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helen aitchison

fall from grace

These things don't happen to people like me. They happen to the young lad who was in care, who's parents neglected him. They happen to the criminal deviant who's come out of the nick. They happen to the drug addict, the drunk and the woman who sleeps with someone in exchange for a bed that night. These things don't happen to people like me. Only it did. It happened to me. This is my story.

There's a short window of opportunity, of time, where you can ask for help. When you can reach out without someone replying "Why didn't you say?" The window is even smaller when you don't know how to ask for help, or you simply can't ask. When you let denial pump through your veins. When pride becomes your oxygen and when it's all said and done, you're simply a stubborn, proud, old man.

I lost my window, or you may say I let it close. I had to wait almost a year until it opened again. Even then, my window was literally peered into and knocked against. If it hadn't been, my story could have been very different and told by someone else.

The only thing that had kept me alive for what seemed like forever, was Lucy, my trusty Springer Spaniel. It was like she knew, her 6th sense. Her

avrina prabala- joslin

elephants on
the balcony

Home is in the small things they say. In crevices. The way the sun casts a shadow of your favourite plant on your feet. The way cacti live so quietly till you see a flower and wonder how stone gives birth. That one spot outside your door where you're prone to slip, snow or rain. In dry summers, you miss it. How fog hangs when you walk back from work. People laughing, dribbling at the corners of their mouths, spitting when the joke is too sudden to hold. But what happens when you know exactly where home is? Somewhere behind, somewhere forbidden, gates closed. Small things that happened there fall into these newer homes, without asking, make me long. I hear me laughing in all these places, throwing my head back, hair in the wind, mother tickling my belly, Aruna's legs on my face. When will memory be just a part of me, letting me see these crevices without the ringing morning song of a mother no more?

The balcony glows in the sunlight. Blue skies close. If there's anything anywhere in the world more imposing than the sky, it's here. St. Jakobi's tower is so close it could be falling on us. Takes my breath sometimes. Gargoyles animated in roar, grotesque babies holding up disciples and me a child in its shadow

ceri
savage

some northern tree

Standing on the short train platform, I take a ripped piece of paper from my pocket and follow its directions. Footpath down to lake. Head to small pier. Third house on right with lake behind you. Red with white windows. I detour and stand on the pier for a while. A heron flies low over the frozen water. In the distance, I see the shape of a skier on the ice; two unnaturally long feet and arms moving like a metronome.

The little red house is made of wood with four square, white windows and a white door. I knock.

“Are you Rick?”

He has a gruff voice and sharp, cerulean eyes, and stands aside to let me through the doorway. I sit in his large kitchen sipping a cup of coffee. A fire crackles behind me. The fireplace is beside a wooden table, two armchairs, and a ladder leading up to a mezzanine floor with a mattress. I glance around the sparse kitchen as Rick packs a bag.

“Are you coming too?” I ask.

“Just for a few nights.”

His face is young but has a scraggly, grey beard.

We step outside, where it's lighter now. The skier is closer. The brightness of yesterday lingers on the horizon, hovering over a land where the sun never

echo + seashell



when a girl wants

I had in mind the design.

The arms that are familiar to my shoulders.

When a girl wants.

When a girl wants.

I have not seen you, lady, She-bear.

Bending overwise Victoria, I'm beaten.

Possessed a thousand times.

Three currencies. A pierced heart.

My puppet.

When a girl wants.

When a girl wants.

The breeze whirls me. A demi-god.

Now harsh now soft now no. Take a step back.

Who ever is in love go to hell.

Face changed.

When a girl wants.

When a girl wants.

No spirit in this world so cruel.

Hang up your sword. Follow where your friends call.

What shall I do with you twinkling eyes.

Giving off a signal in hollow bronze.

a.

whittenberg

glory

In war time, you marry a man who is tall and stalwart.

You marry a man with a sullen smirk. You don't marry a soldier; you marry a partisan. One of the rebels, a hard-core. And for a few days every now and then, life is interesting.

Aussie is your husband and he is also a thief, taking advantage of the kind of bottomless chaos that only war could breed. He is young. He is alive. He is full of pride.

He often disappears for weeks at a time. He sends no word. He spares no words. You have two children. You mother them when you can. You work as a maid to get by. Though you've never been to school, you can read, but not very well.

He brings you glory when he comes. Spoils from the war. Glowing jewels. Religious medals. He tells you how many thayers he can get after he larks them. You get excited. A smile spreads across your face like butter. Your eyes reel in marvel as if you've never seen such a collection of shiny babbles in your whole, entire life. You finger through the pile after he dumps on the grubbery table. Aussie pulls up a chair and together you ogle at every last gem.

“Shit!” you exclaim. “What did you do Aussie,

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