

Dirty Aubade

by Nikki Magennis

5 am, all still

Remember this, all this, all the years? The early mornings, the woodsmoke and the red-eyes and creeping around trying not to wake him, even though my skin was roughed with excitement and the day outside was breaking.

I might slip out the window. Careful not to snag.

We could stand outside, then, in the wet grass, while the pigeons cried. Our feet would go numb, remember? We could kiss under the elder tree, even though it was forbidden, even though we were drowned by the noise of the river and nothing we said was right. Your hand over my mouth.

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5.30 am, day breaking

And the rose clouds bloom overhead, and the trees soften. So quiet I hear your breath, the pull and push, the warm bellows. Now it's a blackbird, that inquisitive song, that rushing, flowing tumble of brittle voice.

I met you in the gap between night and day, in the opening of a shell, in the sliver between knowing and choosing.

Ugly word, choosing. Like something lewd. Something coy, a word that hides its obscenity behind frilly lace curtains, a word that lies about itself.

The birdsong we think is so pretty — it's all fucking and fighting, after all.

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6 am, the world turns

Nobody will remember this. Nobody will witness the redness of your mouth, or how it's both tender and cruel.

Even as the gold starts pricking the sky, I'm forgetting. Even as you settle into that rhythm, that old back and forth, as the tree above us rocks and the fruit hangs and the legs split, mouths cleave, eyes close, the hearts beat out into the day the same old song, the same old song.

And afterwards everything is spilled, and we're too old to play, and we're losing everything in spite of ourselves but oh, god, was it worth it.

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