

Maia Brown-Jackson

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE II

You know you ought to stay away,
but you followed me down and
now refuse to release my fingers
from where they tangle with yours.

This lifetime wasn't enough,
you're thinking.
But we both know the gods envy
the car crash of our mortality.
Time is run out for us.

Go, I snarl, when you seem paralyzed.
That was just the canary in the coal mine.
But I don't blame you for looking back;
I've always courted Death like a familiar friend,
and you don't want to return alone.

But as you remember that justice
and revenge are both women,
and see the scars along my form,
and the wanton, unasked-for destruction in my wake—

Humbled, trembling, you turn away,
knowing that I, and I alone,
have already been condemned.

Don't worry, love,
I promise you will see the sun again.

If we who fight
become the monster,
the abyss,
the void—
Then I walk into battle with my brow dripping blood
and my eyes shadowed—
(my knuckles have always been more bruised
than my lips, anyway)
And I know that never again will I feel holy—

*Are you back in the light,
dear Orpheus?
Do you understand, now, that
the dying grass is as close as we can get?*

So let this trembling, forsaken body run,
this parched throat let loose a battle cry,
because I am already become a harbinger of doom,
and I will not let them take you, too.

GINGER, CINNAMON, MYRRH

There are fissures in my skin
where the thorns have dug in,
blood rising,
swelling,
drying,
cracking,
and I say give me ginger, cinnamon, myrrh,
make it burn
and let me bleed until
I'm clean and
maybe
one day I'll have earned redemption.

GIRL AS LION

*I didn't ask to be a lion.
I think I asked to be a bird,
to fly free and—*

He didn't throw you to the lions.
He left you, collapsed, broken, folded into yourself where he knew the lions would find you.

It's like he never read a story book.
Doesn't he know that death
fell in love with the daughter of spring?

(She's dead, he told himself. No one will ever know what I did.)

He won't recognize you upon your return. Even when you stand above him, lips sticky with nectar and honey, smile dripping blood, he will think, Why? What vengeance could this monster possibly want to wreak upon **me?**

*I didn't ask to be a lion.
I didn't ask to be a lamb, either,*

It will take time to track him down, but the lions taught you patience. You learned to be a beast; it's not that hard to slip back into society.

*and should I have been given
the choice as a girl,*

(He still doesn't know who you are, as everything crumbles around him, and even now, he can't look away from your mouth, stained red with wine, at the white ash your fingertips have trailed across your exposed flesh.)

You're not a god. You don't require human sacrifice. But he turned your very skin into a battlefield, and you so desperately want him to understand.

Daughter, say the lions, he doesn't remember you. What is the point?

You don't need him to remember you, not especially. You know you weren't the only one.

*it would have been lion
every time.*

Perhaps if he had left you to lambs, to birds, to fawns. Perhaps you would offer absolution, of a sort. But.

But there are moments now,

You crawled out of your haunted body a daughter of the lions.

I miss the days of girl-as-lamb.

No. He **made** you become this—half girl, half wild thing. It's time he learnt what that meant.

SOMETHING LIKE REDEMPTION

There's something like spring buds
creeping under my finger tips
and beneath my skin
and I don't know what it means
except that my priorities have been all wrong
and I don't know what the hell I want.

There's something undirected inside of me.
Something that won't settle.
And I want to help it grow.
I want it to last.

I think I must be some sort of fallen creature.
I didn't start here.
Perhaps I collapsed, decayed and overripe,
and still too raw.

I feel like I can't get enough oxygen.
Exposed like a bare nerve and distant like scar tissue.
Heartbroken and far too scared to let myself hope.
Startled when each beat of my heart *bangs!*
through my ribcage
and I'm not familiar with *gentle*.

There's a cauterized piece of my soul,
where the thunder still erupts, sometimes.
I think the lightning precedes it
is trying to tell me something—

that there may still be time,
in this world,
for this world,
for something like atonement,
for something like redemption.