

Diverging courses. 2, Patrick

by mazaher
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He had to come, that last day of days. I had hoped against all hope that he wouldn't. That the blood shed between us would be a boundary strong enough to mark our separation as final. I should have known: blood calls blood, rite calls rite. As the sun rises at dawn, so Jack would feel the need for a farewell of his own making. He is impeccable like that.

When I heard the doorbell, I knew who it was. The very wires of the piano I was not playing seemed to vibrate of their own accord at his arrival. I felt their shiver echo in my diaphragm. Here it is, his step coming up behind me, calm, solid, as usual.

But his words are not.

"So... you are leaving," he begins. His tone is casual, but his voice is trembling ever so slightly, as though affected in its turn by the resonance from the piano.

Or is it I who tremble?

I don't quite trust myself to look at his face, so I remain sitting with my back to him, as I answer as briefly as I can.

"So are you."

For what else is left for us to say?

He asks what I am going to do, and I answer that I don't know. It is not the truth, as we both know.

The truth is, I cannot tell him.

I cannot tell him that I'm leaving him because I am not brave enough to stay at his side.

He wants to study as a physician, which means five or six years at St Bartholomew's Medical College. I can't stay here that long.

I must escape, or I'll stifle. I feel Death at my heels. I feel her stalking me, because I smell of evil, like my father did. She took him, and now wants more. Death is a keen hound, they say. I have to go. And I can't ask him to leave his own life behind just to live mine with me, and die my death.

I should try to hurt him, wound him, kill at birth any regret he may be going to feel at this parting, which repeats itself like a nightmare, first in blood and now in words.

I can't.

How can I meet his perfect love with my imperfect treachery?

Because I know I wouldn't succeed.

Whatever the provocation, he wouldn't turn his back on me.

He is faithful.

I am not.

I stand in the shadow, so that he won't see my eyes filling with tears, and we shake hands.

This is the proper, formal way to say goodbye between gentlemen. This is why he came. Now he will go, the rite performed, and may God help us both in our lives alone... or at least may He help *him*.

But a handshake can't fill the need of our own hearts.

I seem to hear both beating, and I think of the twin wounds. The scalpel was sharp, they must already be closing. I imagine the thin lines of red on his ivory skin. He lapped the blood from my chest, and I bent to kiss him, tasting my blood on his lips. Now I want to tear his clothes apart, and bite at him, open again the wounds, and watch him bleed for me.

Obviously, I don't. We stand poised, stilled in an equal yearning, an equal denial.

Then the balance tips, there is this last moment like the mad void before a fall, and then he -- he!-- embraces me. It is the first time, it is the last.

And my soul has fled in terror. I am not even there.

I cannot take this gift and then allow us to be parted. I cannot stop him. So I... disappear.

The only thing that's left of me here is a broken, dead shell. The kiss explodes it in splinters.

It's all I can do to promise him I will take care of myself.

(Take care of what? Nothing's left to care for.)

But it's enough for him. He smiles.

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