

CIVIL DISGUISE

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Around the fledgling tulip bulbs of the public square a hyena wearing a petticoat is escorted to a raised wooden stage where the gallows wait. It is a morning as moist and fragrant as an English teabag. Iron shackles around its embarrassed haunches, the animal half bites at the dark breath of an audience for whom the sight is a natural suggestion. A hooded man in a sweater and khakis lingers around the scaffold making afternoon plans on a cell phone. A voice on the other end tells him there is still a future in human resources if he keeps up appearances. The hyena is lifted onto its hindquarters, its matted neck hair laced into the grains of the lariat. A sentence of indecent exposure is read aloud by a small child to those who would listen. The animal struggles, drool edging across the bare meat of its snout and falling upon the stained clothe draped around its privates. Under the wail of a passing ambulance a prayer is murmured. Then the bottom falls out, the hyena eating the last laugh.

THE RAFT

We built the raft out of blood and leaves by the trees along the shore. In between hours we'd eat bologna sandwiches in the shade and discuss the finer details we could recall of our own births - the wailing, the cold hands, the smell of gunpowder. One hour I mistook your sandwich for mine. Underneath the yellow bread hid the meat of a black onion. I knew then you had made the whole thing up just to infiltrate my escape. Pine needles pledged soft safety under our bare feet for our last moments on earth as you readied a milk bottle to break over the bow while I searched for a sturdy rock to hide in my bathing suit.

I waited until we were far out of sight from land or God. Then I struck you with a pinecone (all I could find) and you sank like a garbage bag full of vegetables. As the hours before sunset canceled what kinship had survived, I reflected into the white how I'd rather be alone than with a code name.

HOLD STILL

When the man finished the line he was reading he had to put down the book. He removed his glasses and rubbed the tight bridge of his nose. It was a subject that had no doubt expanded the size of his mind. But he still had questions that needed answers and pressed on. A passage on calisthenics during wartime. His glasses popped off. He tried to replace them, but they'd no longer fit upon his head. In some circles this was something to be proud of. They were rather small circles, however; their heads too, being the size of covered wagons, allowed for little space for them to collect en mass in their preferably taut, colonial rooms. Blind as a poked eye, the man now worried about finding his way to their concealed quarters veiled on lantern streets with this new weight upon his neck. But he had to get there. He needed someone to explain all of this to him in a slow, primitive language.