

Short Fictions

by
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Spoiled Milk

I'm going to kill the factory. I'm going wear its bones around my head. It's sitting where the markets used to be, stamping pale words into the sky -- 'FRESH MILK' -- all its tubes and plumes jabbing at the stars and drink drink drinking all the birds out of the air.

I used to work in there, used to heave all the big boxes into truck bellies and click the pallet jack under impossible weights. Sometimes I'd nick stuff from morning tea -- some slice or a bickie, hide it real careful in a cocoon I made from a napkin so I had something for her when I got home. I loved that, giving a sweet thing to my sweet thing. That's all gone now. Only thing left is the smell of Strawberry Flavour, pink sugar that's too deliberate to taste like real strawberry; tastes like carnival lights, like plastic wrap.

I see cars rip past pulling lights along the night -- red streaks and yellow streaks smeared into the wind. I used to have a car only so I could drive her around in it. Windows down, music up, wandering. Makes sense that when I sold the car I lost the girl. Now it's just me and I can't get any light to settle on me before a car yanks it away; before the factory swallows it up and shines shines shines with all that stolen gleam.

I said all this to my mates as soon as the man from HR arrived. Soft cotton shirt, bulging belly -- a brand-new bougie, just getting accustomed to eating 20 dollar steaks every other night. I said: "He's gunna fire us. He looks at scuffs on shoes like hounds look at flesh. He's drooling for us to be feral bogan bludgers, he thinks we're lazy fucks who won't pull up our bootstraps. Trust me, it makes those 20-dollar steaks of his taste bloodier, more tender. He's sinking his teeth into his own ego. Just you watch, he'll kick us out the moment he can." But no no no, no one listened to me. They said to just 'keep my head down and prove him wrong', that the chip on my shoulder was showing. And look where we are now. No jobs, no sweet things, no hopes. For what? For fucking Strawberry Flavour? For that fat bastard from HR?

I march towards the silver fiend, the shiny glutton, and I slosh the truth around it in kerosene. For all the spoiled lives, all the blokes like me. 'SPOILED MILK, SPOILED MILK, SPOILED MILK' I say it again and again and again as the flames flick up and up and up, I say it for all the waste and for my girl and for my mates. The smell of Strawberry Flavour cooks into the night and I pray that bougie bastard can smell it too, the smell of clagged throats and sticky fingers crackling along with the flames.

*I light my ciggie on the pyre
and I join my hands in prayer:
"May he choke and die on ribeye!"
the smoke sings Hallelujah -
the fire eats the air*

Stitched Out



Q: Is there a ghost in the old bell tower?

A: Well, miss, that depends who you ask. The nuns will look at you all sour and tisk, like you hurt their feelings. If you run right up to the groundskeeper and whisper the question he just laughs at you and tips his big sunhat. If you ask Eloise McEwan in 2nd grade, she always cries. But if you wait for a storm to come, you can hear the ghost howling over your head.

Q: And how do you get into the tower, if all the ways are blocked?

A: You're the one who taught us that, miss. Historical Preservation, Heritage Listings, Antiquities. "It is typical in European countries to refurbish the inside of a building while keeping its heritage exterior."

Q: And why is that, do you remember?

A: So the world doesn't look so grey and clean all the time.

An approving nod meets a glassy stare.

Q: You were saying about reaching the tower?

A: Like you said miss, buildings with brand new insides have old faces, and old things sing their own songs. The walls around the tower are like that; tired, strong. You can fit between them if you know where the gap is, and you suck in your belly. If you scrape along for a while you reach a shaft going straight up. I threw some rocks up there, just to be sure, and then some of my sandwich.

Q: And why is that?

A: You taught me that, miss! Sharing is caring, and a quick way to make a friend.

A coffee is sipped, a scab is picked at.

Q: How many people are up there?

A: I don't know, miss. Whoever's up there, they don't move much. Like when you play musical statues, and everyone tries to hold in their breath, so they look more frozen. It stops their bellies growing and sinking but they start to shake around the edges because of all the breath they're holding in. Well, it's like that. It only moves around the edges.

Q: Are you telling me a lie?

A: No miss, you taught me that lying is a sin. That it's naughty.

A pair of lenses, wiped with soft cloth; the Velcro on a small shoe, ripped and stuck and ripped and stuck.

Q: And where is it now? The ghost?

A: That's simple miss, you taught me all about it! You said the dead are all sticky-footed and hollow. That they sigh too much. That if you could run your finger along the seams of the sky, you'd feel their

hairy heads all lined up in a row. And the ghost told me that no matter where in the sky she looked, those seams were all sewn shut -- all threaded-through and red. She's been stitched out, miss.

Q: Stitched out of where?

A: Oh miss. Don't make me say it.

Notes are taken as a storm claps at the window. A thumbnail is chewed while a mother's number rings through the telephone. And above it all, a howling, howling, howling...

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