

Turnip's Tulpa

Past the frozen fields and the knot where the muddy river unravels into two streams, sirens echoed searchingly through the violet sky. Turnip swifted down the streets with his mind miles ahead of him. A tension had been culminating in the space between his eyes and seemed to pulsate with a heartbeat of its own. Later, after lying on the floor and staring at the ceiling, he found himself on his side, overlooking a skyline of tubs of paint, solvent, canisters, stacks of books, cardboard, and canvases. Feelings of at-homeness bloomed within him amid the miniature extension of the cityscape, as if he were a giant nestled beside some unsuspecting town. As if the gradient skies enveloped not only the outside world but seeped into the room's interior, bringing in the low sun. A few slow blinks later — paying attention to the sound of his eyelids sticking and unsticking — Turnip decided to launch into a big-time caper. It wasn't the first time he had considered it, but now, with the building blocks at eye level, he felt compelled. He'd seen similar images in his dreams, vaguely domestic scenes. This inspired him to make the parts into a whole, be it a chimera, so he would be able to look at life from a bird's-eye view.

Turnip furthered his zeal by sketching a house in a Carpenter's Gothic style, and drafting the outlines of its residents. They were an incongruous bunch, the people orbiting around in daily life: Mum, Father, Brother (Fennel), Turncoat, The Dealer, Ms. Angel, and Father Julio. He gathered material to call the dolls into being, already implicating their lives. For his own effigy, he manufactured a kind of tulpa, imbuing it with a spiritual likeness over any physical parallels. The tulpa didn't have a body, only a papier-mâché blob for a head, and a face painted "for the back of the room." Under an auburn hairdo, bushy eyebrows crept like caterpillars across the forehead; plum blusher; blue eyelids haloed by darts of eyelashes like a sinister flower; iridescent hot-pink lips crowned by a fat black beauty mark for good measure.

Brother (Fennel) was a little sailor with saucer eyes and perfect chewies for teeth, lined up neatly next to one another to form an enamel army. Leaning against the doorjamb with his limbs sprawled, he kept a watchful eye on his older brother, who was rolling sideways along the slanted floors of the porch. He'd promised Mother he would do so. Turnip, with a tiara on his head, spun around until he got caught in a cobweb in the corner. Fennel sighed while gathering himself to get up. He freed his brother, who had become wedged between the spider-silk-covered bannisters. Turnip proceeded to sidle silently past Fennel, embarrassed. This time he rolled backwards until his face got stuck between the floorboards, halting his trajectory. Fennel observed that Turnip's auburn wig was suddenly covered in splinters and that a thin stream of blood had sprung from under his left eyebrow. Fennel sighed once more, telling Turnip not to move while he went to get the glitter kit and hot glue from Ms. Angel. Passing the birdcage in the hall, Fennel couldn't help but picture his brother locked up inside it.

The Dealer is still just a wooden-bead head. I should give him a face and body. I think so, but where do I start? I really can't leave him as he is, he wouldn't like that one bit. Anyway, I

shouldn't overthink it. All right, yes, I'll start with his face. What colour pencil should I choose? Perhaps a classic Sharpie will do. Classic is good. Yes, and I can retrace the drawing later anyway, if necessary. The Dealer's mouth is shaped like an O, yes, that's right. An O-shaped mouth can signify many things, can't it? Both terror and surprise. Yes, I can change it later if I have to. I think the circle shape of the O is much like an eye anyway. Yes, the Phoenicians used the O-shape as the letter "eyn," meaning eye. That's true, I think. The Dealer's face would be that of an upside-down cyclops, with the extra round eye. Yes, I suppose that's fitting. Anyway, where did his slippers go?

Only a certain kind of man can pull off a smartly cut suit like so. The other residents will look at it in their characteristic stupor again. But I'll show them how it's done, like so. They don't understand that it's about movement and how the fabric catches and absorbs the light. O, dear God, I do hope Turnip won't make a scene this evening. He damn near fainted from hysteria last time I pinned a rooster's feather on my left lapel. Perhaps the lavender tie is a tad much? O, I can just take it off, voilà, like so. Less is more. That's what the women at the galleries claim. Moving in and out of the glass cubicles like ornate frigates; donning refined silk, luscious furs, and rare pear-shaped pearls. O, all this makes them swoon. O, they do try their best to become celestial bodies, to compass fellow ships to more sparkling waters. Their husbands resemble female bullfinches in listless brown suits and black caps, edging behind their leading ladies. O, if only I could be content to be just like so.

Head cocked and observing his work, Turnip looked for The Dealer's shoes, a pair of lime-green mules. They were nowhere to be found, so he proceeded to glue strips of wallpaper to the exterior of the dollhouse — Mum always did say he had an eye for colour. Adding scraps ad hoc and slapdash to the dollhouse, he could still hear the blush bullfinches warbling in the shrubs outside, their song fading while dusk blended into middle-of-the-earth kind of colours. The light found its resting place in the east. His friend Turncoat walked past the room without him fully noticing. Turnip busied himself adorning the dollhouse in a flurry with everything he could find: sticks, cardboard, bits of shredded cotton, specks of glitter, tufts of fabric, leftover black lacquer dripping from the lattice, a colony of Biro caps (red) planted onto the already polka-dotted rooftop. The staircase moved inward and outward, vining elliptically around the outside of the house, ivy instead of steel. In the entrance hall, a bird sat glued on top of its cage, white and red-chested, a tiny black quiff, its figure visible against the pale halo of the lamp. Swinging back and forth, its shadow looked like a slow-motion game of darts, with the bird's beak as the steel tip in its flight toward the bullseye.

Yes, well, anyway, I should get rid of these green slippers. I will. And Brother (Fennel) can go too. Yes, I need to tell him to go away anyway, and that would be that. It really shouldn't cause too much of a stir. Anyway, Mum would understand, I think. Yes, but, Father and Father Julio are

often more “rational.” They would probably advise against it. Unsolicited advice anyway. Yes, but that would be their opinion, right? They wouldn’t understand, not like Mum would anyway. I can’t expect everyone to understand, can I? But I’d do it anyway. There is some use in listening, but I’m not sure at this point. Anyway, I should trust my instinct. Right? I should really try to concentrate, fix these tears in the wallpaper. Can’t have it blowing a gale inside. No, can’t have that. It’ll have to wait anyway until the glue is ready. Yes. I need to prepare the glue before I can get started anyway. And I need to fix these holes in the floor; those could be dangerous if anybody got stuck in them and tripped. Anyway, I’ll take care of that. I’ll have to anyway, when Brother (Fennel) isn’t around any longer. Anyway, I can’t wait until he’s gone... Anyway, it won’t be long now. If only he doesn’t take the birds — those need to stay. Anyway, I’ll have to tell him that, and he’ll listen. Surely.

Turncoat peered curiously at the spectacle through the crack of the door. Still smoking, he observed his friend’s latest infatuation. It resembled a crime scene, with bundles of light slicing through the darkened room, illuminating the expanding dollhouse and Turnip’s waxing-moon-mask of enchantment. Wisps of hair appeared halo-like in the chiaroscuro room. A frown etched vertically through his triangle of sadness. He’s gone dotty again. Turncoat had learned it best to let him flip his lid. Like a sleepwalker, Turnip was better left undisturbed during his fancies. He was absorbed once more, every attempt consumed him totally, excluding all else. Leaning a bit closer, he hoped to catch some of what Turnip was saying, only to realise it was the usual spitfire of word salad. Closing his eyes and stifling a sigh, Turncoat could almost feel the spray of spittle moisten his face. He shivered, his spine had turned into an eel, vertebrae by vertebrae.

Even though the darkness had long transformed the space, an atypically loud shriek from the bellowing of bullfinches rose from outside the window. Alarmed, Turnip sat up, afraid to turn around. The muddy darkness in the corners seemed to be after him. Side glancing he noticed a shift in presence around the door. Was Turncoat eavesdropping again? Turnip was overcome by the thought that Turncoat would be the only one (but the dolls) present in the moment that he, finally, and forever, lost it.