

THERE IS NOTHING MORE HONEST THAN PAIN

by Ron Burch

My parrot Poe freezes when a crow soars outside the window the same way I do when you approach my door. You come knocking late at night. What do you want this time? I yell. To come in you say, please. Go the fuck away, I respond but you keep knocking. The last time you passed out on my porch and my quiet neighbor left me an angry letter in my mailbox the next day, saying that is not the kind of behavior his son needs to see when he gets up in the morning. Go the fuck away, I say again but you beat on the door with both your open palms and so I finally open it. You're drunk of course. You're wearing a black dress with a pearl necklace. Your face is flushed and your red hair falls about your face as if it's tired and given up. Where are your shoes? I ask and you look down, surprised, as if you were unaware that they were not on your feet. I must've lost them, you reply and stagger in, an open bottle of California red caught in your fist.

I view you as Typhoid Mary or a hurricane with the name of a woman who is bent on destroying the world in which I live. You are a plague and a genocide. You are bird flu and mad cow. You are the pestilence which rots the field until only bent brown stalks are left, leaves eaten into pieces and left there to limply hang.

You can't keep coming here, I say. Fuck you, you reply and ask: Why do you have to be so mean to me? Why are you here? I ask, a question I've asked so many times before, a question that has never, never been answered. Do you have glasses? you say, already wondering towards the kitchen. Of course I have glasses, what the hell would I drink out of? Oh right, you reply and slink around the corner. I hear cabinet doors being opened and cursing and then the

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clink of glasses being found. I should fucking send you away, I say, but there is no reply except for the sloshing of wine into dirty glasses that I poorly wash by hand.

You come back and hand me a glass full to the top. Cheers, you say, clinking my glass and swallowing your wine in one long gulp. I've stopped drinking, I explain. What the hell for? you ask. Just for a little while. I've been off two weeks. Then you should have some fun, you say and push the glass in my hand closer to me. I look at it, a few tiny bits of cork floating in it and I throw it back. It's bitter and pungent all at once, warm and sweet, like it's a song you can't get out of your head and you pour me another. And I drink that as well, hoping that an empty bottle will force you to go out and find a new one and I will be left in peace.

I tell you that you have to go. Why? you ask. It is too late. I'm tired, you say and you rise, your glass empty, your bottle empty, you are empty, and you head to the only bedroom I have, disappearing inside the unlit room where I hear the squeak of the old wooden frame as you settle on it, and I slowly follow you because that is how it has always been, a thing I have never been immune to and probably never will be.

