Yr Wire

by Tobias Carroll

Hours. Hours, bygone. He said, “Come to me all liquored up and you know what's gonna happen.” Sure. It was every bit true, what he said, six months bygone, chewing off cuticle scabs somewhere out west. Alone. Now it was a vertiginous November and he was back, clad in a sackcloth and wire; a penitent. A look bold enough to draw stares, even in this neighborhood. “Yr wires,” he said across the table, “yr wires cut but not too deep; sackcloth seeps no stains.” And then he started to cry, great fucking sobs, his head dropping to nearly brush the table. The prospect of collision seemed great, that awful crack almost audible, so far from seamless it made throats clutch and skins prickle.

Vidal Reade, sackcloth-clad, wire-wrapped. Eighth of the month, talking blues heard in the background. Once loathsome. Now returned, now mysterious -- cast off on beatific errands, extant like a mystery.

And so came the delve, less intervention than inspection, a dissection of a persona once charming but long lost to an idle reach and a lurch towards rage. Tracking back, testimonies solicited, fewer testimonies given. Received in corner bars and public parks, across broadband lines and dashed on ridged hotel stationary. A cracked voice cast over a faded line, a scramble for pad and paper, a quick and lingering regret for the lack of recorder, lent and abandoned six months earlier. And it was that fragmentary voice -- ageless and impossibly ravaged, either smoker or outpatient or both -- that enmeshed points in the narrative that arose, that coalesced and lent context, that bore out a narrative. And at the end of that eight-month search, the shape of Vidal Reade's evolution was revealed. Vidal himself, though, had gone somewhere north, somewhere alone, bearing yr wire. “Bearing yr wire,” he said, “and bearing my wire, too. End then. End then.“

And the question formed: to what would Vidal Reade become upon his return from the north? He had gone west without sackcloth

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and wire, had strode fitfully towards the train, three tickets in his hand. The skin around one eye more wrinkled than the other, a fact that seemed falsified by his own scope of expressions. Westbound, he spoke of a dream: A ride on the downtown subway, when suddenly the announcement came that the next stop was L.A. “And so we all stood there or sat there, in this shit-ass subway car with the air conditioning broken, and we wondered how long it would take us, and wondered if they'd feed us on the way.”

He said it was out there somewhere, the thing he had to do, the thing he had to meet, the thing he had to fight. (It seemed to always come down to the last of those.) And so he went, and was missed by no one, his return spoken of in hushed voices late at night, the regulars at his local seated with posture relaxed, his neighbors walking with springs in their step, his bygone friends and colleagues finding themselves drawn together like survivors of a siege.

And so to witness him transformed upon his return trip east was, perhaps, unaccompanied by an onrush of pity, save in its most abstract application.

“Your wire,” said the broken voice, “was charged. And he did climb the fence, your friend. And he did climb higher and higher, some sound growing louder, a cloud of dust drawn up by the feet running across ground seen no rain for weeks.

“Your wire was charged, and he did take hold,” and with that no more words were needed: the sight came unbidden, the sight and the sound, of the scream and the slow, silent fall and the dust cast up as body met ground and acquisitions spiraled out and cast up dirt as they came to rest. And the mob coming upon him, upon a body once fueled by panic but now at rest, breath shallow but undeniably breath, and the pack turning away.

And in the morning light, a revived and recalcitrant Vidal Reade standing and intact, eyes blinking, memory returning, casting his eyes upon the instrument that had brought him there. And Vidal Reade, wracked by reconsideration, removed from amoral moorings, alone with the dirt and the fence and the wire.

You could see it all, and we considered it and diagrammed it and

enscribed it, but we never again had cause to see the sackcloth-wearing stranger we'd once had cause to despise.