

# Edju - 15th

by RW Spryszak

15.

By the tan gray moon, a pure slice of venom in the blood, what was I and where was the sun? In and out the light goes from me. I am here and am here not. There and somewhere else again. I am twenty. I am seventy. And all is the same as it was. I see the future as plain as a hand in daylight. Then watch it pale in the tan gray moon be a dream inside the dream. Never admit the dream.

What happened to me I cannot tell. Nor divine the real from the sinister.

If I could but remember in the grip of this fever that I am not here for the salvation of the stones like those young men, but to find what I lost. I squirm in my sleep and it comes to me in the dream; Alice is here, in this scene. But Alice is not here. Remember? You are looking for her? Or rather I. Thus, this is a dream and I cannot be back in my apartment. The scarecrow isn't waiting for a car. There was no red door.

I stir. I rouse myself from this thing of slumber. And it comes to me in the hard cold flash of St. Stefan the Crooked. I am laid low on the floor of my rowboat and never left the river. Still the smell of fish, dead, pink and silver, all around me like prayers. I never left the river. Still in the boat. Never in a reliquary.

No, the boat on the river. This was real. I sat up and was still shrouded by fog or mist or the stale breath of kings. I knew, in my heart and in my spleen. Also in my kidneys and my lungs. And my veins. I knew I could never catch up to Marta Vansimmerant now. The river was too wide. The shore too elusive. And I had no idea how long I'd been sleeping on top of the musty blanket I didn't know was there. A red and gray tattered thing crawling with lice. Smelling of sweat.

I had not eaten in days. Or hours. And I resigned myself to the fact that in family gatherings I was always singled out as the strange one. The statute of limitations running out on everyone but me.

Forever seen as the odd one. Even though I never stole the golden bracelet. I never let my tongue slip in front of people who should not have heard me. I never hurt a soul or dwelled on a slight done to me by others. I would always play the rogue cousin. Burned with this hot iron brand on the day of my birth a hundred years ago. So I manned the oars again and began to row. Even though I did not know which shore I was heading to. Or if I were going down or up river and destined for the sea or the mountain streams that fed this fetid stink.

It was difficult, at first, to break through the crust of filth that floated on top of the water. The muck complained and the boat lurched. But I was soon enough on my way. Cobwebs in my head. My right eye blinded from some inner light. And still the hunger. The hunger and the fear that Alice was forever lost.

Somewhere on the river the voice of a child, lost from its home once and for all. Crying and resigned to his fate. A vision of elegant queens of the realm eying the new servants' legs and conjuring the zeal of lust. What manner of river is this? One of shards of things that were or will soon be? I would be the last one to understand. Then there was sun.

There was sun burning off the top of the mist and beating it into clear air like a rug. I could feel the warmth of that wayward orb as it penetrated the haze. And little by little my surroundings came clear. My right eye sharpened and there was no need for a sedative. My hands became strong and sure and I could see that I was at the midpoint of the river's width. This was a relief, though I did not recognize the features of either shore. That was not where I'd departed from. This was not where I imagined I was going to.

I applied myself to the function of the oars with the haste of a child opening a present. There was cartoon music in the air. The kind that accompanies great rocks pounding hapless characters into the ground. Saturns and whirling stars around their heads. I was a boy again, wandering the streets of the neighborhood I grew up in. The dark passages through and under broken viaducts. Blank windows of unoccupied houses breathing in the night air. Bonfires

with a effigy of a witch in an empty lot I'd never seen before. Strangers offering candy I ran from. Snowballs thrown at the back of a sick old man in the wintertime. He turns to confront us and I see myself sixty years on.

I close my eyes and shake my head and the sun has gone down. There was a tan gray moon, a pure slice of venom in the blood, floating overhead. I reached the other shore. This time it was real. Marta Vansimmerant stood above me on a rise of ground.

Drawing the boat to a sudden pier I retract my oars and tie the nose of the boat to the wood. Pelicans are diving into the water and coming out with old shoes and tires. I stood dripping on the pier. I'd been at sea a long time and my legs were unsteady. Marta Vansimmerant stood above me on a rise of ground, naked and arms open. Climbing up the embankment was a struggle, but her perfume reached out like a muscular ghost that held me close to its face of vapors. Surrounded me. And drew me into the web.

Marta Vansimmerant stood above me on a rise of ground, naked and arms open. A stiletto bauble piercing her left nipple. I've been waiting, she says. She says this in a whisper but her words bounce off the water and are audible for miles. She lays back and beckons. The Daughter of the Saint In The Glass Coffin. Waiting for me.

