



ANEMONE SIDECAR

CHAPTER 16
of
THE
ANEMONE SIDECAR

Introduction

*Notes and Observations
from DKG, our Cathlamet Correspondent*

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This week: More of “The Lost Cow of Astoria Finns”
and things of interest in the community
(continued from Chapter 15)

Anyway, I don’t think the old grange hall is even standing anymore, and I haven’t seen anyone drink coffee that way in the longest time. It’s like the saucer has lost one of its definitions. And certainly it is no unusual thing these days to hear “Amazing Grace” drifting, beautiful and lonely, from leaded windows or across any expanse of green.

So, on to other things.

To this day my friend Toikka claims he does not know why he did it. He had never even been to a horse race before. But he did it anyway. He had just been paid and was feeling rich, even though he had trouble making rent the month before and no doubt owed money to people he didn’t want to talk about. And the odds on the horse were 72 to 1! But he walked right up and put \$1500, two weeks’ salary. on it to win.

You can’t anticipate the impulses of immigrants.

When Monorail Silver finished first, Toikka’s life changed in ways no one could ever have predicted and which he himself still struggles to understand.

They say it was a Deep River Finn working for the *Eagle* who first saw the tracks through the forest. He had seen something

like them before, but not quite the same; and, anyway, that had been near Astoria, where he knew he was not welcome, so he told no one about them. But they were worrying, causing his mind to turn all around itself like an unsettled dog. He had a home and family and friends to think about. Sure, he knew about the missing girls and the bloody trail that had led the trackers to the body of his friend, Jaska Jaatinen. He knew, without knowing how he knew, that these tracks had something to do with all that, but he hesitated in a way that would prove fateful. He wasn't concerned in the least about the Astorians, cold and uncaring bastards that he felt they were; but he cared deeply about his Deep River friends....

It isn't only the river that runs deep around here.

Our Satin Blazers, you know, hadn't won a game in five years and so didn't know how to feel when that they were up by one in the ninth against the Adriatic Blues. The Blues hardly ever lost; the standing joke was that the teams that had the blues were the ones playing against them. Every Blues home game, Major League scouts filled the stands; the only scout that had ever come to a Blazers game was Bob Smith's dog, and the only reason Scout came was in hopes of finding a fallen sausage. Yet here the Blazers were, on the verge of beating the Blues and torn between ruining the longest baseball losing streak in American high school history—their only real claim to fame—or putting a temporary end to their shame.

No one felt the pressure more than Blazers pitcher, Iiro Poikkanen....

But anyway, as for Astoria Finns, many in her old hometown are beginning to forget her, and I'm sorry to say that I am beginning to do so too. There are whole waves of forgetting that at some point we are powerless to stop. But you know what I

mean; great chunks of the old life just disappear, like the great old Bumble Bee Cannery only months ago, erupting into flames and dropping noisily through the pier into water so black I can't even describe it. Astoria Finns would be as heartbroken as the rest of us. And one thing I am sure I still know is that she would be right out there with us at low tide looking among the rocks for souvenirs.



The Anemone Sidecar, Chapter Sixteen, 2011,
built on the work of select multitudes.

Cover image by Daniel Boyer.

Robert Píno: *that night that morning*

so many experiences would make so many poems if i would let them
instead i turn away to distractions and distractors
more women more drinks more music
my only mistress should be the written word
she was my first love and my first confidante
possibility was my first muse,
followed by excitement and possibilities

there are things and places i would show you
if i could muster up the tangibility to do so
my hands drift through my desk
touch the paper inside
then pass through it
i grip a pencil
but the more i think about it
the less lucid i become
and i lose my pattern
and i hear it click to the floor with a shattering of lead

my inspirations and i are not so different
addictions and failures and worries
but what makes them great is that these became tenets of their being
they opened themselves up fully to people
their old and naked bodies
their pain and their questions
and people loved them for it

a hat is better than a mask in the winter,
the snow in your eyes reminds you that snow is cleansing
like rain
and with one hand you can tip your hat
to all the women walking by

Damian Caudill: *In Which I Find Myself Reeling
Somewhere Outside of Parma, Ohio*

and then Sarah came over and let herself in with the spare-spare key.
The one that is not the one kept on the porch beneath my wife's frost-
bitten geraniums,
which now fading
are the favorite color.
That of the blood stuck beneath the nail of my first wine crushed toe,
the backwards bend of the proximal fold a stitch above our dripping
wedding rings.
The idea that if you drop a dishwasher from the roof of the very first
sky-scraper you ever remember looking up at
it will land closest to the man you were meant to marry.

Sarah,
mumbling into my chest now and smelling of distant salt-water,
tells me that the just missed parts of waking up at 43 and a day is what's
really been keeping everyone up at night.
That trans-fat is just a thing,
and the floundering 401K is also,
just a thing.
And that when someone's kid falls from a bunk-bed and breaks an arm
that's just another sort of thing.

And this time when I picture my wife and the car salesman in romance
I like version number 3 the best.
In which, upon our high-angled entrance into the scene,
we swoop the camera intimately low
to find our lovers locked inside a 2007 Subaru hatch-back eating pot
stickers
and Lo Mein out of biggie-sized cup holders.
Black plastic mimics in this moment,
enacts the heavy comfort of pre-heated bowls of clay.

In which, if one were to turn on all the lights in the grand showroom at
1 or 2 a.m.
my wife and the car salesman would appear as the idols of 50's films
and amateur modeling agencies.
Lounging across the broad hood of a softly humming Mustang,
Coca-Cola packaged in unreasonably nostalgic glass bottles leaving wet
rings
around their hands and waists.

Or in other watery heads
they appear as the jumbled victims of centripetal car crash.
The bad luck of ending up curved around a tire well,
of being bent to fit the concave shape of an unnerving excess in
horsepower.
In this moment I appreciate the internal blood bloom
that hides the worst of it from our eyes.

Today when I shaved at the sink I nicked myself with the razor for the
first time in years
and then a minute later I did it again.
Today Sarah came over with her red brush of hair
held up by countless sky-blue pins of the thinnest metal
and gave me a well thought-out resignation speech.
In which she referenced my lack of compassion,
the faulty footwork exhibited most embarrassingly at the annual IBM
Gala,
the ever widening gap in my teeth that I can't quite seem to shake.

Today my wife came home with a brand new car
and let herself in with the spare key when I wouldn't open the front
door.
Today I discovered that if a woman drops a dishwasher from a
skyscraper
it always lands closest to the other man's other man.
Today I locked myself inside the old Honda and drove backwards
through the garage door.

Today I stalled out in the lot of the largest car dealership in Northeast
Ohio,
where ten thousand alarms sounded off in split-tongue around me
and my wine crushed thumb swelled thicker than ever over the panic
button
once in red
and then again in blue.

Margaret Walther: *Ode to the Double Bass*

Ode to the Double Bass

lady of spruce, what is this joy—

your low inflections unlock our bodies
release a cadence—

we didn't realize our hunger for
these bluish tremolos of lupine

buffalo scrape across the earth
their shaggy fur, a plain song

while water reels over the bedrock of the Yellowstone

pizzicato—
beavers gnaw wood, slap tails on water

a pine siskin eats conifer seeds
grizzly cubs play in grass, mother watching
cinquefoil, marigolds cloister in the meadow

andante—
when the bow rasps across your strings, moss agate, sardonyx
cabachons descend

cattails open, seeds pirouette
in sleeves of wind

lady of sycamore, what is this lull—

big-hipped, you tremble into the bourn—
of paradise

forage in its terrain
then geyser us with the scald of steam

Yarrow Paisley: *Heat Life*

A temperature fluctuates within my skull. There is a point of heat inside, it moves to keep from being caught. The silk transversal of my ears was spun by a spider that feeds on heat, and then the spider spun itself into the thread. The poison thread imposes the life of heat. There is laughter in the silent thread. There is darkness all around the dark thread. O ecstasy quivers in the motionless thread! I have slithered often through my sheets to find the entrance of my bed, reasoning that if there is coziness on the mattress then what infinite forgetfulness must be within!—ten thousand points of heat to make finally a steady temperature! For it is a certainty the lonely heat within my skull must eventually be captured by the transverse spider thread. But O ten thousand points of heat plus one could surely overwhelm a single thread! I should like simply to shake the thread out, but only by shivering my skull to fragments might I succeed in this. I am unwilling. I beg—do not condemn me! The heat breeds in my bed. I rest my hope there. Come into my head you swarms! I invite you!

John Sibley Williams: two poems

We all arrive by different streets

Act I

We all arrive by different streets
with different dialects of silence
exploding in our mouths

and the whole city hears
this beautiful holler
rise uncertainly above it
like a storm cloud
awaiting its rainbow.

Act II

We all arrive by different streets
shielded by our personal mantras.

You say *beauty is*
this shared anonymous silence.

I say *the whole city will die,*
silently, with me.

We argue well into night
and somehow are comforted.

Act III

We all arrive by different streets
fearing the transparency of clothes—

that in our own hideous undress
we wear the whole human race.

When I go there

Act I

When I go there
I go by bone
most often,
hardened bone
carried by sediments
of iron
that would rust
if exposed to all this rain.

Act II

So I keep inside
the heavier elements
and speak in man-made
polymers,
plastics,
and gases
that won't so easily combust.

Act III

But those that upon a candle
consider
if this time
they too should burn
or simply become
again
the air—

those are the cherished memories
I wear around you
uncertainly.

Rose Cook: *The Storm*

The sea churns, rough
so two young men must swim
to their boat tied way out
bucking like the metal horse
in our playground at home.

Fishermen tip toe the edge,
try to haul fish life from it.

The early cormorants are long gone,
now a family chucks stones
as if to match the heave and thrust
of the very ocean we crawled from.

The wild sea excites us, flags waving
people huddle with hoods up
shout to each other.
The young men have reached their boat.
Now what?

Mist blurs the headland
soon the foghorn
will moan like a widow.

Kat Henríh: *at the Two-Hearted River*

I forgot to tell you: I drowned you for the sake of symmetry.
watched a wall form against the water, stacked layers of sand and rock
open like a bed with the sheets pulled back
waiting for entangling.

at the Two-Hearted River a small boy watched us diving.

meant to
the sunset over the water but above

too far from Earth to notice light

the small boy was disturbing rocks.
his pockets sagged with their round weight
his skin browned before my foggy eyes.

had come from the nearest star, he said, looking for a cage
for his sheep and a cage
for his rose.

Those things can be found here, you said, but why would you want
them?

I remembered a drawing in a children's book:
two black lines curving toward each other like thighs
to form a desert landscape: the saddest and most beautiful place on
Earth
the caption read.

he lifted his shirt to show me his Care Bear tattoo
and I wept into the sand, my tears percolating through the grains
like the waves through the rocks on the shore.

Miriam N. Kotzin: *Buckets*

see the petty violence blooms
violet heads hang down

heart leaves hurt heart
leaves hard heart broken

bank banged chick let
chick weed check it wild

flower fall under cart
wheels hands down over

upside down deals alley deals
dirty deals pretty penny ante

up alley-oo! alley alley
in free form no harm

meant ma'am no harm
no sireee sera sera

William B. Robison: *The Apotheosis of St Leroy*

Good Brother Leroy has long been forgotten
in the annals of the Holy Mother Church
excised from the compendious chronicles
his royal name abased in commonplace jibes
nary a statue in the darkest corner
for the martyred patron saint of irony

He went into the desert for forty years
living on fried chicken and watermelon
not buried waist deep in the sand nor aloft
on a pillar like Simeon Stylites
but rather tap dancing on a lone flat rock
a furious flurry of fancy footwork

Pilgrims once came from the corners of the earth
sometimes leaving crusts of bread and old wineskins
brought from the priory of the Thunderbird
watching him with wonder and condescension:
idiot savant, such a prodigy, how
amazing to have such natural rhythm

For the origins of this metric precision
the synaptic snap of slick syncopation
certainly could not be supernatural
not in so lowly a creature of the mud
no, only the angels and elect partake
in the beatific march of measured time

Yet penitents home from the heat and the sand
fingers drumming on the arms of ottomans
echoing the pumping pulmonary pulse
dozing in the wing-shaped shadows of angels
sense just outside of consciousness and conscience
soft voices whispering . . . canonization

Bruce McRae: *The Sleepless One*

Prop of the earth,
all trails lead back
to the dreamhouse.
Prop of the earth,
the spirits have leveled,
disequilibrium balanced,
the wondrous made
to seem banal.

From sleep's chair
you can almost see
visions mocking a visionary,
smoke in the outhouse,
your ninth wife
under a lawn.
In life's winter
bundle up snug
in your coat of arms,
a little black doctor
mulling over dark matters,
his mouse-head screwed on,
his virtual scream
like a glass of ginger wine —
difficult to swallow.

Prop of the earth,
evening arrives
in its unprintable blue.
In the eye of the dream
evening is heaven-shaped,
its windy hook lowered
from azure skies.
This is love,

a beautiful truth,
a black-eyed melody;
its throat burning.
Love is an incredible fish,
its dispossessed body
twisting on a barb.

The pain is exceptional.

Carl James Grindley: three pieces

Campton

Campton, New Hampshire is a landscape of broken stone foundations and steep green metal roofs. Here and there, old shingles peel away from housesides like silvery scabs. Faded trailers grow out of the open land, hemmed in by uncut grass and a lattice of ancient stone walls.

The Intended has been wearing the same green suede bell bottoms for a week. Her left thigh is a glassy ketchup smear and there are pinhole burns running across her right knee. Her hair is pulled back in a greasy pony-tail, and her fingertips are badly bitten and yellowed from nicotine. She shoplifts clothes for The Child of the Relationship whenever she feels like it, and today, the little boy is wearing a red t-shirt that says "hot dog". His t-shirt is decorated with a monochromatic hot dog in bright yellow vinyl.

When The Intended studies The Child of the Relationship's little face, she has a hard time deciding who she sees more in its tiny outlines. He has her vaguely bored look, her red, wet mouth, her waxy complexion, but he has his father's eyes, jaded, timeless, depressed. The Child never speaks about his father. Indeed, The Child almost never speaks at all.

Autopsy

The Intended left him dozens of messages, called several times a day, placed notes under his windshield wipers when she recognized his car parked downtown. She went to the dentist's office with him, spied him from afar when he slipped on an icy sidewalk, always ready to be there, to offer a hand when he was at his most

vulnerable, most needy. Sometimes she slid into the crowded elevator with him at his office. They would exchange a momentary glance—him of longing, her of unvarnished lust—and he would turn away, scowling. Every now and then, she would follow him to his desk and draw obscene pictures on his note pad, or type pornographic URLs into his laptop. Once she even followed him into the men's room and stood outside the stall door, tapping every so lightly with her cheap press-on fingernails while he sobbed inside.

The First Ending

Today The Intended promised herself that things would be different, but her resolve wore away and nothing changed. It became clear to her that things will continue on the way they always have, that stillness and disquiet and disappointment—such vague maladies, such malformed woes concealing a very concrete and yet ineffable truth—yes, disquiet and disappointment will be her lot until the end. Such is her silence.

He has not called, and she knows that he never will.

The rain is slowly ending for the season. Looking up, she thanks The God of Light Rain for his blessings. The garden will do well this year. The plants do not care that he has left and will never return. The plants will grow and flourish long after his bones have joined those of his ancestors in the loose dirt of the mountains. The plants will flourish long after the World of Men dies and becomes the World of Cats and Rats. The plants will flourish long after the World of Cats and Rats dies and becomes once more the World of Plants. The God of Light Rain does not have a dog in this fight. He only cares about his ongoing affair with The Goddess of Unfathomable Sadness. One day, He fears, She will respond to his slow advances, reciprocate, and then, in a single moment, they will both cease to exist.

The Intended pulls the curtains closed and wanders into the kitchen to make tea, waiting to be used.

Alessandra Bava: Women's Only Asylum (starring
Miss Plath, Miss Frame and Miss
Dickinson)

A mansion that is more
like a condo, inhabited
by the kindred souls of
those who have lost

their sanity. You will
find them all gathered
here in participating
disruption wearing

their candid straitjackets,
playing cards with
their mouths, acting
scenes like Tomfools,

There is the crazy
stare of Sylvia
writing wailing lines,
on sheets tossed

around her body.
The new so-called
schizophrenia in
the lucid ravings

of Janet. So many
different forms of
lunacy, but you will
end up loving them

all. Even Emily in her
room, blowing glass
panels to smithereens
at last.

Neila Mezynski: *Flooded in Missouri, Floating in
France—five pieces from “Floaters”*

Invisible

Wind blow don't blow, sun on shine face wall house tree, me. Anyway
they need me be she'll be, stretch taut loose spread eagle out of
alignment every which way turn loose. She won't go far. Only if he she
blew don't blow. That far. Only. The envy of all those floater. Wind.

Floating

The river full of his house on it, swallow. Carpet car knick knack paddy
whak, give the frog a bone or other one. She in it, the car, steering, the
tub, wet hard to hold, both grind in 2nd gear. Water high enough to tell
her to turn down the faucet next time, cut back those out of control
heart pling string keep your clothes on, girl. This time. Mind the store.
Wander in dark water with loud on both sides keep your wit girl in soft
head. Clothes are on back seat. Do try to stay dry, new idea on water
log.

Dancer in Bordeaux

Step lively in vine flat face no humour. Keep your tights dry no grape juice on tulle. Nice enough to give directions from back seat of car with smelly arms. Those vines can get lost. Take me by the hand please boing boing boing. Sounds on pogo stick. She was kind in beige in matching car. Not rude at all. French France.

Too long Toulouse

Go see the soft pink violent painting. Quiet though. No one there sees her for only a second sweet burr head. Concentrate. Eyes. Don't look at him. He'll see love me. Behave. Don't tolerate nonsense from old broads. Look worried. Lean over the river to test no jump or close eyes when drive too fast. Same thing. Too much paint on flesh but then he say that's what oil is for don't think about it. Pink on flesh. Use plenty. I'll look you deep in your eyes not tell lies if I can help it. Maybe two. Dress nice not that one. If you have legs in tight pants you'll be nice. No lie sparkle plenty.

Singer in France

Pink green building people in it, not smile, disgust on mouth, probably like her, pretend for not sure. Pooched lip, eyebrows wide eye lift. American peegs. Used to look longer, not no more at her used up on the outside inside thirteen. Hit that high note.

Graham Tugwell: *Nativity of Flies*

They fed us up on special jam, fat and special on cold turnip and milk.
Only at this time, in this place.
Fat; ready for festivities to come.
Look at our lips. Look at our lips.
Our wet and shining lips.

...

Stopping to rescue your breath at the road's-bend, you find yourself bent in pain— a stitch lops away lung-ends, leaving air no purchase. Hands sliding on thighs, you're wheezing, but the smile won't leave your face.

Folding, sucking heaving breaths; feel musclesheets flex in protest.

And you run, you run home—

News!

News bursting from the very heart of you!

...

The backdoor simply flies open, knocking against the wall with a terrific crash. It shoots back but the little boy is already through and skipping through the kitchen shouting with glee, flinging his schoolbag away, spilling books across the floor.

"Mammy!" the boy cries, "I got it! *I got it!*"

Mammy appears from the sitting room, smiling, her hands on her hips. "What's all this noise?" she asks, "You've got *what* Brendan? What did you get?"

Brendan skips from foot to foot, he simply can't contain himself, his smile is so wide and eager. "The *part*, Mammy," he cries, "The main part in the Nativity!"

Mammy crosses her hands on her heart, and they're smiling, both smiling. "Oh that's brilliant, Brendan, I'm so proud of you," and

Mammy reaches down and gives Brendan the biggest hug imaginable.

“I’m going to be the Fly,” cries Brendan, “I’m going to be the Fly!”

And they hug; they hug, there in the kitchen they hug.

...

I was going to be the Fly.

In later years I would remember the show being the proudest moment of my young life, on the stage, under the lights, at the head of my classmates. The most important day of the year— the Winter Nativity— the village assembled to watch in thanks, in awe, in fear.

But first things first; before I get my lines to learn, my costume must be made. I remember how excited I was— I don’t think I slept for days—every waking moment designing and making an outfit worthy of the Fly.

How to construct and secure the wings?

How to make the plumpest, pinkest lips?

How many legs did a fly have, anyway?

Questions like that, I asked myself.

But one thing was certain: I would be the best Fly the village had ever seen.

...

Winter comes.

Go out to bogs and silent places.

Barter with strange families there.

Bring home wet unspoken things, the secret kept by everyone.

Special meat, to cut and fry and salt and savour, special for Nativity.

Comes a time of feasting, of celebration.

And then comes Winter...

...

Your hands are deep in dishwater when the cry comes calling from upstairs: “Mammy! I can’t get it to stick!”

"I'm doing the dishes Brendan, hold on for a moment, just a moment now."

"It keeps coming off the end— ah, *Mammy!*" he calls in frustration.

Placing a plate on the draining board you find yourself sighing, drying your hands you call: "I'm coming up to you, now."

Ascending the stairs you mutter "Hold on, hold on," almost unknowing to yourself.

You find him sitting cross-legged on his bedroom floor, surrounded by bits of cardboard, discarded plastic and odd scraps of material torn from old blankets, jumpers he has grown out of; green, blue and purple. On a sheet of old newspaper are scissors, sellotape, glue.

In one hand Brendan holds up the old hurling helmet, in the other two matching shapes cut from cardboard.

He wrinkles his nose. "Mandrills keep coming off, Mammy."

"Mandibles, Brendan. They're called mandibles."

"Mandibles, then... won't stick on proper."

He demonstrates. The cardboard peels away from the plastic helmet.

You recognise the look of sour thunder darkening his face.

Smiling, ruffling your son's hair, you crouch beside him.

"Pass me the glue," you say, "And let's see if we can't sort you out."

...

Decide what coloured scraps are usable, what shades of green and purple best signify the Fly. Pin them together, measured first against arms and legs. Coat hangers uncoiled, furred with felt; fly legs free to bend. Find how many you need, stitch them secure, thread them to your cuffs so they move in concert with your own. Find the glue best for gluing, fix the mandibles, paint the jaws, use old soup strainers for the eyes, glued with sequined lenses. For feelers, old plastic spoons—they look too awkward, take them off. Wings—delicate sparkling gauze stretched across a rounded frame of sticks. Straps cut from an old school bag hold them against the back.

Stitch pink strips to the costume front, bulked with rolled-up

socks and tights.

These will be the lips.
Stand in front of the mirror.
You are the Fly.
You are the Vulva Fly.
Bow to your reflection.

...

Grinning, the boy stands in front of the mirror, clad head-to-toe in his new costume, from slippers to glittering wings, from puffy lips to the helmet with wobbly knobby feelers.

It really is quite striking!

"Everyone is going to be very impressed, Brendan," says Mammy appreciatively.

The little boy squeals, springing up and down, causing his arms and wings to wobble and flap.

"Buzzzz Buzzzz Buzzzz, Mammy!" cries Brendan, running rings around a laughing, clapping Mammy.

"Vulva vulva vulva!" cries Brendan, nuzzling her playfully with the furry-helmet of his Fly-head.

"Vulva vulva vulva!" cries Mammy in reply, clapping her hands, clapping her hands.

And they laugh!

Laugh and laugh and laugh!

...

Across the low-shouldered hills, in sweeps along bogs and flooded fields, Winter is coming, striding on bitter-cold gunmetal haunches, pushing wind and rain before it, scattering the last scraps of Autumn in its wake.

And all in the town can feel it, long have they been tuned to such things, all can feel the change in the air, the sharpness, darkness, coldness coming.

Time to retreat; time to think of staying indoors. Bank the fires, pull the curtains, wait for it all to pass overhead.

Winter is coming.

But before the snows and frosts, before the freezing of the reservoir and the closing off of the wider world, there will come one last moment of colour, of freedom, of thanksgiving.

The Bright Nativity. The Nativity of Flies.

...

This morning I got my script and so I took it home with me after and I put all marker over the words I had to say and there was lots to remember of them and some of the words were big and hadn't heard them before so I asked Mammy what they were and how I was supposed to say them.

...

The boy points to the word, underlined in red pen upon the photocopied page.

"Perineum," Mammy says, turning back to fill the dishwasher. "That word is perineum. Per-en-nee-um."

"Per-en-nee-um," the boy slowly repeats, the syllables faltering yet falling in place.

Mammy laughs. "That's it, Brendan. You've got it!"

The boy grins.

...

You learn your lines.

You practice your dance moves.

Smiling, moving the linked arms and wings up and down, you show your costume to the other children. And you can see that they're jealous because you worked so hard on yours— and theirs? Theirs aren't much to write home about!

Tim Sweetnam there, for instance. The eyes on his angel costume are nowhere near big enough and he's strapped his eggchute on upside down! How is he going to lay the Egg of Spring when the tip points towards the ceiling?

But your scorn is interrupted by Fr. Keogh, clapping for atten-

tion beside Mr. Darby's piano. "Alright kiddies," he calls, "Places now for the Dance of the Bitches' Bath!"

Your heart leaps—this dance is one of your favourites—not *the* favourite of course, that'll be *your* dance. The one that brings the curtain down.

The Bath is wheeled in, with little Imelda Quinn crouching inside it. At least *her* costume is good—those bruises look very real indeed!

And the children line up and as Mr. Darby plays, you sing:

Drowned inside the Bitches' Bath, Bitches' Bath, Bitches' Bath,

Drowned inside the Bitches' Bath,

Old Lame Summer!

And you watch the Twins grab Imelda and force her down and under.

...

And now, the long-wanted night of Nativity itself, bringing the Recipe of Bright Birthing, and the low hall of St Barnabus and His Holy Mule is filled; filled with parents, hushed voices chatting, children-filled, excited running up the aisles; full, expectant, trembling unspoken with ritual need.

Outside, the long-threatened snow is finally falling.

...

Fr Keogh is giving the cast instructions and I creep away along the stage until I am standing just behind the curtain and I can hear people out there, a huge crowd out there, I can hear them talking and whispering, there to see us, to see me.

...

Tentatively, the boy parts the curtains, leans out into the cold dark space, the expectant sphere of the audience beyond. So cold: he's sure his breath will come as frost.

...

From your seat in the third row you see Brendan slowly poke his head between the curtains. You give him a little wave of encouragement— there's not a doubt within you that he will be fine, just fine.

...

If there's one thing that I remember, it's the range and rapidity of emotions; nervousness, confidence, excitement, fear, arrogance, all in quick succession, all threatening to overwhelm me.

I remember looking for Mother.

I remember not being able to find her among the shadowed faces.

...

Pull yourself away from the curtains.

Feel sick.

Feel so sick.

...

We are waiting in boxes at the foot of the stage.

You'll see our lips.

Our wet and shining lips.

...

Begin.

Mr. Darby plonks his fingers down upon the keys: *Ding da-ding ding ding!*

Squeaking, the curtains part.

And there, singing *The Chasing of the Water*, the characters of the Nativity are arrayed.

Bright innocent Summer, before the bruising, blood-red Spring with his furry belly, failing, swollen Autumn, and looming behind on home-made stilts, terrible Winter in his cloak of bitten skin.

The Three Angels, ready to lay their eggs of Change, swaying, brown fingers locked together.

St. Barnabus tumbling on his backwards knees, his penitent Mule

dragged along on a length of cord.

There— Baby Christ in scarlet bands and poor Chained Mary with the Worst Shepherd and the Bitch of the Bog and there; Thomas Clarke and Hot Father Dagda.

There's the Dalmatian, snaking along the back of the stage, a heavy-headed sheet of black and white propped up on staves by eleven children.

And skipping, darting between these groups, laughing, gesturing with her bells and white branches—the Water, uncaught, uncatchable, unstopped, unstoppable.

And dancing lightly along the front of the stage his pink lips shining under the lights: the Vulva Fly.

...

You dance along the lip of the stage, wiggling arms and wings.
You are the Fly. All eyes upon you.

...

The audience gasps and giggles and clap their hands in glee as the Baby Christ is forced to exchange tongues with the Vulva Fly.

The cast sing:

Buzzz, Buzzz, Buzzz, says the Vulva Fly,

No, no, no, weeps Jesus Christ!

A child in the audience pulls upon her parent's sleeve, grinning, looking up and grinning: "He doesn't like it, Mammy!" the child whispers, "Look at little Jesus! He doesn't like the Fly at all, Mammy!"

Chained Mary flops about the manger, trying to force the Vulva Fly away with her chain-wrapped stumps.

And this is the sound that Mary makes: *Kee-haw Luu. Kee-haw Luu!*

"*Kee-haw Luu!*" the child repeats, bouncing in her seat.

"Shush!" the Mother whispers, smiling indulgently, "People are trying to watch the Nativity."

...

Me? I play the part of Thomas Clarke.

Wanted to be the Fly, but too small or didn't say the lines right when Fr. Keogh tried us out in his rooms. Those reasons, and others probably, how should I know?

So I show the Vulva Fly to the Warehouse, and I sing the *New Ireland* song, and then I retreat; I become just one in the chorus.

My part finished. I'm not important.

...

Father Keogh, at the stage door, smoking. Watching the flakes fall. Coming down, coming down.

...

Winter has killed Spring, has slain Summer, even craven thin-legged Autumn. Loosed by Water, the dread season stumps around the stage on stilts, bellowing for more bitten skins.

The audience gasps.

Little Jesus tries pleading with his new tongue, but it's no good, it's no good. Winter freezes him; he falls away.

The audience boos.

The Dalmatian attempts to intervene but Winter sends the long thing away, skipping always in front of the snows, avoiding the cold point of Winter, escaping into the shadows.

The audience claps. Who will stand up to Winter? Who else, but the Fly?

...

So this was the part I was looking forward to. This was my moment.

I jump onto stage, waving hands and wings, darting beneath the grasp of the season, buzzing, admonishing Winter for holding the town in its terrible grasp.

I duck and dodge, fly and dance. I do my best.

But I tire.

I slow. I am struck down by Winter.

...

The children gasp! Oh!
The Fly has been cast down.
Looks so small lying there.
But the kids in the audience know what to do. They feel it.
As one they begin to chant: *Vulva... vulva... vulva... vulva...*
This is magic. This is the passion of this place, honed and forceful.

A voice in the darkness.
The Fly stirs...
The chanting rises, quickens.
Vulva, vulva, vulva, vulva!
Look! The Fly is rising!

...

You rise.
You are the Vulva Fly. They bred you here, this time, this place.
You are the wrong-heart of this town.
And as Winter cowers from the power of you, you dance the dance of the Vulva Fly.
The chorus sings: *I am the Fly, I am the Fly, I am the Fly.*
Your lips are flexing.
Winter falls.
The chorus sings: *Fly of the, Fly of the, Fly of the, Fly of the Winter!*

...

And the song reaches its climax and Mr. Carroll and Mr. Jones lift the hamper lids.
Releasing the vulva flies. And they get everywhere.
Good Lord, they get *everywhere*.
Wriggling in smiling mouths, bitten, tasting like raw turnips, tasting like milk. Crawling through the hair of laughing children. Buzzing through the crowd, up into the rafters of the parish hall, through the holes in the roof.

...

Winter cowers, Winter cries.

...

We fly into cold grey clouds, spreading out, disappearing against falling snow.

Months of warmth and darkness, scant seconds of bright coldness.

Our lips are shrivelling.

...

I stand with my classmates. We link arms; we bow. The applause rises, the Nativity ends.

I'm so happy.

And our parents are so proud, so proud. They'll be passing round the strange meats now.

...

We have spoken to the darkness. We have spoken to the frost.

And this year, like every year, we have shown it we will not submit without a fight.

...

The vulva flies rise up; the curtains come down.

Winter folds the town in its cold embrace.

Joel Chace: *Font*

. It required time to go from the silence of the hot valley, the shadow of his little cabin, and the wire fence of his pasture, back to the days of his youth.

. Lowering her voice, she said the word, then took it back.

. It goes without saying that any corrections you make, I approve of, a priori.

. Back alley's icy font of darkness.

. They were low, long-drawn expulsions of breath, very expressive.

. I still can't find a satisfactory story to go with it, but I continue to develop the separate dances.

. This is a problem which only a life-subsidy from some kind soul will solve.

. Those scars will be purple, edged with white.

. The whole thing lasts from 8 – 10 minutes, I think.

. This unknown family, composed of human beings and animals, forces him to move the mass of historical happening as Sisyphus rolls his stone.

. Finding it impossible to do any composing, two weeks ago I politely resigned my position as jazz pianist.

. It's colder in Detroit than it is in the winter.

. Spirit of joy, rustling, whispering, almost a voice singing, moves on water washing two shores, joining two lands.

. I should have preferred telling you about other things – our jazz-bands, for instance.

. Each pearly-perfect mushroom cap, the peter's end of an infant saint.

. Anxious to try the effects of education on one of those I had but slightly wounded in the wing, I fixed up a place for it in the stern of my boat.

. On the island, three hundred seals moan their cat-gut joys.

. It lived with me nearly three days, but refused all sustenance, and I witnessed his death with regret.





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