

CLOSER THAN A DREAM BUT JUST AS FAR

By Eric Mohrman

WHY WE LIKE IT: *A drunk man, a woman with no love and a snowy evening. These are the basics that dissolve into surrealist frames of powerful beauty in this shimmering narrative within a dreamscape. 'Powdery silence' gives way to bone raw reality. 'she finds him passed out prone on the couch, one arm dangling to the floor, head sideways, mouth agape and expelling some sort of half-gurgling, half-hissing noises like an old demonic radiator.' And everywhere the language--the deep heart of voice—scintillates with spellbinding prose: The clouds look cubist, sharp, ominous. The air is itchy. Ripples set out tentatively over muddy puddles, but quickly become too apprehensive and contract. Even the grass—an anxious green—seems to grow from some compulsion. A ravishing hybrid that settles in the imagination like a mirage.*

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Snow falls in the streetlight and statics the night with luminescence. Staggering drunks swagger and dally in the dreamy dimension between closing time and beds spiraling stilly in the dark. Boozy clouds puff from their mouths. Boisterous shouts trapped bouncing between snowflakes—echoes perpetually diminishing in lost pockets of space, preserving a powdery silence.

Specters
walk this weather, footprints

form, fill in, and fade
away, nihilistic little metaphors.

Gradually, gracelessly, they stumble off the streets into muted rowhomes. Cadent footsteps on steep old stairs accompanied by creaks. Switches click up, switches clack down.

Lights turn on, lights turn off. Pupils shrink, pupils dilate and flirt with bursting. Functional patterns of life, blinks in a bleak eternity.

His balls feel abnormally heavy, like cannonballs straining a hammock. Drunkenly trudging up flights of dim stairs is a struggle, but the round ass swaying in his face is motivation enough. He thinks sloppily of biting it. She stops at her apartment door, digs around in her purse, procures keys, unlocks, opens, enters, flicks on a light.

Living room walls painted in smoker's time, stark darkness outside uncovered windows, the carpet much abused by tread and the errant cherries of cigarettes and joints. The floor groans, but seems to provide sufficient support. Around the room, dozens of black-and-white photos sit on tables and shelves, all showing well-dressed torsos cut off at their necks by the picture frames.

She walks into the kitchen; he trails behind with no particular purpose. Dropping her purse on the counter, she stands staring into the sink, captive to unshared thoughts. Stepping behind her, he grasps her dark brown ponytail, lifts it up, and begins gently kissing the back and sides of her neck. The kisses promptly devolve into prolonged wet sucks punctuated by aggressively nibbly bites.

Turning abruptly, she pulls her hair free of his grip and leaves the kitchen, walking into a tiny bathroom with a narrow shower and pedestal sink. He follows and stands obsequiously in the doorway as she unbuttons and unzips her jeans, tugs them down over her hips, slides her panties down, and sits on the toilet. She kicks the door closed in his face.

A blush, bluish
night,

alone in a lush drift with
soft

edges and hard
memories.

After a few minutes, the toilet flushes and she emerges. Stepping back into the living room, she finds him passed out prone on the couch, one arm dangling to the floor, head sideways, mouth agape and expelling some sort of half-gurgling, half-hissing noises like an old demonic radiator.

He's in the woods. A hazy dusk, a wincing moon, out-of-tune mosquitoes buzzing all around. With lumbering slowness, trees reach with their branches to nervously pick their own fruit and chew on it. Uneasy, they use their twigs to tweeze their leaves. An unnatural scene of dermatillomania, trichotillomania.

The clouds look cubist, sharp, ominous. The air is itchy. Ripples set out tentatively over muddy puddles, but quickly become too apprehensive and contract. Even the grass—an anxious green—seems to grow from some compulsion. He fixates on an odd sensation in the dirt, which is an extension of his nervous system, and feels pangs in his chest that concern him greatly. Pulsations building in his ears, he becomes increasingly sweaty, lightheaded, and unsure. His teeth are crumbling, creating the sounds and sensations of sucking on a mouthful of pebbles.

His lymph nodes force themselves out slowly and painfully through small holes in his skin and land with dull thuds on the soil. Wormly, they wriggle down and disappear into the ground. In years—thousands maybe—they will germinate and develop into unfulfilled urges. His liver spasms and his sclerae yellow at the thought of it.

Sunrise is the eye
opening, everything is

unfamiliar and jaundiced like a
birth

from which we do not wake.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *This story sprouted from an image in a dream: standing in a room surrounded by photos of bodies cut off at the neck. Somehow it merged with a fragment I'd written while reminiscing in Florida—where I currently live—about the almost supernatural atmosphere during heavy snowfalls late at night in Philadelphia, where I lived for a long time.*

Anyway, I'm influenced by surrealist art and literature, and often add dreamlike elements into my writing, and I tend to get more caught up in creating a certain mood than conveying a narrative. In fact, I've always written much more poetry than prose—probably in part because it lends itself more readily to that goal—but I've recently spontaneously started writing flash and microfiction, and exploring the potential of blending poetry into prose, as I do in this piece.

BIO: *Eric Mohrman is a writer living in Orlando, FL. He's the author of the chapbook Prospectors (Locofo Chaps, 2017), and his work has appeared in Gone Lawn, Eunoia Review, BlazeVOX, Ygdrasil, Defenestration, Moria, and other journals.*