of hearts he knows that this world, with himself in it and of it, is beyond all possible redemption and so is well lost. Because he knows that, he knows also that to win the world would be, then, to come into possession of nothing worth having.

In his most secret heart, he can see himself clearly, naked as God made him. And to see himself thus, a poor creature, pale and sad as a winter root, is to know beyond any doubting that he is a fool. But, don't you see?, he still loves this tired world, worthless as it has been and may be. And calling upon St. Paul and St. Augustine and any and all others he can think of, he tries hard to learn to love himself, too. Which is why he is always so busily seeking the love of others (especially the ministrations of fair women), as if he needed to confirm his own best aspirations.

Yet it is these lies, falsehoods and very present frailties, which give to his life, his sometimes desperate and always anxious life, its power and its energy. And it is from his deepest falsehoods that his finest moments as a costumed player and performer, in life as much as on the boards, are slowly and surely drawn out of deep and dark and into light. Like the sweetest and coldest well water which can assuage the most burning thirst even as it sets your teeth on edge.

The other one is not outwardly and visibly much like him at all. A creature of fire and ice, blood and thunder, he is, a rusty, much-wounded soldier home from the wars. Still in one piece to be sure. And thanks be to God for that, he'll be the first to tell you. For all his best friends have left behind chunks and pieces, the best parts of themselves, in many far and forlorn places. But he is bitterly scarred in both flesh and spirit. And he is so poor from the weight of his hard experience that he will do anything he thinks necessary to remedy this distressful condition. Which is to say he can be ruthless, completely merciless if need be, yet without pride in himself for that.

Despair is the way that he walks in. He would not admit and confess that, not under brutal duress, even to himself. He denies it. He simply allows that he is not and never will be a seriously (foolishly) hopeful man. He believes that he has lost much of his faith and, with that loss, has shed the fear of hellfire. Thinking: "How could Hell be anything more terrible, any worse than so many things I have already seen and felt?" And yet knowing, in his soldier's hard heart, that there can always be worse. More than that. It is more

than likely that there is something worse than he has ever experienced or imagined out there waiting for him.

It is the very slight, yet somehow ineradicable fear of the fires of Hell, together with the logical certainty that if there is a Hell, then he has long since earned himself a place in it, which makes him seem to be utterly fearless, as careless as any saint amid the dirty, daily business of this fallen world. Believe me, he would as soon kill you as look at your face. Yes. And yet by the same token, he would kiss you full on the lips if the spirit moved him to do so. By which I do not mean to suggest that he is one of your open-handed, open-faced, open-hearted fellows, a bag full of the hot wind of gusty feelings and with no kind of decent rectitude about him. He is not one of those savages of the latest generation who neither hold nor allow any reins upon themselves, but, instead, run away in whatever direction their thoughtless hungers and crippled fancies lead them. Not one of those by any means. Indeed, that crew and all others like them, men and women alike, baffle and disgust him. He thinks of them as wild beasts. For just as the player is, in large part, a creature of the experience of his craft and vocation, so this one, also, a soldier once upon a time and perhaps too long, is shaped by and clings to the virtues and vices of his trade. Rigor is his closest friend. He long since learned to fix his face into a blank mask, ever the same in pain and pleasure, hope and fear. No one, not his proud betters nor his inferiors, not his lovers nor his victims, will be given any signs or clues as to what he may be thinking or feeling. In that one sense, then, his craft is the same as the player's, though it is turned inside out.

He and the player have that much in common. With some differences.

If it is the figure of thirst that can define the spiritual man—and does not Holy Scripture, in the Psalms and in many other places, summon up hunger and thirst as the aptest similitudes for ineffable desires of our deepest selves?, then it can be said that this soldier satisfies himself inwardly just as he has so often done outwardly. Dirty, sweaty, panting like a dog, with perhaps blood, his own or someone else's, no matter which, flecked and clotted on leather and armor, he tosses his heavy helmet aside to kneel down next to some stagnant ditch and to plunge his hands through the coating of scum and slime, up to his elbows in muddy water. Lifts his cupped palms to his lips as careful and ceremonious as if he were an anointed Roman priest and as if this were the blessed chalice with the blood of Christ Jesus he was bearing. Then he drinks it down. Tongue lapping like a dog's. Eagerly in spite of the foul stink of it. Finished, he wipes the back of his hand across beard and lips and then looks up, as if to catch your eye, and winks, and laughs out loud.Laughs as if he were daring the dirty water to work on him, to sicken and kill him if it can.

Outwardly he has a face of stone.

These two, then, and myself.

Together with some others, both greater and lesser.

Of them all, the greatest voice belongs to the poet Christopher Marlowe. Who died young and badly enough, as it was, in the view of many, bound to happen. Died too young and badly, but who wrote words of such power and shining as to outlast all but a precious few, all but the finest wordsmiths of his (our) age and many others, before and

after. He will say next to nothing here, having spoken for himself, once and for always and being dead and gone even as this story begins. It is the murder of this man which becomes the cause for the beginning of this story, becomes the occasion for bringing together the player and the soldier and others, ghostly lesser voices, though some were inestimably grander in life and light than they can be here.

Marlowe, who was a scholar, a poet and playmaker, and something of a spy in his time. It is not the kind of story he would have created. Yet I do believe that he would have seen through the masks and costumes of both the player and the soldier to the bare and common human nakedness they all three shared.

As for myself.

Why, that's nothing for you to concern yourself about. I am here present as a voice only, a voice from the dark. Hoping by the power of words and words alone (though words may sometimes cast shadows like sudden wings) to permit you to see and to judge for yourself. Trust me as much as you dare to.



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Otherwise think nothing of me. For this is in no way my story. Except, perhaps, this much. To know what I profess to have known and to believe what I have believed, I must have lived out a watchful life, as awake and alert and as thoughtful as I could manage. You can say that I watched and waited, bided my time until, as Holy Scripture promises and soon enough fulfill, death arrived and surprised me like a thief in the night.

If you insist on figures of speech, then ask if I was thirsty, too. And I will answer yes. But neither for cold well water nor the dregs of any ditch. Wine was my weakness. Wine to warm my heart and my bowels and to brighten my disposition. And bright it was in the world while the wine lasted.

But that is altogether another story and has no rightful place here.

What Alysoun Did Not Tell Hunnyman



Her beauty is weakness. Has always been. For as long as she has any memory of herself. As a child, with golden hair, with fair, smooth, completely unblemished skin and with bluebright eyes, she was at once spoiled and protected. Pleased with herself even as others took a curious pleasure simply from her appearance, her presence. Pleased with herself as her mother and father were certainly more concerned with her health and well-being (a form of constant, solicitous tenderness which she confused with love) than with the mundane welfare, the aches and pains of her brothers and sisters. Who were, as she observed and not without some wincing envy, far more free than she was, free at least to live, to suffer and rejoice, to die (as some of them did in infancy and childhood), not without arousing a measure of grief and sorrow, true, but also a grief which was not without the common sense of resignation, even, in passing of time, of cheerful acceptance. She knew that they would not resign themselves to her death so gracefully. Also knew, sensed strongly, anyway, long before she had learned any words for the sense and feeling of it, that her brothers and sisters shared some things with her father and mother, kinfolk and others of the village—which was to her the world, and all of it, then. And one of these shared things was a clarity of expectation. The best and the wisest among them were never wholly hopeless, not by any means; but they learned early in their lives to hope only for the simplest things. And learned to be well pleased, indeed content, by the slightest and the least. They were not safe from pain and disappointment, not ever. But they were not at the mercy of bright and bitter expectations, especially the demanding expectations of others.

And she might have come to share this common strength and heritage, by birthright, if she had not been, from infancy, exceptionally beautiful and, thus, at the mercy of the hopes and envy, the love and hatred of others. Others who mysteriously were empowered to invest her life with secret expectations of their own, with all the selfish hopes and fancies which they had suppressed in and for themselves, but which they now felt free to set free (like, O!, the

winged and terrible creatures freed from Pandora's box) in her name. For her name's sake. They might believe her to be worthy of admiration or envy or even a form of bitter contempt. Yet they could never imagine her as she conceived herself to be—as a perfect and living sacrifice to alien beings who were like shadows of themselves. An offering up of self to strange gods and spirits who filled dreams with their murmuring voices and who riddled the darkness with frightening and invisible wings.

So you can see how to all the natural woes of childhood were added the burden of fears, at times reduced to the pure, chilled, cold-sweat terrors of awareness, as in the heart and center of an evil dream, that she was not so much blessed, being spared from so many commonplace, quotidian bruises and breakings, itches and wincings, fevers and chills, these things which make up such a large part of the lives of all of us, the less lucky others, as she was being raised up like some fat goose, prize pig, spring lamb, kept and preserved for something yet to come, perhaps for some enormous and surprising agony. An agony of flesh or spirit or, most likely, of both. An agony which, whenever and wherever it might come and seize her, she surmised, would serve as a blessing for all the others, those whose indifferent lives ran gently away like water dribbling from their cupped hands.

This, then, was the playhouse of her childhood.

Earlier in the age, in the old days of the old Faith, she might very well have studied and dreamed the lives of the saints. Perhaps found her own true vocation in a nunnery. But here and now in this new/old world, all of it burning, aflame with continual and indescribable changing, she found no sanctuary except whatever imaginary edifice she could build and inhabit by the power of mind and by the strength of her indomitable, aspiring will.

Call it paradoxical, if you choose to, the purest form of irony, but nevertheless what the world took to be her greatest blessing, gift and asset, that extraordinary beauty of face and form which, no matter how much or how often threatened, has never yet failed her, she took and takes to be a weakness and a curse. And so her secret, thus her strength,

is to be found elsewhere, at home not in the commodity of wonderful flesh, but in both mind and spirit, unsexed, being neither the common attributes of man or woman, and being also ageless. And yet so long as she is, or seems to be, both young and beautiful, she remains desperately vulnerable. Many times she has found herself longing for deformity, for a siege of any one of the much-dreaded diseases of the flesh which would, at least, set mind and spirit truly free from the tyranny of skin and bones. Times when, staring into a looking glass, she can picture herself clawing that face to bloody ribbons and raw meat. Times when, looking into a candle flame or a fire on the hearth, when she has felt a sudden need to plunge herself into it as (for so she heard long ago and now imitates) great ladies, from time to time, do place their pampered bodies into warm and scented baths. . . .

Scent was how he came to her first, an odor of flowers, of sweet distilled perfume. And she thought, first, as she followed her servant into the chamber where he was waiting for her, facing away towards the fire, that there must be a lady here to see her. Entered the chamber and saw instead a broad thick back, square, close-clipped hair, flecked with stains and spots of grey, he turning, light on the balls of his feet, like a dancer or a swordsman, at the first sound of her shoes in the room, not smiling, yet somehow affable enough, polite, a formal greeting and not without a certain warmth. Hat in hand, sword at hip, a gentleman clearly, yet clad in plain and sturdy clothes; a military gentleman, then, every inch of him, turning and taking a step or two, no more, his eyes brightening and then (it seemed) withdrawing into shaded, hooded caves of a badly scarred face.

Seeing Captain Barfoot, firelight behind him, candlelight revealing his face and figure, she surveyed, unflinching, the brute handiwork of visible scars and then looked away into his shadowed eyes, eyes which had seemed bitter cold to her when they first brightened; stared into his shadowy eyes, and she had been suddenly possessed of a vision of herself, stepping out of all her clothing then and there, shining in candlelight and firelight, swimming in those dark cold eyes and shedding her skin as well. In a moment exchanging, as it were, one body for another. Wrapping his strangely bruised and battered flesh around herself, the bones of her, like a warm old cloak or a clean wool blanket, now at last

somehow truly invulnerable; because now at last she would be the owner, in a wink of time, of all of the pains and grief and woe she had been hidden from and which had been so far hidden from her. Because now at last, and all like the putting on of a cloak, just so simply, no worse pains or grief or woe could ever come to pass.

What she felt, then, was first a raw surge of desire, almost irresistible, an overwhelming need not merely to offer up herself, the best parts of herself, to him and his pleasure (whatever that might prove to be), but, much more, to offer herself, such as she was, to him so completely that she would be wholly consumed by the act of giving, itself, and would, in truth, become him, to live in the habitation of his large bones, the architecture of his hard muscles, ugly scars, looking out on a world restored and more, transformed and transfigured, through his dark cold brutal eyes.

At first she heard next to nothing of what he was saying. She looked into the shadowed sockets of his eyes and felt a tremble of weakness, as if she were about to faint. As if they had been toying and teasing with each other at love for half an hour.

Whatever it was he wanted to know, she could not have lied to him to save her own life.

As it was, he did not ask anything much of her. He stood there politely, fastidiously clean, scented with some expensive womanly perfume, and proceeded to ask her for that foolish Papist pamphlet which she had never seriously considered publishing.

He sternly warned her, in his soft, hoarse voice. Tipped her a slight bow of farewell, put on his hat and turned and walked outside to vanish into the noisy, busy street. Walked away to leave her standing there with a weak-kneed feeling close to the pangs of extreme hunger and thirst. Until, after a moment, hearing herself breathing deeply like a sleeper, coming to herself like waking, with a fury at the weakness she had allowed to invade herself, she went back to the printing shop. Where, finding them all loafing and idling the time away, she fell into a shouting rage.

Later she could not, would not tell Hunnyman much of this. And nothing at all about her deepest feelings. Lest somehow or other it might serve him to free himself from the sense of need. His hunger and thirst for her. The enchanted spell of his own false and foolish hopes.

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LIBERAL ARTS

ON INSPIRATION

I have often thought how interesting a magazine paper might be written by any author who would—that is to say, who could—detail, step by step, the processes by which any one of his compositions attained its ultimate point of completion. Why such a paper has never been given to the world, I am much at a loss to say—but, perhaps, the authorial vanity has had more to do with the omission than any one other cause. Most writers

—poets in especial—prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy—an ecstatic intuition—and would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes, at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought—at the true purposes seized only at the last moment—at the innumerable glimpses of idea that arrived not at the maturity of full view—at the fully matured fancies discarded in despair as unmanageable—at the cautious selections and rejections

—at the painful erasures and interpolations—in a word, at the wheels and pinions—the tackle for scene-shifting—the step-ladders and demontraps—the cock's feathers, the red paint and the black patches, which, in ninety-nine cases out of the hundred, constitute the properties of the literary *histrion*.

—Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," 1846

Alien Worlds

by Fred Chappell



She was a handsome woman, Raylene Thomason, not what you'd call beautiful, but with Cherokee blood that gave her a broad pleasant face with a clean jawline and steady dark eyes. She took her looks so much for granted that it seemed she paid no attention, and maybe she didn't. Her appearance was useful for getting men interested in her, though she was not a flirt or a tease. But she was curious about men because she simply could not make them out. They were helplessly attracted, always putting moves on her—well, okay, that's how men are—but when she took up with a man and tried to make him happy, it was only a week or two before he began treating her shabbily, lying and sneaking and cheating. Now why was that?

She was taking a continuing education philosophy class Tuesday nights at Sugdon College and the demeanor of the affable fuzzy young instructor had gained her confidence, though she hardly knew him. After class one night in October she had waited patiently to speak until the other students departed and then had told him quietly: "I'm going out tomorrow night."

"Going out?" he asked.

"Yeah," she said, and her gaze turned inward and she nodded in agreement with some thought that Rodney Hegen knew he would never hear. Then she hitched her

books against her chest and walked out of the classroom, marching away as steady as a soldier.

And because he was an unworldly fellow or maybe because he had come recently to east Tennessee from Albany, New York, and didn't understand local custom and idiom, he could not at first figure out what in the world Raylene was talking about. Rodney knew the ideas of wise men as they are revealed in books, but he was less acquainted with emotional impulse, and he and east Tennessee were nearly strangers to one another.

Asking among his amused colleagues, Rodney discovered that for Raylene "going out" would mean cruising the casual streets of Sugdon in her shiny black Dodge pickup truck and inspecting the parking lots of a couple of hamburger drive-ins and finally settling down for a beer but not more than two at a joint called Happy Rabbit. She was taking revenge on her boyfriend for her hurt feelings and if there was a man who struck her fancy and showed some humor and halfway decent manners, well then, she might console herself a little while in the night. Probably she wouldn't. But she might and if she did she wouldn't feel guilty about it, not in the least, because Frank had no right to treat her the way he did. Who made him the Emperor of Women anyhow?

So then the question remaining with Rodney was whether Raylene had extended an invitation. Was he supposed to go out tomorrow night in his dinky yellow Toyota and prowling up and down the avenues in hope of accidentally encounter-

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