

A Mirror to Forget

Jessica Butler and Isabella Kressin

Gern en Regalia

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Hers was a premonition inciting a passion for the possible. Vehicle hazard lights created shadows of deliverance from a fixed identity, a voice made known in an inscrutable alias. There need not be a body, reference point, only a spirit in the unending process of becoming. That spirit's desire translated to an investment in looking, faithfully driving to water land-locked, her reflection all elbow-grease coiffed in an updo, her mouth the shape of a spade, fleur-de-lis rippled. Approaching, not near receding, hewn stars touch golden birch, while beasts with the look of living stone devour smoke trailing an inhale.

“Welcome to ‘*Land Cradled on the Waves,*’” just beyond her lake. Signs that give orders must look as if they mean to be obeyed. One-fifth of the canvas, yet a decree: wherever she comes from will shift gears through country to forget, in the sunken seam of aerated soil. Her hue is best seen in the dark of silo pillars, the bayonet of thunderstorm, lantern to a leger lined Standard, a set of instincts held close to her chest. “Mid-noon, supper's nailed to an orchard, wade in waist-deep, drink it all, tuck humidity behind both ears, chalk what's boundless, shoot sharp, both hips, somersault the grave of a trope. X”

A century ago so-called "wall dogs" scribed "*Hail To The Sunrise*" in lead paint to whitewashed mortar, inlaid brick, to the exterior of a fill station that offers, “Quality, or ten for two dollars?” More than once, she drives here too. The floorboards warped and weft to trophy hunters, booted feet in haste of falling feet, a preoccupation with how the heart thunks in the chest, or there, in the yard. She is not so unlike them, tracking pulse, the phantasmagoria of what lives in plain view, her curiosity in culling wool coming apart, the lush of fading things, incandescence made spectral. Various pots and pans stud the room collecting rain, stalactites leeward an upturned eye. The woman and the trophy hunters mill about the grotto's symphony, aisle five, until the longest dream of water begins, the season of field frozen over, glacial potholes and chlorophyll broke down this side of two-lane.

She is a chapped collar, column of nerves intact, left with the sound of heat rising from pipes, aware now people become apparitions unto themselves, how few fear the core of night or being caught. Low clouds copper what might otherwise be perceived as frost-browned refuse. She maps coordinates to the arctic, a northern quarry more precious than the eye itself, movement towards the tension of tectonic plates, equal amount of light and dark at all latitudes. Too much movement though and the sensors pursue an explanation where there is none. The salt will saturate ice, all will evaporate to sky come spring. She protects the flame with closed hands, and finds a large house. The hallow of spoiled iron soldering vines to banister, stairwells alloyed in lenten rose stretching to beveled eaves, doorways unhinged, tedium patinated green. Weather had moved through the lungs of the property, but barely dissolved subject and object, every presence accounted for. She sleeps flanked by marbled limestone, lions at shoulders, taloned gods sculpted to corners of antechamber, as felled spruce sit the stern of a crick river. The woman, the spruce, theirs is the soft breath of switched backs at rest.

Story down to its sole is theory. Hers was mortality ceased to have the last word.

~ Catherine Calderon, 2021

Jessica Butler (b. 1992) is a visual artist and Photo Editor at *Artforum* who lives and works in Brooklyn, New York, but whose heart and mind will always belong to where she grew up in New Jersey surrounded by the forest, tucked in by crickets, and cradled by a lake.

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