

Justin Vicari

## CRUELTY

After delivering me, the doctor  
checked my sex and could not tell  
which one I was. He told  
my parents right away:

I looked, down there, ambiguous,  
hermaphroditic.  
And they were all alarmed.

In those days they fixed things like that  
with a scalpel on infant flesh,  
but it didn't really fix anything.

He asked my parents to decide me.  
They decided me a boy.  
When I was a few days old,  
the surgeon took up his scalpel  
and reshaped my genitals.

\*

My parents never looked back.  
They wanted me to be a man,  
a big tough man, strong and hard,  
whose manhood is unquestioned.

They taught me a nonsense religion.  
In every baby picture,

I hug a football.  
They brooded my recessive male sex  
like a fowl's brown egg,  
excitedly expectant.

When they found feminine ashes  
around my eyes, they sulked.  
“*You're faggy,*” my mother fought back  
an angry sob, her work undermined.

She had me on godawful  
liquid iron, worked her finger  
into my tight asshole.

An old wizard said of me, as a baby,  
“She's gonna break a lotta hearts,”  
in Kuhn's, one afternoon. The survivor in  
my mother flinched.

\*

That wizard was right:  
I came of age female,  
Rosa finally running amok  
in my slough of puberty.

I knew what I was.  
I had always known,  
so they must have known too,  
especially my mother.

When I was a child, she frequently told me  
men would rape me, anywhere I went,  
strange men who saw me only once  
and determined then and there to have me.

These men would kidnap, rape and kill me.  
“You die a thousand times  
when a man like that gets you.”  
I wondered how she knew.

## THERE IS A NATIVE AMERICAN

There is a Native American, tipsy and shaking,  
Taking off his leather,  
Unable to keep it up inside me but always trying,  
Turning my hips and my legs this way and that,  
Bringing my knees together between his knees.

My face moving closer in and out of his crotch's  
Fragrant bush, I rest my hand on his plateau of blubber  
Not because I find his shape beautiful,  
But because this body, letting me have him,  
Deserves the comfort of a touch.

He rises above me, long black hair stringing down.  
In the low light, his skin appears paler than mine.  
I don't know what makes him Native  
Matters more than the closeted gay man  
I read from his timid stillness, wary eye contact.  
Kin-like, painful, intersectional body.

Finally he lies on top of me, in my arms,  
And we are clammy skin pressed together  
In something I'm tempted to call "brotherhood,"  
But don't really want to,

Not least because it's not the 90s anymore,  
But also because I have never made my female side fit  
Into any brother-bonds on Earth.  
But I'll let it stand, in spirit, stoned but  
Alone again as always, typing this.

## THE MALE VAGINA TRIES TO TOUGHEN UP

*It's only Rosa, running amok.*

- Rainer Werner Fassbinder

You saw her and wanted her, me. Rosa,  
a fool by love from way back.  
She lacks even the family of gay friends  
who protect each other in the world.  
Neither, savvy women to help her  
escape from predatory men.

Set spears Horus bringing night.

That's not to say she'll hold her shape for you.  
You have to conjure her fully.  
Hang clothes on her like the invisible woman.

A sharp roll of the DNA dice, twice  
twisted allele,  
and I would have been a heterosexual  
woman. As it is, I'm an intersex person  
who feels like one. If only  
being a woman was singing along  
to Marianne Faithfull.

My intersex body  
has lost its mind  
again and again.

America was  
my stillborn vagina, incomplete,  
unopenable. More homeless people than ever  
on the streets of downtown Pittsburgh:  
old lady with cane,  
old veteran with glasses,  
hunched woman who doesn't look at anyone,  
bearded young vet.  
Please help, they ask.  
I have not eaten, they say.

Another man stands at the highway on-ramp  
during rush hour. I see him from the bus  
holding up his sign:

HOMELESS — BUT STILL HUMAN.

How easily this could be me.  
I cannot imagine anything more evil  
than killing off an entire way of life  
so a few can make themselves richer.  
Is that why I'm alone?

My intersex body  
has lost its mind  
again.

I picked up Blaze in a subway station  
over a conversation about cigarettes, his tattoos, the time.  
He held up gas stations and needed a place to crash.  
I licked his boots one night, tops and bottoms.  
Blaze brought his buddy Chirp.  
I made out with Chirp all afternoon after  
we smoked weed, he kissed my powdered and rouged cheek  
and that seduced lonely me right away I ripped the buttons  
on his plaid shirt.

But Blaze started stealing from me,  
so I had to throw him out,  
put all his things in a box on the porch.  
He never had my key.

## MISSIONARY

Unprovoked by me!  
What were we  
talking— ?  
Nothing?  
I always listened while he spoke.

He smiled on my twisted hang-ups,  
both of us young fireworks fizzling.  
I, fat Caliban, worshiped him  
and called myself his slave,  
feeling bad about his mental problems  
and because he was good-looking.

He got up from his chair  
and came toward me on the sofa,  
his eyes bulging, serious.  
He gripped my throat with his hands  
and pushed me down.

His thumbs pressed my windpipe.  
He  
cut off my breath, pressing full  
strength. He did not smile.  
DEADEYES DEADEYES DEADEYES I'M  
*I was always painfully hard around him,  
would lie at his feet. It was all I could do  
to grind my pants into the floor*

*till I came in them. I ate  
bites of food he chewed and spat  
in my mouth.* I gurgled, not  
breathing, he  
shuddered above me, then  
re-  
leased my throat.  
He sat down again, speaking one word

that might have been a question:  
“Forgiveness.”

Because of him,  
I breathed again.



## THE BULLY'S SALUTE

*Here come old Flat Top*  
- The Beatles

### I

The bull-throated bully in his greatcoat  
stands nearly at army attention, his weak chin  
thrust above his paid mob of followers  
like a Nazi's hand.

The lives of people mean nothing to the bully,  
nor legal votes tallied in fair elections.  
He lives, and wins, by lies alone.

He tells the mob, *Fight for my lies,*  
*Die for my lies,*  
*Kill for my lies.*

### II

At the bully's salute,  
as if kissed on the head by a hectic green angel of history,  
each follower,  
each member of the mob  
turned to march  
up Pennsylvania Avenue  
toward the Capitol.

There were thousands of them,  
some of the millions who'd voted yet again for the bully,  
and still believed him.  
The bully's lies became their own  
in transubstantiation.

### III

The mob carried a sign: *This Is Our 1776!*  
They carried a sign: *Q Sent Me!*

Some were Qanon,  
some were Oath-Keepers,  
some were Proud Boys.  
They wore red MAGA hats  
and waved the bully's flags  
(and Confederate flags,  
and neo-Nazi flags).

### IV

The African-American lady stopped to document  
the edges of the insurrection.  
Rioters attacked her,  
stripping off her Covid mask,  
ripping out her hair extensions,  
pepper-spraying her reproachful eyes.

She dangled crying, bald and drowned,  
in the arms of a ginger-bearded man, until rescue.

A naïve D.C. policeman, forty-two years old,  
tried to stem the insurrection near the Capitol building.  
He was beaten in the head with a fire extinguisher  
and died in the hospital two days later.

### V

A cop  
got knocked to the ground, injured;  
the mob around him chanting,  
*"Kill him with his own gun!*  
*Kill him with his own gun!"*

A point of dishonor from old Western movies.  
Interviewed later, the injured cop said,  
*“I thought about killing people.  
I could probably kill one or two.  
Then they would take my gun from me  
and kill me with it.”*

Other Capitol cops were filmed dragging  
back the bike-rack barricades  
and waving the bully’s mob inside,  
like parking a Supermax inside a barn.  
They took grinning selfies  
with the bully’s thugs,  
fellow workers for the same boss.

## VI

Somehow, the mob erected  
a full-scale, working gallows.

## VII

The Qanon conspirator, an Air Force vet,  
with bovine eyes under her red MAGA hat,  
was shot dead  
as she clawed through busted Capitol window.

After chasing away the security guard,  
the rioters went straight to Pelosi’s suite.  
They were shown where it was days before,  
on illegal tours by Congresswoman Boebert,  
witnesses said.

“Death is the only remedy,” a riot leader said.  
Pelosi wasn’t there,  
so the mob trashed her filing and scrawled  
feces on her walls, stole her mail, laptop.

*Where is AOC?  
Where is she?  
Hang Mike Pence.*

The bully smirked,  
watching from the White House,  
watching on safe TV,  
exulting himself God of vindictive ants.

Senator Hawley, that vile salamander,  
marched across the plaza  
with his chest puffed out,  
giving the mob a power salute.  
Many call today  
for resignations,  
expulsions,  
reckoning.

## VIII

The Air Force vet  
with bovine eyes  
carried the bully's lies on her  
suicide mission.  
But nothing ever dies in America,  
obsessed as She is with eternal life.  
The young ones gear up  
to tape their martyr vlogs  
for Views and Likes.  
The living ghosts sit, haunted,  
in the waiting rooms  
for their next appointments.  
Criminals in rich suits  
file their court appeals.

The bully is back,  
announcing again that he won.  
The news is full of firsts,  
has been for a while.

Blue Georgia has redeemed  
Kentucky's shame.

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