

*Joseph Hughes: Graze*

I thought that I saw purity and harmony without a vicious nature but she is hollow now. A great amount of effort was necessary to ensure that she had distanced herself far from me; they think that I am some kind of heretic with tangled ideas. I am not concerned. I only desire that second in life where all is there to envelop, like that little ghost that sings every night. That deep, sinuous sort of line. That hollow line ending in a quiver. Like a moth caught in a soft, floating web.

I am sure that there is only a bit of time left now but I can't think too clearly about that. I will not cry when I have to go. My father told me that those who give their lives will be happy, much happier than I may ever be.

A few hours at the least. I have some time in front of me.

When I was young they asked the children about devotion. The man in charge had a calm smile that was not frightening. I left early with the older kids. They seemed to have more answers. I think that it was all intended to forge a path, to help us find our way home. I couldn't find a place in that retreat. I tried but could not carve a niche. That is better left to those in charge. They have conducted those procedures hundreds of times.

This, she said, may have been my downfall. The core of this spiral. I loved hearing things like that. She gave life to my ideas. She seemed like she had never experienced that spring-like energy, that flood of life that is so overwhelming that one cannot keep from smiling. The endless flow of light that showers resolve among every misguided notion. Every unrealized dream.

At those times I felt like a prophet. A caesarian prophet with words sometimes like flowers.

She did not understand most of what I had said but she continued to listen. She would never feel that way.

Sometimes I would present a look more hostile to make her think that I knew something that she could not understand. That was the picture that stayed with me, the time that I saw her last. In a field like a painting with some strange

daisies that felt like fingers pulling me closer and closer to her. It was in the books by then; I wanted so badly to see those lavender plots with the sunflowers behind them. They seem so soft but they will not let you go. I am a heretic at times.

The one that sits across from me now, he sits at that table every day. I thought that he could guide me through this. I should know not to look for answers from men like myself. He has only books and reads with fluency the ideas of others but has nothing within himself. He seems to carry with him a stench. One that he has not created and one that he cannot destroy. He rattles something of Heisenberg. He has been talking for hours. Someone who should not have a tongue, someone that sleeps for only an hour or two then feels a headache coming on, one that will engulf him and send him to the border of the world. He simply wants to breathe in the day, like he did when he had hope inside of him. When he was small. And blissful.

I think that it is Provence with the wisps of purple. It looks that way if my vision is blurry.

There seems to be less time now. I feel a bit of nausea but it passes quickly. It was that April; she talked endlessly about vineyards and she was something so soft in velour. She wanted so badly to have some rolling spring dinner parties, with songs that she would play on the piano, Chopin, always in a nocturnal tone, something always dark. She really wanted to be passionate but I could tell within seconds that she was empty. That look that she had hiding somewhere, it had to be that of a soul like mine. I loved her more than I had ever loved anyone. And that is a story to be told, one without end, one that is a cycle. Like the sun that comes in and tells us that we are awake.

She was empty but she drew me in like that morning sun and I had no control, simply a sentimental view of life and a clear understanding. This prevented me from changing that which had been written. Like the prophets said in school as they crept underground. In cells. Like little mystical leeches. They crept in and toppled the house where my brothers and sisters lived. Autumn will always evolve like that. With smoke and fire and the thought that God may not always hear us. That was the necessary evil. It had been written.

She told me that she would take me in and we would live like peasants. Some horrible storybook that she had been reading. She thought that I would immortalize her in an artistic fashion but I have not an ounce of clarity when dealing with such matters. If she was left as she appeared initially, as nothing more than a desire, I could then send her to the heavens. But she was only a siren. A moth that flew upon suspicious air.

The man that sits at the table is looking at me now because he knows that it could have been his child. I can't smile right now. I can't make it right for him. I am only here for a few more hours. Struggling with something that he will have to expel. It is his idea. Behind what looks like a thick blue mist I can see him sometimes, or maybe a reflection; his face haunts me and I want to tell him that I cannot cause any more pain because I have no reason. I just want to smile and let him know that he is safe. It is this life that makes me want to sleep. So they may safely graze.

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“And there I am going to have delphinium. They are particular but worth the trouble. In front I think some poppies. If I can find the soft orange kind. The spring will be beautiful. This won't last forever. I felt it in the breeze last night. It was full of that moist, mossy scent.”

“Why do you spend so much time out here?”

“I don't know. I've always wanted to paint, or sing, create something beautiful. This is all I have. This is the only thing that I can care about.”

“Have you tried anything else?”

“I used to try. I would sit with these little ideas and they were full of color and life but I never captured anything close to what I wanted to convey. Because they were rendered too densely. I lost that light, that clarity. Until the ideas became diffused. I only wanted simplicity at that point. Which led me to this garden. I have never known something so delicately simple and so overwhelmingly brilliant.”

“You have created more than you will ever know. Something that is far from simple.”

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Not much time now. With that I can feel her touch and the listless expression that welcomed me when I saw her lying on the lawn. I remember her this way sometimes. Her dress was moving hypnotically through the grass, providing a sanctuary in the waves and a flow, a smooth grey flow that could only nurture. I lost myself in the coarse fabric and we laughed for hours like children caught in the rain, like fervent little angels caught in a storm of familiar joy. Something like narcissus pulled me to her and I felt that I would never love her as I did at that moment. The spring it arrives with demons and we all know what follows. To

detach in that moment would have been impossible. I could only see as far as the end of that field. She had a smile that would not let me forget. Not for a second. She would certainly speak about this. She had little concept of the truth. I had been forceful. She had always been full of ridiculous stories. That is why she smiled, as if she had known before I did it. Always telling stories to anyone with the patience to listen.

Now I am called and I know that I will not cry. There is something so comfortable about the evening and it is this comfort that will carry me away. I am nothing if not receptive and I am looking for moths in the garden. I have seen one that flies at night and its path is precise and linear. I will follow forever this song because I know that it will lead me into the arms of a green, maternal ghost, one that fosters the simple force of adoration, one that will nurture and never suggest that I am alone. In the springtime I found love; in the springtime I fell asleep and dreamed of its return.

Joseph Hughes lives happily in a quiet piece of Cincinnati where he constantly strives to balance an automated occupational life with thoughts of the vivid life-to-be. He has been writing since an early age and occasionally stumbles upon something that avoids the recycling process. His current list of credentials is overshadowed by his current list of plans but he is slowly tipping the scales in favor of the former. He blames it on the roses, which are not such horrible things.

