

the naked midwife

by f. d. Hudson

Poetry Editor Hezekiah writes:

*This entry is brilliant. I can't believe the author is just 18 years old! (Do any of you lie about your ages to make me more jealous and inadequate?) In comparison, I am a barren man. Do read the **The Naked Midwife**, if you please—it is sure to. It speaks to us all. “and i am the naked midwife / with hands covered in blood clots.” Hudson is certainly a poet. I always wished I could write for a living. This one may. These words engender emotions and images I wish I could affect. “i am the stone catching her sparks” “she grabs my seaweed hair, / i catch the oyster’s pearl in my tongue / while tears touch red lips, tucked under teeth.” Bellissimo!*

“the naked midwife”

and i am the naked midwife
with hands covered in blood clots.
i can still feel her sharp nerves
tingling against my stomach. she is

like a jellyfish floating in my arms,
and i am the stone catching her sparks.
i keep my fingers free, in order not to smear
the color of roses on her skin.

i ease my breath and feel her
again, covered in sea-foam like a spirit.
i curl the fingers of my free hand into her balled fist
and call her mermaid queen,

poet of pearls, mute until i begin chewing
saltwater taffy. she grabs my seaweed hair,
i catch the oyster’s pearl in my tongue
while tears touch red lips, tucked under teeth.

i lie on my back, both my hands frozen
at a safe distance. she lays love
on my chest and swims across me.
my stomach feels tight as leather,

while my fingers claw into the sand.

the waves crash between
my legs, and i breathe
like a whale breaking the ocean.

she spits into the sink,
and i am screaming
with laughter.

“the keys to the theater”

i kept the keys hanging from my shaking hand.
told myself no doors need to be opened
today. this twirling ballet needs
its tragic second act.

the lights come on, and a violent moon protrudes
from the ceiling, hanging by a thread. somnolent
slippers come twirling stage right.
the heart plateaus. the light can be seen across the pond.

only the fantasy of a star; a stage light covered
by cloth lulls the audience into believing
there’s hope. there is none.
these dancers must fall into the water.

and the curtains are drawn. end of act one.
whoever came is shuffling in their seats,
wondering if they can leave. “it was only a pond,”
“yay-long. why couldn’t they just swim across?”

pens scrape over notepads as act two
comes barreling through, making no apologies
for structure. now we are at war, splashing
in the shallow shore. the heart grows

concave, forging new caverns. the stars multiply,
crash and spew flames. sheets of white, orange and red
are thrown asunder. the moon grows
a face and fangs.

the anticipation is dearly felt, and in response
a knife is plunged.
tragedy befalls center stage, and just as the first tears
fall, the scene ends. another intermission.

silence befalls the velvet room. “what a terrible

way to hurt me, just for watching your rotten
play,” mutters the air. the exit signs
disappear, as if in response.

act three is quiet, with echoes of a silver lake.
the heart is overwrought with blood; this ballet’s
windpipe closes. the songs are mute, the dancers
bound and gagged.

the night has ended with a whimper. in conclusion,
life loses its way, and is drowned
by the earth. the moon obscures the sun,
and the audience takes its leave.

but here i am, with the keys to the theater
in my naked palm. and i say the ballet
need not open today. nobody has to see
this nonsense, so they may call it a travesty

and continue on about their days.

“tatterdemalion soldier”

send me to bleed, tatterdemalion
soldier. you and i share a poisoned heart.

have no fear, son of clovers and rose crests,
there is no known cure. you will be relieved

of duty in due time. come, let us foxtrot
with our rifles slung round our shoulders.

in the between time, after all the bullets
have been fired, but before our wounds can be treated,

let us fire rounds into the black night,
let us drink and fight so that we can taste our bleeding gums.

rejoice in the shelter that was torn away from you,
celebrate the searing pain of this blade of freedom thrust

into your back. always remember the beauty
of your lover, for the photographs thrown into the fire.

always dream of the battlefield. it will embarrass you
to know how tethered you are to this torn-up place,

but nobody knows the echoing canals of your mind,
so feel safe at least in this; i am your one true lover.

your tongue will bleed and i will be there with the bucket.
when you come screaming back from a dream, it's me smothering

you with the pillow. you and i are failures together,
left behind without a morsel of a true word,

and when we die on the front line, there won't be a soul
to eulogize us in the papers. a flimsy legacy

regardless. so send me to battle first, ragged, ailing
brother of mine. our time is limited.

THE POET SPEAKS: *I am trying more and more to write about myself. For the longest time, I refused to be autobiographical; so much so that I tried to write poems as far removed from my life as possible. As such, I have written about famous actors, birds named gloria, and senile war veterans. Perhaps this is why I have so many poems about war and religion, despite not having particularly strong feelings about either. That is probably also why these poems involve midwives, ballet dancers, and (unsurprisingly) soldiers: three things with which I have no experience. I do have experiences with intimacy, admitting things, and breakups, which are all things I meant to write about when I sat down when to write these poems. Sometimes I think writing poetry is like subjecting yourself to the most confusing psychological exam conceivable.*

Whenever the question of inspiration is brought up, I usually say T.S. Eliot because it's easy, and because every time I read "The Waste Land" I feel like submitting to my true fate as a grocery store clerk. Recently I reopened Birthday Letters by Ted Hughes and surprised at how much I took from him, which troubled me until I couldn't be bothered to care anymore. Other names include: Mark Strand, Guillaume Apollinaire, John Ashbery, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Marianne Moore. I have been compared to E.E. Cummings often, and understandably, but the influence is less present than it seems. Some of my friends have told me that I will grow up to be a famous writer. More predict that I'm going to be an alcoholic. I don't know what to make these conjectures, but I hope at least that it means some of the stars are aligned in my favor

AUTHOR'S BIO: *My name is Foster Hudson. I am 18 years old, and I live in Jersey City. I am a senior at Elizabeth Irwin High School, and I am published in Black Horse Review and Sheepshead Review. Thanks for taking the time to read my work!*