

Here

by Alec Niedenthal

I am reintroducing myself.

I am speeding, soaked in this long, dry road. I sit behind a screen. I visit the nurses' station and make some yelling noises.

It has been suggested that what I am doing is I am at Langston's bedside. I am probably leaning, leering out of a chair. I have been told that this hospital here is loud and efficient--here, a boy of mine was born--and yes, it is clean indeed. You would never know this soft, unplucky thing to be Langston, so still. So strung with tubed blood, not dressed her turgid best in this off-white room: one window, seemingly no floor. A series of oceanish veins like broken roads. I cannot touch her. Great clumps will fall out of Langston, if I do touch. Hulking chunks. I have been told to flee this sacred place before a quake--a shaking frame, a choked and flubby brain--becomes me.

I pluck the yellow foam of Langston's bed with finger after finger, tug at the tubes curling out of her, and will risk her life, the scream of her heartbeat, to feel at her.

The boys are gone. It's just old Gainey. The boys in their white river outswimming a shark. Goddamn and good heavens.

My boys--Altazar, Gainesville II, Stevie--are magnificent boys. I am so glad they are mine here on this earth.

Nurses will enter and I will act sovereign. I will do doctorish things, like prescriptively read and reduce charts. But really my profession is professionally having no profession. And in that I do excel.

My hot, rottish life.

Thousands of days halfway between Gainey and an Egyptian guard-dog--ambery eyes in either case. Entering new modes. As the case may be, pay attention as I lisp and click out each slot of this chart.

"Medishin," I say. "Dishtribute medishin." I am having fun.

"Stay right there," the nurses say to me.

"Hold still," they say.

I am just trying to change the channel on the television on the wall over there.

My hair looms on its gray edge.

At home, I am known as the man of the house. I have a garden which I relish. Long lines of tomatoes, rinds of squash, plain spiny vines cycle in it, I cannot remember all of the others. I will sit in there for hours and uproot and shoot things.

There is this body here in front of me. I measure its temperature, touch its cold head with the back of my hand.

I am warned do not kiss it, love it, or attempt speaking things into it.

Do not order me to leave my hand from my wife when she needs me here.

Here is what Langston did.

A private doctor had prescribed so many effective pills for how she has found difficulty in sleeping.

It is funny that she would use so many of these pills for this purpose.

Langston took so many of these pills because she had been feeling so blue.

She was feeling so blue.

These particular pills can be dangerous if you are taking so many.

Some of the boys uncovered Langston in the playroom, seizing.

Some things can be repaired if you are trying hard.

Other things simply sink.

Langston will probably die.

I am not sure where that puts me. I am not sure what to get from all of this. I am struggling hard to stay awake in my chair. This chair is mine. All of these sentences are mine. I am beginning to shake. A shred of me blinks briefly into sleep, machines hiss and whistle to keep Langston alive for tonight. Most of what happens from now on will appear unclear. Dear old me, dear friends. Will I soften into uncaring?

I remember catching Langston in masturbation. I remember moving her hair around in my mouth and asking her why. I mashed my nose into the hard part of her neck. I washed her with kissing lips and blushing touch. I guzzled most of her down, thinking: was she thinking of me?

Wake me up if you see me nodding off.

I remember how her skin was altogether wet. I had been outside biting the night sky with a rifle. I fired into tall trees and waited.

Now I heard, in the silence ripping out of my rifle's boom, Langston doing sexual noises from inside. I have excellent senses of smell and hearing. I can hear just about any human noise you play for me.

My desire to fire was gone. I went upstairs and held onto my Langston. I tugged up her nightgown. I said down here is where I am yours. I ran my hand on that strip of her. She trailed her love on my palm, sucked in her scabbish unlicked lips. She made noises even I cannot hear. I performed this until she fell asleep.

Here is Langston here. I am touching where I love her while she sleeps in her soft, courageous coma. If anyone enters I will say she is my wife here.

She is my wife here and you cannot stop me from loving her rightly.

I am doing what any strong husband would do. I am no stranger to devotion. I have not been brought so far from risk. Even though we have been far apart and I could have been more of another man. I am kneeling on Langston's hospital bed. It is like I am praying into her.

Langston is a dry scab down there. Her gauzy gown swallows my upper half. I slide her open, trickle into her with my tongue.

I vanish. I think sometimes I am magical.

Look, I am tunneling and digging a way out of here. I am not telling jokes anymore.

It is impossible to know what I mean when I say that. Look, I have proved the way my heart goes cold the instant a gown blooms around me.

Langston once wanted to pilot on airplanes.

I talked her down from it. And I am tired of saying no. This bright place brings out each morsel of yes in me.

It tastes down here like less of a life, the loss of one.

I am trying not to fall asleep, but I am submerged. I am saving the best for last. I try to smuggle myself between Langston's tender legs. My hair shrugs and my body rolls over.

Goddamn, it is gruesome to behold.

Wake me up when it shines outside.

