

Potato Mash

by Finnegan Flawnt

Crystalline sentences came out of her mouth. Elianna was an engine, a steam engine of love, and her name meant “God has answered”. Honey-coated cashews stood next to her bedside table and her lampshade carried long-forgotten symbols that had last been seen during the first crusade. She was of mixed breeding which amounted to no breeding at all. When she thought of her ancestors, all kinds of faces emerged like a weird gallery gone into warp drive.

When she wrote, she waded through faces. She wrote and her writing seemed fertile feces to her. Faces and feces were her fecundity, the source of unfettered fabling. She was followed by a fox. His snout was sharp and his step was light as gossamer. She liked that the fox never slept. Like her, he was a loner looking out for nobody but himself. He had once had a spouse but the spouse had been killed by a lorry.

The lorry driver came out of his cabin, the lights of the lorry illuminated the street and the fur of the dead fox seemed to glow. The lorry driver held his hips because he thought it funny: a dead fox in the road! There were five little foxes who now came out of the bushes and huddled around their dead mother, nudging her with their puny snouts, whimpering, unscared and unmothered. He thought his son might like a fox for a puppy, and he picked one up and dropped him next to the driver's seat in a bag wet with smelly sports clothes. The dead fox mother was carried off by a road servicing angel once the truck had gone. She was elevated to fox heaven which is next to the heaven of man but greener and there are no trucks and no roads and no fences, no men but mice and meadows of daisies.

(Note: How used we are to bogey men coming out of the dark to threaten us. It is not fair since most men aren't swines they are just like you and me, and when their mothers are crushed we children must huddle and push them with our silken noses. And we remember the smell forever.)

Elianna sat at night at her desk with no photograph on it. Nothing reminded her of the past. There were pills in her dresser, red ones to get giddy and blue ones for a walk in the dungeon. And a copy of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* because she loved the Savage in that book and his confusion drawn out over hundreds of pages. The collision of worlds was her metier. Metier was a French word which sounded like a door closing: me-tier. It also contained the English word for an identity and the German word for animal. Foxes haunted her dreams. Islands full of foxes, truckloads of vixen. Why foxes, she wondered again but there was no answer readily available. There were no guides to explain your dreams away and out of existence.

One could always buy drugs of course as the kids did these days if one could trust the news. But who could. The most reliable source of information was still the own intuition. In Elianna's case it only failed when it came to men that she fancied. She had a history of falling for losers. Except they didn't seem to be losers in the first place. Only when she introduced them to her family, where academics and self-made men and uber-mothers abounded, did she realise that she had, quite possibly, once again chosen someone who couldn't hold a candle to her candour. Do not sell yourself cheaply, her mother crackled. Why even sell myself at all, she said. This is no show and I'm no thing. I can pick and fuck who the hell I want, she said. Don't you talk to me like to one of your loser friends little missy, her mom said. And her brother said: hear hear. And smirked. He always smirked and he seemed content with that. He never brought anyone home. Oh god, save me from this family, Elianna thought.

But the next time she went out with Tom, Dick or Harry, she looked them in the eye and asked them hard questions, questions untainted by love or lust, questions like: what're you going to do when you grow up? How many children do you want? Do you play an instrument? Why not the trombone? Which school did you go to? What are your interests in life? And so on. God, some guy said one day — I love ya, I just wanna make love to you, do you really care about this shit? She left, riding out of the place on a high, invisible,

white horse like a righteous virgin. And another, his name was Lancelot, said: I'm a writer, doesn't that say it all? A writer of what, she asked. Of flash fiction, you know, very short pieces that hit you between the eyes before you know it. Who reads that stuff, she asked, somewhat intrigued, because this particular guy made love beautifully, seemed generous, talked well and liked the books and the music she liked. Well, only a few, he said, I've only just begun to go out there, he said. She puffed peevishly. That's not very much, is it. Where do you see this going? He laughed, and his laugh went through and through. I dunno, haven't thought about it yet, he said. I just love to write, you know. She couldn't decide if this one was going to be the one.

Perhaps you need an accountant, her brother suggested (smirk smirk). Fiddle off, she said. It was family dinner time: they all sat around the table, including grandma Clara and uncle Geoff who mumbled and it usually was some dirty joke, old as cotton knickers. Grandma didn't say much at all, she only smiled. Elianna thought perhaps she was demented. Pass the salt, her mother said, and the potatoes too, her father added. Elianna looked like her mother, but with a smaller nose and better, bigger, green eyes like her father. She had brown hair which she had put in a bun. Mother's fingers were reddish and puffy from doing the dishes before they sat down so that everything would look as if they had gone to a restaurant. Which they could not afford. But both her parents liked to play pretend.

I want to ask you something, Elianna said. Well? Her mother said. You're always full of advice on whom I should date and stuff. And nobody I ever brought along was good enough for you. So I keep having all these really short relationships, and I'm 41 and I'm fed up with that, I want a man, a keeper. Who exactly did you have in mind? Somebody like dad? She asked. You know, sweetie, her grandma said, and it was the first thing she had said in a decade, almost as long as Elianna could remember, you know what I told your mother when she went out with your father? ... Mum, said her mother, I don't think the child really needs to hear those old stories. Mother

giggled nervously but Elianna was dying to hear more. I said, grandma continued undeterred while Elianna's mother was gripping her fork as if it was a deadly weapon and breathing loudly while her father was digging into a pork loin, happy to have it to himself — I said, grandma started again — and then her face fell and her head dropped straight into the potatoes making an ugly thumping sound. Awww, said Elianna's mother. But Elianna knew instantly that grandma hadn't just fainted but that she had died, died before she could pass on invaluable advice to her only granddaughter. Dammit, mother, Elianna cried, I really wanted to hear that. Her brother didn't smirk then in the middle of gulping and said hold on, shouldnt we do something for granny? Then everybody got up and they carried the light body of the grandmother over to the divan, her dad called an ambulance but it was in fact too late. It was good that granny had died with a mouthful of potatoes the way she liked them and the way she had taught her daughter to make them.

