Dreams of Echo

by Ella Harmon

eyes bright, wide. lashes dark, tangled. tongues stretched. hips pressed. your fondest memories from the dimmest of times.

deep blues. not in the way you know them now. at first dance in her refracted light, she asked you into her hollowness. a rare, revered visitor you were. a symbol of all she was not and all you could not see. a weathered shell with scintillate meat, ripe for the scraping.

this sailor's knots were not designed for pleasure. the siren's allures echoed a familiar void. who could anticipate such subsequent rigidity. designs woven not for love. for some secret, flat, unknowable thing.

at first, the tide lapped soft. almost tender. it did not feel like erosion. it felt like opening.
it was silent and knowing. like moonlight. it was strands of dark curls, folding you into her night.

once inside, glass bars mirror your every move. you cannot name them. from some angles you are divine, others, putrid. years fall away. meals are swallowed without hunger. you learn the terms of her departure. your sharp, critical eye turns inward. an unfamiliar disgust rises from you like steam from the asphalt. it wafts indiscriminately, veiling all but its true source.

slowly, the pit of mirrors becomes your shelter.

life is caught in glimmers. dark iridescent walls. polished shell bone. you grow ever-cleaner. the buffing scrapes away at you. every promise widens the pit. hope grows perilous for the sunken soul.

your eyes stop watching the sky. you mind your steps with diligence. you hardly notice.

years fold into years. you are but an echo of her ego. you've confused this function for life. fatigue flows from your stomach. your chest now resides in your throat. your laughter has lost its lungs.

you are the mirror that needs infinite polishing. her reflection just can't be right.

and when it seems you've been entirely siphoned, a door swings open with force.

not just the metaphor. slammed wood. squeaking hinges.
she storms through the stillness you so carefully cultivated. her hands seizes one of many small relics you've hung for comfort: a chain once fit carefully to your neck. wrenched from the wall, its links scatter.

a strange constellation emerges. a flash of the force you'd tried deep to forget. wrists pinned. the demand against your life. her face twisted in the blue hour. her other face restored by morning light.

your-sweet smiling other half frozen serene on an iphone screen. how you believed then. how you knew if you just did enough, you could mend the fractured form of her love.

in the doorway, the siren wails of a hollow life. it's a song you've long trained yourself to ignore.
your gaze fixes between your chest and the laptop. her frenzied shouts quiet your mind. you've run short of the stamina to parse her circular logic. short of the endurance to wait for the grace of a new day when her words will braid themselves into strange coherence.

here, reality always crumbles. your breath is all you have.

she demands you put an end to this shameful cohabitation one final time.
what should not break breaks. what should not open opens.

you are devoid of defiance.
you do what must be done. you send the emails. you seek a new home.

months pass and you are haunted by such soft-glaring death.

how you masked your fear with impervious distance. how you became so perfectly immune. how only you could take it and so you believed you must.

tiny fractures form. you don't speak on them. deep purples. deep blues.

not in the ways you know them now. not in their effulgence. (shrouded in static. nondescript.)

memory bends back on itself. a sound, a smell, the bright burst of her mean laugh. your chest tightens, breath quickens, the infinite pit rises into your throat. there is pushing. not like that of the lustful hip.

shuddering limbs and dark skies. safety in the crashing of waves. they speak to your infinite salt offerings.

you are well acquainted with autonomous tides. memory lapse. surface repair. don't buy the gun. you know that together, you cannot house the gun.
fear rises up. you bury the source. you know the sand well. you look so good together. together, you are the smartest in every room. yes honey, they're all jealous.
such flat seduction could only move you on a gradually laid bed of fear. when did these dark tendrils wrap? why can't you breathe? it must be the movie. yes, only the movie.

acid allegiance. buffered bank account. still she moves in shadows. still dances beneath the blinding light. still flickers, refracts, bends, blames. somewhere.

yet your door remains unlatched.

exhale by exhale, you stop moving with caution. the air around you clears. the hollowness was never yours. your lungs fill with oxygen. you deserve this breath.

you stop scraping yourself into a mirror. the polish fades and barnacles bubble. the body is bigger. teeming with life.

you remember the efficacy of your own hands. their myriad functions. your steps land, even when they falter. even when time pulses.

there was God in that forcefully opened door. God in the chain she could not help but fracture. God in the undeniable repetition of it all.

your deep blues now shine full and bright.
you know for certain you are not made of glass or echo.

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Some Relevant Visuals:



-Dominika Hoffman, The Bowl, 2022
-Artwork detail of "Salvator Mundi", touched by the Clayshaper Original piece attributed to Leonardo da Vinci circa 1500
-Harmen Steenwyck, An Allegory of the Vanities of Human Life, (detail), 1640
-Louise Hearman, Untitled, no. 540, 1997.
-Chan Nga Ying, 'Flicker', 2023, Oil on stretched fabric, 60 x 100cm
-Enrique Martínez Celaya, The Map, 2009 | Private collection, London, UK.
-Jędrzej Bieńko