



# Megan Martin

## Sparrow, Eulogy 1

Torn swath of day so lay in the memory-nest: tearjerked, dysquieted. Faces of post- highway-accidents, all caught up in Sparrow's features. (Dearest, come; come see me, Prince; *see* me, take me a-sea, a-new, hydroport me home.)

Hospital quakes white silence, rumbles blank thru labyrinth of walls. Hospital for sleeping ghosts—shhh—years deceased. Horror in the whiteness.

No postcards arrived.

Sparrowless nobody. Lost all her darlings. No future visitations; not in this life-line. Sleep herself to death like the very old? Get tired go to sleep forever.

Nurse removed the bandages I was wrapped in. (Neither skin nor injury underneath.) Washed my blood in bowl of warm soapwater sponge slipped overskin like—

Sparrow and I had taken soaps together? Had washed each other's? There was a certain bath? Perhaps unwashed by anyone since babied; since brutally mothered.

—story: ended.

Eye-speak: accompany me to the bathroom; hand-hold; I cannot digest the alone.

Read to me, nurse, in newfangled language; let your words pelt down, rainwater, thatched roof.

Come to me, boy, in native tongue.

## Sparrow, Eulogy 2

1.

I'm conversing again with my paintings in tongues because I am not bright enough to believe the person who says: 9 out of 10 times there is no correct answer.

“Was there a lightbulb a-danglin somewhere I missed? Someplace yonder?”

The mailman arrives with notification that my lightbulb resides in Antarctica, in the cellar of the nightmare-fishery-museum. He has a picture. He has a map.

I invite the mailman inside. When I request that he dress in the uniform of Sparrow, he obliges without question. He says: This is the duty of a mailman.

2.

You have got to convince yourself of something. Sparrow has returned from the dead, arrived on my doorstep in his dungarees, his tubesocks; arrived to reclaim our lost language, to converse with me in tongues.

“How benevolent that longlost Antarctica lightbulb would have seemed to our skins had we traveled there hatless and with newly shaved heads like we would have,” I say.

“Had we known of its existence...” says Sparrow. “Had our hangovers been less severe...had we chosen Antarctica over a breakfast of leftover eggrolls.”

“Imagine purple sores of warmth blooming from our snow-numbed scalps. Or the tooth you broke drunkenly at Monika's sweatlodge and refused to repair caulked full of white light...”

“All of the syllables you never did take back eclipsed by its electric hum...”

“In the gallery of carp-avalanche-sculptures we would have curated, which nobody but us would have cared to visit...”

“That tiny dying lightbulb could've bound the two of us together in an inopportune moment of chance.”

“It could've gone out.”

“I could've chewed it whole and let its thousand watts enlighten my feeble swallowings.”

“Any of which could have prevented your wanderings into those sarcastic Nebraska pastures...”

“Your repeated bellyflops into the bathtub of déjà vu...the shatterings of your spine.”

“Let’s go, let’s walk backwards into the white at sundown.”

“Fuck it,” says Sparrow. “Let’s go now.”

Never in his life has Sparrow said “Let’s go now.” Never in his life has he returned to anyone’s doorstep.

The mailman wears his mailman’s uniform and stands on my doorstep and waves a hand in front of my face.

“Walking backward into the Arctic is physically impossible,” he says. “It is my duty as a mailman to tell you so, while removing all your clothes right here on your doorstep.”

I oblige him without question. I am tired of speaking in tongues.

## De-evolution of Mythology

but, my treetips—regret falls silent after burning itself up in the ultimate fantasy in which I crush your bones to dust, twist you into a wreath, and nail you up above the mantel in the living room that was ours once, in the “enchanted” library of botched, tacky brownness my treetips extend beyond the window without making a lick of peace unlike that fairytale of a day you and I filled the house with popcorn and for once the neighbors did not summon the police, or that other day when I said shut the hell up and eat your gelato and you did my treetips disintegrate in the bathtub, then they clog the drain, wondering: are you knitting amends, locked in the mineshaft, birdy? because the taste of your blood is cheap and ungratifying as sugarfree Kool-Aid not unlike the realization that She was sweethearted and clean in spirit before He entered the picture back when my treetips were obese with purple blooms back when the treetips leaked that woozy odor when I was charmed by your synapse-writhings when I saved the empty hot sauce message bottles when I was an idiot when I think about my treetips they are without meaning, or ashen, or otherwise unrecognizable but the manual says if I run a comb through my treetips they’ll split a little softer, get a little more playful during peak hours at which time you better run as fast as you can into Hades, dead of Iowa, or anyplace, really if I were commissioned to paint your portrait, it would be an offer I could refuse.

## Conversations Between the Lovelorn: Act I, Scene I.

(Enter CHERYL and STEVE, stage zero. Scenery: a GLEN. CHERYL and STEVE circle one another in an unruly manner. CHERYL sniffs after STEVE, animal-like and wishing.)

STEVE: Why should I approach you, dear—you on your hands and knees, tearing up lipfulls of grass?

CHERYL: But I made an angel in the dirt for you; please?

(STEVE approaches CHERYL. Lifts CHERYL's finger via her wrist via her elbow via her shouldersocket. STEVE looks underneath the air.)

CHERYL: Hardy har. I tricked you! You thought you would find the enmagicked word, and what is there but the nauseated cotton candy of regret?

(STEVE lifts CHERYL'S skirts, sticks his head underneath.)

CHERYL: I am all out of sorts, tender as prime rib under there. No thank you.

(CHERYL and STEVE empty their POCKETS. There is little to exchange: THIRTEEN STONES, JAR OF WATER, STAINED HANDKERCHIEF. CHERYL and STEVE trade with gratefulness, then smell the void.)

STEVE: Why did she go away after all, after I left her on the prairie roadside?

CHERYL: I made a little pick-a-nick for us, see? Something is growing out of the ground and we shall eat it and it shall take us over.

(CHERYL unfolds picnic blanket full of holes and lays it on the ground in ditch next to I-90 W. She plucks a PUMPKIN she sees collapsed in a BED OF GOLDDUST)

CHERYL (Holding up PUMPKIN): Look, we can break jar into knife, press stones into face, build a pumpkin tea. See, Steve, how the sky is wrapping around itself in preparation for our divine pick-a-nick?

STEVE: Warping, you mean. Warping around itself as we do, spending its bones. I thought you were bringing boiled chicken, my favorite, but now I see this was just another womanly ploy. In the Grimm's version, you know, there is no pumpkin. No carriage at all. Only a dead mother, a gruesome wedding, some bloodthirsty birds, a moody bride jailed in a womb of ash.

CHERYL (dropping pumpkin, pulling Steve onto blanket, awkwardly straddling him): Wasn't there more underfoot, underhand, then? Wasn't there "transcendence"?

STEVE: I thought she meant to pull me up by the bootstraps into glee. It is our human responsibility, isn't it?

CHERYL (staring off into traffic while grinding on Steve): He acted like my father sometimes, like when he'd upend all the furniture in the night and I wanted to stab his eardrums. You will certainly be the same. You were certainly separated from him at birth.

STEVE (staring off into ditch of impotence): What was her name anyway?

CHERYL: The quilt fell away in the night. The cold put its spell on my lips. Nobody was there in bed with me.

STEVE: The guilt? Prairie roadside is not so bad—do you think?

CHERYL: Listen. The treetips sound so distressed and unruly now.

STEVE: I am waiting for something again. Stupidly. And I do not know what it is. Therefore someday I shall purchase a condominium. Someday soon. It will have no shutters, as condominiums refuse all resemblances to Home. I will live alone in the condominium of grief for all eternity.

CHERYL: That cannibal on the news ate his victims in order to make them part of him, you know. To make them the closest ever. It makes me feel that I, too, could be a cannibal, and proudly. What a strong identity: Cannibal!

STEVE: Someday soon I shall purchase a condominium by the sea and someday later I will die by getting swept out into it.

CHERYL (sobbing into Steve's armpit): I am getting to be an old woman. Creatures and people in movies, they mate and go out and get their condos. I do not. Therefore, I am not people. Why gingham? Why romance? No, I am not people anymore.

STEVE (petting Cheryl's ribcage): I spent 98% of myself on her. Now nothing makes sense except waterfowl and artificial ginger-lemon tea.

CHERYL: She was a cunt. He was a cunt. What else is left to say? C-U-N-T. We have got to move out into the shine—it is waiting for us to stop repeating ourselves.

STEVE: Someday soon I shall...

CHERYL: The treetips sound so distressed and unruly...

(TRAFFIC NOISE enters stage right, louder and louder and broken-sounding. STEVE and CHERYL move to opposite sides of PICNIC BLANKET, with the PUMPKIN between them. They keep lying in the ditch as RAIN moves in, longing for the world to grow blurry and lopsided, for their tale to grow up out of the earth and bludgeon them.)

## “Art Therapy”

Time up and quit me. Meats hung stranded in the windows. I reinvent paper dolls out of disappointment: for Gary: the therapist. He came up with the idea when I said: there are no words to describe it. You can imagine the satisfaction.

### EXHIBIT A: Paper Discoball

Medium: inside-out feathers, soaked in blood and lumpy Hollandaise X made each springtime, while en route to Tasmania for the air-guitar playoffs.

Description: X could not follow recipes, and preferred the imagined sound of the air guitar to notes of the actual instrument, which he played sloppily and with so much melodramatic grief. My discoball does not shine, is not mirrored, and bleeds all over Gary's carpet, which is gray as X's sensual demeanor. Gary examines his fingernails. It is a general rule that all X's prefer the wrong thing.

### EXHIBIT B: Paper Kittycat

Medium: Oceanfall, together they made a pain in my throat, ash saved from hundreds of cigarettes I smoked at four in the morning, waiting for X's return.

Description: Did you have pets at home? Gary inquires, mistaking kittycat for koka nut. Bats, perhaps, or silverfish like those your mother squashed in childhood? No, Gary, there were no pets. He demands names and shoe sizes of the pigeons that roosted on the el stop outside our bedroom window, of the cockroaches that lived in our dishwasher. “Pet,” like everything else, has limitless definitions, says Gary.

But I do not believe he understands the infinite combinations of ideas the universe births for no reason, all those accidental conceptions. X, for example, birthed by sixteen-year-old mother. Gary says: yes, I can see how important those pigeons were to the two of you. How you ingest cockroach residue at each meal because it is so impossible to fully cleanse the palate of longing.

EXHIBIT C: Waddedloveknotofpaper, exploding out of Paper Molotov Cocktail, followed by abstraction of paper peace.

Medium: Shards of plump red heartbeat: mine, spattered on bedroom wall. Residue of accidental appearance of stranger in my bedchamber.

Description: I do not mention X and Heloise out on the lawn before our window, “necking,” or any of the others. I recount The Stranger's overall perfect genetic makeup, residing most especially in his seashell-like toenails. Is he a robot? Gary says. If he is a robot, this is fabulous. A robot is what you have needed for so many moons. Yes, Gary, he is a robot. Oh yes, I am drowning so deep in the blameless, predictable quicksand of robot-love.

EXHIBIT D: Consecutivelinked3-Dquestionmarksofpaperechoingwaythefuckoutinto...

Medium: Unknown.

Description: Campfire love, kitchen table love, drunken love out on the balcony in front of the neighbors. When it was so easy to achieve whatever I desired? How is it so easy to lose?

EXHIBIT E: Paper Magic Wand

Medium: Purchased at discount magic shop across the street, while Gary takes an “emergency call” from X. The wand is transparent as childhood, so full of water and purple glitter.

Description: I *plunk* Gary in the head, hoping to turn him into anyone who can tell me how to exist. Gary says: ooh, can you turn me into Neil Armstrong, floating weightless and untethered around the moon? Can you turn me into Sacajawea? Make me famous, and loving, and kind, and not-myself?

Yes Gary, yes I can, I say, and he morphs into Liberace, Julia Child, and his biological mother before my eyes.

Later, I will *plunk* my robot repeatedly while he sleeps, *plunk* him human, *plunk* him flawed and understanding. And Heloise, repeatedly, as if with a lead pipe. I will *plunk* X into his best self, which existed so deep below the surface that nobody but me could see it.

I will *plunk* myself into somebody blank and whole, who has known no grief.

## Self-Evaluation

Read the story, then answer each question by completely blackening the oval next to the correct response.

*\*Note: Story not included.*

1. Who is the narrator of the story?

- a) Me
- b) Mary
- c) God
- d) There is no narrator
- e) All of the above
- f) I don't know

2. The boat is a metaphor for \_\_\_\_\_.

- m) The dumb bitch.
- n) Hello, stranger.
- o) Redistribution of unsavory backstabblings during the Parakeet reign.
- p) I do not believe in metaphors.
- q) Your smile.

3. I was turning \_\_\_\_\_ over.

- x) All the stones.
- y) A sane amount of water.
- z) Nowhere.
- w) The baby's inner tube, haha

4. In actuality, there was no boat because \_\_\_\_\_.

- a) I was searching for it all over the wild.
- b) Mary came dashing into plain view, then went away again.
- c) I am the cliché of the girl who cannot find.
- d) There wasn't any water. There is no such thing.
- e) The boat would save, the boat would shine.

5. At the end of the story, the narrator falls from grace because she \_\_\_\_\_.

- a) Self-righteously misrepresents her mistakes to the President
- b) Forgot to consort with her lama this morning

- c) Fucks Pedro in the frozen food aisle, redistributing all of South America's karma.
- d) Could not make amends with her adoptive mother (not mentioned in story) who raised her on soap operas and "instant" breakfast.
- e) Again falls in love with the incorrect answer
- f) Cannot find her car in the parking lot.
- g) All of the above

6. Were the narrator smarter, she could have...

- p) Stolen the shipwrecked show and cashed it in for Bermuda triangle tickets.
- q) Guessed the correct number of fetuses in the jar, thereby winning the corpse-lottery.
- r) Discovered the magic turn of events with which to re-woo him.
- s) Collected herself, reconvened, and eaten all the cherries that had been left for dead.
- t) Ridden his hello like a boat, way out into the the horizon
- u) None of the above; no smartness could save her.

## Advice For Puritan Lovers

1. Slip your hand underneath the orangepeel without ripping.
2. Pour your potions slower.
3. Release my blackbirds from their sewers, place them inside your mouth, let them flutter back and forth there: warmly, and a little frenzied.
4. (Next time do not clip the nail of your middle finger: that magnificent, blooddrawing claw.)
5. A little off-rhythm with the squid, please.
6. Bruise my holy darlings.
7. Feed me a bevy of blond teenage boys. Let them assault my hair with yellow bows, finely decorating me. Let them skin and debone.
8. Put your whole foot down the well. Now the other one. Let the rest of you follow.
9. Lend me the microfilm upon which to record you draping Melinda's gossamer hurricane across the canyon to dry, then shredding it to pieces, shoving it down the length of her long and voluptuous throat.
10. Give me nails to hang the recordings all over the living room so I can watch them while I press vacuum to floorboards. The house will be cleaner: I promise.
11. The day the sun comes back, cover me in blankets of warm mudspring--slowly and with deliberate tease.
12. Unearth my hibernations from their comfy dens.
13. Wait for rain. Repeat.
14. Wait for grass.
15. Release the panicked flock of me from your mouth into sky.

## The Constant

I itch in the t-shirt I am too old for...the itch-itch-itchings that won't leave. I will be the same always. There is no progress in me. I will forever be haunted by X's absence. Never will I learn how to apply eye makeup.

Decades after the fact I re-enact all my old treacheries out of habit: falling asleep in the grocery-line. Hovering over others' soups in secret evaluation. Laughing after the moment.

My limbs buckle, still. Still I wake underneath the house where I've been hiding three days—under the porch where there's too much sun.

You coax me out, hands wide open.

Kitchen shears or paring knife? For onion width can make or break.

I catch myself picking basil from my tooth and flinch, wait for you announce your irritation.

Why do you work so fucking hard in that garden? you say.

You put me inside your mouth in a childhood game, eat up all the crazy in me like water. You open all my drawbridges; a vitamin arrives on my tongue.

Newly scolded for sneaking into the shower, the cat curls back into sleep; I fall apart at the constant.

Passion, felled by centuries of broken weather, comes back for a deeper haunting.

Laughter boils out of me all over the room. Finally I understand you aren't him.

## Housefire

True: my brilliantine laugh pirouettes autumn-leaflike through midair, but I was never a geometrical numbskull nor a harpsichord wizard like the rest.

The uncertainty of your chewing motion promised we would never again love each other like we had at noon sharp the day before.

Across the table there was nothing to say. I whipped myself silly over it out behind the shed where you chopped our cherrytree with plump neighbor Heloise, sharing cherries until all hours of the afternoon, staining your mouths by the facefull.

Run a-sea with me? I heard you say in our backyard. Run amok?

Problem: I've forgotten the correct dimensions with which to construct a tear. (I believe Mother used romancenovel-cornstarch-laced-with-celebrity-obituary. But hers turned out flat and unintelligible as razor blades.)

You came outside, wrapped yourself around me like a string around a finger, rope around Joan of Arc—depending on who was doing the telling.

I was doing it.

Solution: the jack'o'lantern guts would go on glowing hideously; a housefire doesn't illuminate anybody's mistakes.