

The Moat

There was no discernible reason why the fever broke when it did, or maybe there was but in her indulgence she was simply not able to recognize it. She liked what the fever did to her, although it left her in a supine and almost helpless position. Nevertheless she felt a sense of urgency

– It has to stop!

she told herself

– It has all gone too far, it needs to end right now and right here!

The end was what she feared most, but after all she was a mother and this came with responsibilities far beyond mere survival and extensive self care. She tended to think about her daughter with anguish, clearly she took after her and being reminded of that made her uncomfortable, a full twenty years her junior but none the wiser. She shook her head slowly, emulation really was a bitch, no way around it! Sure, due to her daughter's young age she was at times less apathetic and slightly more curious but overall equally self centered, both of them caged in their shared time-lapse perception of presence. Given their nearsightedness, she realized how awfully misfitting this metaphor appeared, sight really wasn't their strong suit. Sound and touch was more like it, above average hearing and an extraordinarily sensitive skin – she had proudly told her daughter many times – was what made them so special. This and the fact that they were the last of their kind, but she tried not to emphasize this aspect of their existence too much. Although in her heart of hearts she knew that in the end it all came down to this unbearable truth. Being the last of anything changes the way one experiences time, not so much the past and future, but clearly the presence. The future, she thought, was easy enough, the future was extinction, zero, nil, zilch. The past while stretching back some 55 million years was hardly more complicated. Dating back to an alien epoch when Europe was a cluster of tropical islands, when cat-sized horses galloped across North America, when wolflike carnivores were just beginning to wade into the ocean to start the very strange process of turning into whales. All over the planet, mammals were feeling out what it meant to be mammals, groping toward their best forms. A history of evolving adaptation, migration, resilience and finally depopulation. The story of a vast development, millennia in the making, that would come to a screeching halt the moment she and her daughter had vanished.

She could live with her past, she would have to live with her future, but it was the presence that felt unbearable to her, a life on the brink of extinction distorts the momentary, it forces existence into an ever extending purgatory of sorts and renders one dead before having actually passed away. No, they were not exactly walking dead, they had a sense of self and a wide range of emotions at their disposal to prove that, yet everything they did was at the same time unique and typical, a description of individual character and personality as much as a behavioral model ready to be set in stone for future memory. For fuck's sake, the two of them were their species, that's it and whatever they'd do was what could be expected of their kind! Character is destiny she used to lecture her daughter and wished she hadn't as the whole boot-strap-narrative that came along with it suddenly rang hollow to her. Clearly they were stuck, but stuck in a situation she recalled a preposterous friend describe as the theatre of all possibilities, naturally she laughed it away back then. Realizing later that what he meant by this ridiculous term was plain stinky old contingency with a spin, what a dork! But while contingency surely felt like a bitch, there must be a way for her to profit off of this misery. Not cashing in like everybody else did, more like just breaking even, wringing some meaning out of this. After all contingency plus time equals sense, or was it tragedy plus time equals meaning? She would have to ask her preposterous friend next time he was around.

– Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself / I contain multitudes.

A quote just short enough for her to remember and somewhat uplifting in the stream of dire thoughts that kept her mind racing. She had developed a habit of humming lately and whenever she felt distressed she would softly hum these verses to calm herself down. It seemed to her like times were increasingly tense, the moat that contained them clearly was drying out and the exposure, derived from being the last of their kind, was really getting to her. More often than not she felt raw and unprotected like a sole tree withering away amidst a vast desert. But it wasn't so much the exposure itself, that was upsetting her as the accumulative effect of being seen as rare and special. A growing sense of exceptionalism forced onto her and implanted in her daughter's impressionable mind by others. Over time all these iterations of their unique existence had given way to a feeling of being totally fenced off and left to dwell in utter loneliness. It would take more of her kind to break through this isolation, a good thing that she contained multitudes.

Although she could neither read nor write she wanted to leave a record for her daughter to consult in the times ahead, when she wouldn't be around any more. A record summing up her experiences, lessons in solitude and solidarity, as she would have to carry a weight way heavier than her own. She would start it with a verse, the only one she could memorize, but this would have to wait for some other time, right now she was tormented by the fever as concerned vets came in to check on her once more before night fall.

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