

Man Writing Story With Ears Plugged About Painter Who Only Hears in Color; Black Ink, 2002

by David Backer

Ready, here we go. It's got to be a she. Sit down. She splatters paint everywhere, yeah everywhere. On glass, like Pollack, like a crazy woman. She bows down to the ground like to a thunderstorm way off in the distance in purple gobs and bubbles way off. The paint splatters and she screams so the glass shakes and her throat gives out while the splotches pour from her mind and her brain and those evil transmitters, but are they evil? They don't have to be evil--it should be what you were made like, how you came, could she do this if she weren't like this, if the doctors weren't there and the people weren't there shimmying around her with no idea what they were talking about? Could you live that way? Right, of course, her little girl inside does and cries all night and Mommy comes and is just as confused while the night time stars spark out like the specks of cheap paint on her canvas, on her glass, on her floor. You shouldn't be worried-- she shouldn't be worried-- neither of you can hear. She's on her knees and you're on the chair and she's scraping her claws on the chalkboard and you're sitting here typing with those evil things in your ears. Evil? Do they have to be evil? You're doing it for your art, your expression, like she does. Could you live any other way? It could be just the way you came. Do you want to go to work and live the way everyone else does and dream dreamless nights and see nothing when you wake and think nothing when linguistic sound waves travel through the air and hit you? They hit her too, but you're trying to block them off when she just lets them hit, when she

just lets them hit. She splatters paint everywhere and all she can see is her mind and those swirling eclipses of moons and slow milky pools of water like when an oar pushes through on a lake.

Everywhere. She's got to be beautiful, just like Audrey. She's got this curly hair and a sexy thoughtless type of action so guys will stop in their tracks, be distracted from their conversations to keep their eyes on her for just one more moment so that maybe when you, they, go to bed at night they can have an image, some coal black hair, some tortured artist going to buy paint that they can have an ugly affair with in the bathroom of the supplies shop. "Do you like this blue?" "Yeah, you know, I feel like I've known you for years..." That's all it takes and you're, they're, with her in a small room, not a real room, but like in porn with a small wave back and forth back and forth and back and forth with dim red lights making your, their, skin that crazy yellow hue. She walks into the store though, and she walks out, she doesn't say a word because the guy at the register knows her, knows her that well, and she buys her brushes and bottles and tubes and with nods completes the only transaction besides that of the diner she goes to for every meal. The greasy spoon where her early work hangs, where the gallery owners first put their hands to their mouths when getting lunch on the way back to the city. And guy at the diner, like the paint store guy, knows her well enough to give her a Caesar salad and a chocolate milkshake. Yeah, just like that diner at home. She'll go in, nod just like she's buying paint and he'll know, like the way you've always wished those waitresses knew what you were going to order before you ordered it. They don't know you're a regular but he knows her, she gets the same thing every time and doesn't have to say anything. Because she can't. You can. You do. You fill the air with waves and you think those sounds mean so much, don't you, so much that a void just sounds like a hummmmm a hummm like it sounds like right now like it sounds right now just a buzz with a tone, a pitch. With just your voice rumbling in your throat. The mind can't make sense of the silence; it needs to explain it so it hears something that's not there. She hears it all. She knows the silence, her mind makes sense of it.

She splatters paint everywhere, you can see it on the walls of the diner, yeah, and yeah she painted the restaurant a mural one day and they all watched. Yeah, there's a story. They all watched her do it because no one ever knew how or why she could produce such screams, such images from nothing. Artie wrote her a note, once, and what did she do? She closed her eyes, opened them right into his, right through his, and nodded yes. The next day she came with her tool box, it's a red tool box, a little rusty thing with shelves that pop out like that congressman's make up artist's box. Red and crazy all over. Yeah, she just comes in and dips a wash towel into a creamy white and throws it against the wall. She hums a muffled song like this one you're hearing right now, like this you're hearing right now. She opens her mouth for the first time and all the regulars are just dumbfounded because they know the sounds she's making: they remember when they held their ears and heard themselves speak or shout like that to try and ignore the pain, to let words and noises go by unheard and unfelt, because it's better that way, right? They her working and look at their hands like they don't know how she's doing it because there's a fork in their left and knife in their right and she's throwing dishtowels against a wall. She dips her hand into a darker brown and swirls in fisted into the pearl and it's her milkshake waiting for her under the silver box with fifties writing behind the counter. Artie smiles, big smile. There's a crowd all around and they know who she is, they've seen her on the local evening news and read little articles here and there about her shows and seen pictures of fancy looking sophisticates with goatees and New York City smiles with her under their arm. They know. But they can't believe what they're seeing, what they're hearing; what they're not. The deconstruction, what's getting in her way? Nothing is getting in her way. It's the absolute breakdown of a mind and the composition of its reconstruction-- upon a wall that used to have phone numbers and FuckYous written on it. That's just like this, just like you're doing right? There's no one around you though. There's no wall. It's ok, probably someday...but why? Why do you need a circle of people around you who know you from articles and smiles

and nods? Why? She would still compose. She did it when she was, when you were, nine, yeah, and when no one was watching her, you, and she would scream like that into the painted echoes, like you hear now, when no one in the world could listen in the woods. In the woods by a lake where she, you, used to camp with your friends from school. There's a hammock there she, you, would crawl into and sing that choked song. Hmm...Yeah. Write her a note, write her a note like the guy behind the counter did, she'll hear you. Scratch it like she would. Would you still do this if no one were around? Would you still throw your mind and colored words onto paper if no one ever saw it? Would you? Then, she splatters words onto the paper below the neat script with a charcoal. She pushes it in front of you but before you can read it she takes your head in her hands, they're your hands, and she stuffs her, your, fingers in your ears and sings into your eyes. You know what that napkin says; you know what that napkin says. You know what she's, you're, saying. "Yes. Yes I would."

