

Girls in the Garden of Holy Suffering

Tragedy Queens anthology

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six.

My understanding of darkness comes early; I have no words for it, no context with which to drown in it or master it. But I know it's there; it is a wound. I hide it and pick it; am preoccupied of it. Of it I am.

I am raised by a darkness, even when things are good, even when I do the normal things children do. I always want more. I want that which makes me feel immortal and lithe and destructive. These are my formative years, I know it; I was born a thousand years into the sadness of my reincarnation. I have an intimate relationship with hunger, that she is an invisible friend. My body and mind cannot catch up quick enough to the condition.

My grandmother, from a fisherman's island off of Sicily, is a tiny woman with jet black hair; she swears the devil exists in my father, that he was born of blackness; she says he is the bad one, always will be. Dark and tall and tan and his blood is thick and of heaviness. He wakes early for work and I can smell the trail he leaves behind: aftershave of birch, white shirts, man. And he plays guitar, the blues, late at night. Of course, I am filled with understanding that what you cannot *have* in life you make.

And then he leaves. And so does my mother. I make and make them again in other images.

Fourteen.

I cast a spell for a boy, but he has to have *all* the parts; I want someone who lives by music, he needs long pale hair, and he has to be on fire inside. I don't have time for dead things. And I want him to be all mine — so mine his organs fail without me. My word is my magic. I want to fuck him but I want him to make love to me. The stupidity of youth fills me but I don't mind. I don't mind choking. I want to hold all my want and sorrow in a person who can consume it. Boys make my reality more beautiful.

Here he is and he is perfect, and for the next five years I will drown in him. He is named after an angel — there can be no other way. I lie about my age, but it all comes out in the water, like blood, and it turns out he is a real man and I am a real child, but never mind it. His mother loves me, takes me to museums and parks and the theatre. I am a good girl in their eyes, like a daughter, but he and I have our secrets.

His hair makes ringlets at the ends, it sticks to his neck when he plays guitar and he is taller than me by a foot or more. Through him I

understood that the body is an object, a thing to be abused and hardened and also loved. I don't forget about love; I don't claim the woman's body is a victim all the time; sometimes I victimize myself because I like it that way. He wants a special kind of sex, a kind I have to pretend to give. He wants me to beat him up, fuck him up bad, and cover him with welts and bruises. I don't want that; I have no desire to be the one doling out the pain. It's not that I am holy, I'm simply bored by men who want to act like little boys.

He has a friend, and his friend had the sort of things I learned I want. His friend is dark, like my father, and he puts me over his lap and shows me what it meant to hurt. I want that, to be made into a thing, to be possessed by what I have no capacity for.

I am rocking in his hands, that black kelp hair, oh his wicked mouth, his hard sex absolutism. And we sneak and sneak, we hold hands behind the angel's back, and we fuck in stairwells. In a manner of speaking he is not very kind but I am above the idea of what is or is not good. That is a naivety I feel particularly disgusted by. He leads me to his father's bedroom and splays me. I understood that what I have been given is an explicit want with no end.

Seventeen.

I am in a foster home. I am so sad my limbs go numb. This place is sterile and safe and predictable; there are flowers on tables, doilies, Degas. But I am just a boarder, I have a bedtime, I stay up lingering, I perpetually

dream otherness—of flowers in fields only I know of, of boys and girls who know my pain and can say they suffer too.

A quiet spell has been cast; I welcome the wound. I know I can relieve myself of want and negative space by chasing the dark, by finding those who understand it too.

Then I find Sylvia — she is an antidote to my sour life. She fills in the lines.

Tulips. I'll never forget it. I find a space in the school library, back beyond the rows and rows of books, near a wide open window. Summer is full and violent and the other teenagers are kissing or smoking or fumbling in their disgrace. I watch them with a blinding hate and disgust; I want anything, anything, but for them to come near me. I can not, will not, let them know me or see me or sense me.

All I want is my loneliness and my dreaming and my want to be realize. I want to get out of this other person's life. I want the boy who loves me and the boy who hurts me to distract me. And I want to come home at night and keep it all to myself. I want to bring God down to my chest and be inhabited; I am holy in the magic of my word and my want.

The teenagers have no space for the vastness of my life — they toil in the parking lots with their fashions; I sneak off to New York City and listen to the opera, I dig holes in the soil and plant words that come true. But I always come back by sundown on Sundays. And I have Sylvia. I have a

blackness in my heart like my father does, and I am filling it with the world and beauty and sneaky things. Through art, I elevate my heartache. I can live inside the trope. I can live inside my word. I build a world.

Sylvia says:

*I didn't want any flowers, I only wanted
To lie with my hands turned up and be utterly empty.
How free it is, you have no idea how free -
The peacefulness is so big it dazes you,
And it asks nothing, a name tag, a few trinkets.
It is what the dead close on, finally; I imagine them
Shutting their mouths on it, like a Communion tablet.*

I read it like a birthing; she understands — in her sickness and melancholy, in her being left in a London flat with two small children, in her constant need for death. In her actually achieving it. I think, how can she fit an unreasonable amount of suffering into so small a space? I cut the poem from a book and keep it in my pocket. It's the lock and the key.

twenty six.

I have had my fill of the dark, but we'll see. In and out of life, studying literature, studying the night.

We all write and stay up late and smoke cigarettes out the window. I find a home in New York City and revel in the hoax of it all. And I have a

new lover, he is demented, and obsessed by me; he sneaks through my things, secretly drinks, prisons the light out of me.

Naturally, sex is how I kill him. So I take my sex and put it around the town. And so he leaves and I am left.

I know this game well, you fool, I say. Because you cannot destroy my blood with my own poison. Because my body will run filters over your trauma. I can make anything a glamour.

I am in love with a sadness, simply because it is easier to translate it than to conquer it. And I am only good at replacing my sadness intermittently, with my body — because my body can transcend, if only for a moment. Into my body I pour a hundred elixirs and shapes and voids and wildnesses; I can make sacred my misery.

I learn to find men who make me cult-like in my surrender. Whether I am being loved or left, I find myself bending toward those who can supplant what is, day by day, a leaking in me: a sense of self in a world that values normalcy and good homes and nice girls and early mornings. I am not an early morning girl; I am a destroyer.

I always come back to Sylvia.

“Perhaps when we find ourselves wanting everything, it is because we are dangerously near to wanting nothing,” she tells me. It makes sense to me; I have nothing to want but the illusions of things, the script, the

grandeur, the facade. Because what can be real that also fulfills me? I don't know, I don't know, I just don't know if I want the chaos or the cure.

twenty seven

I am in a church on 14th and I pray for the first time since childhood, since I prayed the devil out of daddy. I wander in, and when I wandered out, the world changes.

I meet Lana; she makes sense to me as though she has always been there, in my chest, playing out. Like a woman stuck in perpetual girlhood, she is the ultimate symbol of woe. Maybe she even makes her face look more sad? Maybe she paid for them to sculpt it? I don't care. She's a comfort to me. She is a vessel; she is an stage show. We place into her what it means to be wholly separate from the world around you. We like the mirror she holds. I don't believe she suffers, but I believe she conjures suffering.

Thirty.

Lana does a photoshoot for Vogue. It's inspired by the idea of *Melancholy Sexuality*, which is something Sylvia knows well about, which is

something so simple and clear that the fact that one captures it is reductive and gauche.

But there is a difference between appropriating sadness and being sad, between the romanticizing of pain and pain itself, between death and the daydream of it.

Lana may be heart aching, and she may be obsessed by a world of beauty and youth, but she is no Sylvia. Sylvia sticks her head in an oven and kills herself, while her children sleep in the other room. Lana wears dresses in Italy.

My life is full of contradictions. I am been smashed to bits, and I am in love with my own sorrow. I am hurt so badly I want to die. But I also glamorize it, negligee and parfum are a distraction.

But I am not Lana. I am not Sylvia. I am just a girl making sense, I am just someone who collects death and beauty. I have to let it pass through me, all of those sad girls, before I can rid myself of it. I have to say, come in, come in, be a friend, be a muse. Let me clean my hands in you. Let me learn how to let it go. Let me watch you suffer. Let me watch you transcend the minutiae. Let us be preternatural. Let's walk into the garden.

I wear the mask and the reality. Only now, I understand that my words are a product of the intersection of the two. It is a place that lets me toil

without killing me. It is a place I think the other sad girls sometimes go.
We can keep the gate hidden by vines.