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The Banshee, or Margaret Mary's Red-Leather Satchel

The day broke in a deep purple when Margaret Mary was on the train to New York, a fashion magazine passively laid across her lap. Her body hummed to the steady vibrations. As they rolled on by the calm black waters of the Hudson, her eyes were elsewhere - she was watching trees scratch the sky.

For me, to look at a photo of a young girl - some dead-eyed model with colors globbed on her face - sat all disjointed in the odd angles of stilettos and long thin limbs like a pale de Stijl painting - there is nothing so sad. The brevity of a blossom, the golden lily. I know now that no matter what she does, the rest of her life will be lived in souvenirs.

Je me souviens, her lips mouthed.

[I will never forget.]

My mother (G-d rest her soul) always said life is just a series of moments and where you choose to place yourself. Time and lines, time and lines.

Margaret Mary was choosing to place herself back in lower Manhattan, closer to the water shared with Brooklyn, where the tallest buildings are project housing and the streets are no longer numbered. She was going to a small bar near her old apartment on Clinton Street to watch a man she used to know sing a few songs and pick a

cittern. But for now, she was somewhere outside of Albany, sitting silently on a train that shook to some obscure beat like an angry hand rocking the cradle. In between her legs, on the floor, sat her red leather satchel. It held something very important - she guarded it with a foot on either side. When she got up to use the bathroom, she strapped it to her chest.

Opposite the toilet, as in most bathrooms, sat a mirror but in this bathroom, its proximity was abnormally close and it was made of something just slightly better quality than a sheet of tin foil. It was impossible not to see her self. Her hair stood red and blanketing, a fury of tussled gossamer, and her porcelain skin randomly punctuated with freckles. Under her eyes, thick dark-purple highlights curtseyed to the harsh precipice of an Aquiline nose. Below the crucifix at her neck, the satchel on her lap bulged with the present she had brought for him. The reflection was too loud or too close. The lines seemed aimless and broken; the colors screamed in opposition. She turned away from the mirror like an angry wave.

I think the most closely related emotions have to be sorrow and anger. My sick brain oscillates between the two. Sometimes, when I think of what might happen when he sees the present inside this satchel, a raw happiness crawls over me and then even joy becomes somewhat perverted. It is in the unknown of the future combined with all the heartache of the past. I have something to give him; I have to guard it between my legs.

Back in her seat and day had fully broken. A new sun sat fully visible in the sky. It rose like a halo around the outline of upper Manhattan as the train moved closer to its destination.

Soon the train stops and I work my way upward. Outside Penn Station, in the pulsating heart of this town, the sun shines down on tomb-grey buildings. This city is my church. Littered with idols, with its wine and roses, I am navigating it like an endless text and its myriad meanings. Moving forward, I tumble down Fifth on an invisible current.

Margaret Mary moved through the streets with her arms wrapped around her satchel like it was her only possession. She moved fast and her cross beat against her chest to the rhythm of her stride. After getting lost a few

times, both physically and in her thoughts, she arrived at the bar by her old apartment right before dusk. She could hear him before she saw him. Margaret Mary decided to take her Eucharist (“You-kah-riiist” she mouthed to herself) at the bar, though as close to the exit as possible.

*The King of love my Shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never,
I nothing lack if I am His
And He is mine forever.*

His voice is light and beautiful, and the music feels so close to pure. An Irish brogue against the lilt of punctuated strings evokes something almost magical. But I don’t know if there is enough purity in this world for wonder. I don’t know if sin isn’t ingrained from conception. Sometimes I wonder if he remembers. If he does, it doesn’t show on his face. His eyes are closed, a peaceful head floating underneath the light, decapitated by the black background.

*Thou spreadst a table in my sight;
Thine unction grace bestoweth;
And, oh, what transport of delight
From thy pure chalice floweth!*

The songs seemed to go on for hours, ebbing like a wayward tide, with Margaret Mary keeping a steady pace of a drink for each changing melody, a blessing for each blessing, and it was well into the night before he stopped. The moon outside, hanging close and low, pushed forward her torrent.

After his set, there was no pause - Margaret Mary made her way through crowd, the angry wave crashing to the black shore. She walked straight up to the man that sang and opened her red leather satchel. Before he fully recognized her face beneath the fire of her hair, she sat this object on top of a bar stool, and it bled, and it cried. It

cried a hundred dirges; it wailed a thousand psalms. Margaret Mary opened up her mouth to sing along but all she could produce was one long, loud scream.

"Margaret Mary Keen!" The man gasped, shrinking backward onto the stage. Heading backward into the spotlight. Her present floated in its jar, beads of condensation running down its side like tears.

Oh Father, I'm so disappointed. I'm kind of like my own mother now.