

# Rites of Spring

by Marcus Speh

1.

He noticed a short, strong white hair from his beard on his tongue and decided to not take it out but see what would happen. A moment later, a tiny bear emerged from the cave of his mouth, grabbed the hair and pulled it on his lap to play with it. It was a furry sensation and the beginning of a long friendship with things coming out of his orifice. It made him want to dance, shave and dance in the rain shaved, to feel the water run over his clean cheeks and celebrate the connectedness of everything with everything else.

2.

When we arrived at the Factory of Blind Infants very early in the morning, I saw the dog patrols. I lost a left foot on the first day and my right arm on the second. It didn't matter much because many of the Infants were incomplete. The games we played would have scared me before. Our stories revolved around limbs going around alone, begging their former owners to account for them. They mercilessly drilled what was left of us. After three months, I became an agent. I received a uniform and a gun and was declared ready for fieldwork. I learned that pride is a measure of loss and that there is no substitute for comradeship. I also learned that drugs could help me forget and that the loudest music comes from within, like water oozing from a stone.

3.

Shaking and trembling. You imagine strident sounds made by strangers when their right hands are roasted over the fire by feds, who, a moment ago, had their hands down someone's pants because there was a tic toc and a tac tic coming from the aluminum-encased, sleek, ogre-sized detecting device radiating X-rays and dizzying your cells. Hymning slews. Working next to one of those machines might change your entire life: you must scan the perimeter, looping, with your especially developed anti-terrorist gaze, which will bring any

offender to his knees, thereby creating another sound, the sound of a slowly keratinizing human. A final shaking, then silence.

4.

Two leathery lovebirds set off to a jog through bewitching countryside. The stench from the fields was sharp and brought the animal out in Fred. His wife, Frieda, was belting along the dirt path despite her seventy-eight years. Fred's little Martian stirred merrily at the thought of the Venus trap between Frieda's legs. If the stars were aligned he might get lucky tonight he thought, all the way to his death that awaited him at the end of a seemingly infinite patch of bluebells, whose little heads were bobbing towards the place where Fred would fall and lie, his eye turned upward for as long as it took him to imbibe the beauty of the world for one last time and carry it wherever he'd be going, as alone as he hadn't been in half a century, while Frieda was storming ahead of him, her chin stuck out, a fighter to the last breath, an incandescent wife.

5.

On the terrace outside of the commons stood a small bucket labelled 'Nürnberger Würstchen', filled with green water. This is where students dropped their butts. It has been observed before: fags look like little musty, wiggling worms. What hasn't been said before is that here they actually were worms, with eerie eyes looking for idlers who were desperate enough to rescue them from the depth of destitute, drying and reusing the tobacco for roll-ups. A small contribution to a greener, better world. We called this place 'Wormwood': it was easy to meet women there, hanging onto a stub, enabling and indulging addiction, slinking away from intimacy, eyes on the sausage.

6.

Every morning this same set of choices: to eat or not to eat. To drink or not to drink. And how much. To shit or not to shit (no issue with volume there). To smoke or not to smoke (you still with me?) And moods! Go down in flames like a cleansing Easter fire or hold my breath indefinitely as we all learnt to do it, years at a time, swallowing sarcasm. Uncomfortable morning truth: I'm not a bird. I

feel my bones, every one of them, nasty needles. I can fly but I must write my own wings first. Shall I touch the tender spot above my April blooming heart for help?

7.

Fifteen monarch butterflies. Six and twenty snow drops. Ribbons with hearts on them. A dozen blown out eggs painted as Chinese policemen. Lost in last year's brown leaves: my glasses. Wandered off by themselves to look for the ridge of a nose that knows what it wants. Bunny-shaped mole on the skin on the back of my hand. Hundreds of white horse hairs clinging to my spring step. Greetings to all wayfaring strangers lost in elaborate egg hunts! Nothing can hold us back now: the best time of the year is upon us!

8.

When Elmer found the hedgehog's diary one spring morning, he was a happy man. The text confirmed a number of his ideas about insectivorous mammals, shed a new light on the concept 'pricks of conscience,' and contained as one major zoological behavioral sensation the information that the quarrel between foxes and hedgehogs was not a Darwinian necessity but was, in indubitable fact, a stage play, enacted continuously for entertainment, a choreography that brought, according to the hedgehog's copious notes, considerable pleasure to the ostensibly hunted.

9.

He kept his pants on and made a stupid face, or so it seemed to him. There were no limits to the stupidity of faces on a man. He put it down to a lack of experience. Writing was so easy, too easy, but doing the right thing with a woman, a new woman, was difficult, too difficult. It required much more than imagining, which he was good at; it required dedication to something not just outside of himself but quite outside of his universe, something he could not own or imbibe or eat up. Still, he continued to bang his head against that particular wall, carried on pissing in that particular corner hoping for that particular look from her that would signal, once and for all: I'm yours.

10.

Early in March, the snow had just melted, his glans showed white spots. "Probably a fungus," his wife said, "perhaps you should wash there more often." He imagined his penis as a rainbow-colored canvas where mischievous little devils played arty games, painting it this way or that. He might wake up tomorrow with a blue cock. Hypochondria did not set in, while only the tint changed. But the next morning, he found tiny feathers under his foreskin. That scared him. "Maybe angels visited you last night," his wife suggested, trying to be helpful.

11.

From my window I can see myself on the other side of the world, almost neckless, in a place where I don't have a shadow, where my fingers are fused to the keyboard forever and my tongue licks the screen hoping to pick up those very last pixels that escaped my wandering attention. There is no weather, only weariness. A crow comes to visit at odd times, dabbing my shoulder covered with corduroy. When spring arrives, I raise a storm in my palm and watch it listlessly, hoping for a merciful tide that sweeps me along into the wild, where I will live as a bear and cool my paws in the sunny water. I promise.

