

A Revolution Against Her Skin

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When Dolores turned ninety-eight, the gods visited her in a daydream and touched her all over. When she refocused on the concrete world, she started to hear things. She thought she had lost it.

When they started to appear she was rubbing her right shoe up her left leg, trying to rescue the knee-high before it bundled like an oversized sock. The first woman wandered in and smiled at her. Dolores thought this was about the oddest thing that had ever happened. The woman's eyes reflected a shine coming from Dolores's direction, but Dolores didn't see any bright lights in the room. She knew something strange was afoot when the woman stepped toward her and sat in the seat next to her, rather than the open seat next to it. There's something odd about a human who doesn't mind a human, so surely this woman must be a spirit or vision or angel.

Dolores was knitting a scarf, pretending to be sane and alone, when they started touching her. The passengers at gate D53, including Dolores, tried to convince themselves that elderly women couldn't have orgasms as Dolores shrieked in their public air. Surely she was in pain. Someone should help that woman, they thought and averted their eyes from other eyes. With no one looking at her except the translucent images of gods, Dolores started hearing things.

The thought wasn't Dolores's, but it was in her head and it was illegally thinking, *love me love me love me*. It seemed to stream in to Dolores from every outward point, as if she were the center and all thought was drawn to her, and it was thinking, *dying dying dying*.

Dolores had been on the plane for five minutes and twenty-eight seconds before she noticed the pulsing. There it was, everywhere, in the sobbing baby, the wrinkly old couple, the chubby brunette, bumping and thumping. Each one squeezed out forbidden words, words that Dolores wouldn't dare to think, *regret rape insanity*, beat beat beat. Each pulse broke something, she was sure of it, but what? All of the words Dolores had never let herself say or think were rushing about and attacking her. She thought she had lost it, but really.

60

This is the way the night goes, the night goes.

Dolores is certain the black isn't nothing. It is some strange substance not entirely good that can't harm her, or can it? She flicks the switch and scurries to bed thinking, "Jesus protect me, will protect me, will protect me," and then lunges under the covers as well as she can, considering her age.

Dolores stares into the black. Although she can feel nothing when her body parts are out in *it*, she's convinced it's a substance not wholly good. She tells herself to close her eyes, but when she does, she feels the dark close in and opens them, searching for changes in the space. Maybe it moves only when she doesn't watch.

With her eyes open she lets her mind wander a bit. She picks at her nails, making little clicky noises to various children's rhymes as she surveys the perimeters of her mind. It's the TV show from an hour before or the phone conversation, when there's a conversation to think of. It's the following of driving directions, just to keep in practice. It's the names of various birds in her neighborhood or the names of various people she may have to talk to. Sometimes, it's her mother. She remembers how confused she was at the big thuds coming from such a tiny body as the woman walked from one end of the house to the other. And always it's the click click and the children's rhymes.

Then she remembers that her eyes are still open and rather dry and that she's never been able to fall asleep like this, at least none of the previous days. The knot forms in her chest as she considers either the torture of open eyes or the torment of her whole body exposed to the substance. She thinks herself in circles and at some random point rolls herself feet first onto the ground, thanks the Lord it's there, and thinks, "Jesus protect me, will protect, will protect, will protect me," all the way to the Jesus-shaped night light, and His holy image divides the substance to the far corners of the room and the air becomes not wholly evil.

This is the way the night goes, click click, so late in the evening.

The night goes.

40

The girl swings and her lover pushes her. She's old. She's too old for swinging, but there she is, hands turning red from her clutch on the metal, legs out, then in, then out, hair jumping about, laugh silenced under the music. How silly this all is, Dolores thinks.

The sun above the girl shines and the eyes shine and the metal shines and the shining shines. Dolores tries not to like the shine. Dolores thinks she should be suspicious of it. She's suspiciously interested in the shine. The shine makes her blush. She thinks things that shine are revealing something they shouldn't. The shine should be withheld, she thinks, but secretly wishes she could shine, too. She stows the wish away, underneath. It hurts to look right at it, so she looks away. The man has a smile made for this. His voice is thunder, and the shine intensifies, so Dolores moves on.

Always there's a murder here. Or a robbery. Or other violations. This is no good, these things aren't considered. Consideration of consideration of these things isn't considered.

Dolores gives up on finding a new program and

switches to the cooking show on channel nine. There's nothing particularly bright or dark about cooking. It's a gray show. Dolores color-codes her world in brights, grays, darks. She avoids the extremes. Anything with an opposite can't be trusted. Bright, dark. Black, white, love, hate. It's best to stay in between these things. Big, small. Old, young. She does her best. Comedy, drama. To stay in between. Male, female.

The TV in front of her tells her to blend for five minutes. She hears silence underneath the woman's voice, so she turns up the kitchen TV. It tells her to mix blue and yellow to make green. The voices of the two women haven't yet covered the silence, so Dolores picks up another remote and turns on the radio in her bedroom. Classical music accompanies the women and Dolores tries to hear them all at once, filling every empty space in her mind.

She thinks, hears, smells, tastes, feels gray. Life is as she wants it. God has provided her with what she needs. Life is acceptable.

Dolores wonders what the opposite of TV is. She can't think of one. It has earned her trust.

Black, white, male, female, up, down. Weren't these all the same things? Colors, sexes, directions, words, descriptions. Dolores feels a little uncomfortable with this thought. It overtakes the noise in the room and wonders if finitude and infinity work like the other opposites. Belief and disbelief. Dolores becomes a nihilist and an anti-nihilist because aren't they the same thing anyway? Dolores realizes she's been considering things. She panics, she asks for forgiveness for her thoughts, she turns up the TV: "When the water's lukewarm, add the seasoning at a moderate speed. Not too much, not too little."

Gray.

Dolores stares into the eyes that it took from her. She started going to church so her mother would agree to watch it. She enjoys church; it's comforting. She has a Father, unlike this bastard-child. Dolores officially gives it to her mother the month after this one.

The church tells her, God is good. All the time, all the time.

22

Dolores slept too long this day. She wakes and the strange bright flecks in her sight make her think she must be emitting her own light. Her standing feels like falling, so she grabs along the wall as she walks to the living room couch where she makes a list of the things broken. All the noise makers in her life have been silenced. This worries her a bit because she's sure she hears something that shouldn't be there. It's less than a whisper, but when she makes out the word "love," she grabs her knees to her face and holds on. She releases at a knock and opens the door, smiling again.

Walter is a polite boy. They were married six months ago but hadn't found the time to combine their things in one living space. They decided that today's the day, what with her necessities being out of order; Dolores would change houses.

Moving is an enjoyable task. Things are planned neatly, and they're not upsetting or exciting. Walter whistles as he drives and Dolores hums along. The car is silent, except for the tune. Dolores focuses all her attention on his tune. She wants to impress him with her humming, wants him to think she's talented. Wants him to think she'll be a good wife.

Their house has a short driveway and a tiny flower box in the front. Walter's allergic to animal hair, but they could get a fish. Dolores wants to think she'll be a good wife; he'll be a good husband. She puts her pillow and comforter on the couch. She's not comfortable with sleeping in the

bedroom yet. Walter doesn't protest.

They discuss politics and religion. These are things Dolores doesn't mind talking about. They're safe, despite the fact that everybody makes a big fuss over them, they're safe. She knows they guard her from the really dangerous subjects. People think she's talking seriously, think they're talking seriously, when they discuss politics and religion. But Dolores knows these things can't harm her.

"People get so uptight," Walter says.

"Arguing over religion is like arguing over the weather. Just look outside," Dolores says.

"If I'm hot when you're cold, what's the big deal? If I say it's hot, and you say it's cold, aren't we both right?"

"God is good," Dolores says. "All the time," Dolores says, "God is good."

Walter turns on the radio and sits on the right side of the couch.

They live together separately for six months before Walter starts finding ways to touch her. He peeks through the doorway as she undresses and dresses and he brushes specks of dust off of her chest, and he smooths the make-up on her face, and this alarms her, but she says nothing. This night he convinces her she shouldn't sleep on the couch, and the next night he stays awake convincing himself if you're married, it isn't rape.

5

Although she's only five, Dolores knows people think her Daddy is strange. When he walks, he always looks about to jump. When he talks, his tongue is like a dog and peanut butter. When he looks, he overlooks. He's a glazy man, he's a hazy mind. He flips and dips his tongue when he talks. He creeps in a heap when he walks. His belt, his hands, his mouth, his legs. Watch out for these things, she knows, and she is five. People think he's strange; she thinks he's Daddy.

Dolores hides under the covers at night. Jesus is on

until the substance enters at night. He goes when the dark comes. The dark comes, so she squeezes her eyes shut and there's the closing in, then there's the closing in, in, in, it always closes in. Its tongue is like a slimy dog and maggoty peanut butter.

4

Today's Sunday. Sunday means church for the saints, the good people, the heaven-bound. Dolores pinches her four year old knees. She traces her thumb along line after line of skin. She wobbles her body back and forth in the pew. She crosses her eyes and looks at the tip of her nose. She folds her fingers together and looks at the patterns she created while the man with the booming voice boom boom booms about the room. Dolores sits cross-legged on the pew and looks cross-eyed at the blonde curls pulled taut between her fingers. She focuses her eyes on the hair, then refocuses to the boom man, hair, boom man, hair. A clunk on the back of her head tells her she should be listening to the good word, whatever that is, so she stares forward and dreams she's a puppy and can dig in the ground and chew on things. She suppresses giggles, she secretly grins, she counts to four.

Dolores and her dad walk hand in hand out of church. Dolores takes two strides to his one and occasionally skips or hops. She listens to the people talk and is upset when she hears an old woman calling her father strange. There's a shine in her eye and she yells, "Well I love my Daddy, and I hope you die!" He grabs her with one arm and jump-runs through the doorway and into the woods. He throws her against a tree and his tongue is a fish.

"The hell is wrong wit you?" he's saying. "Don't you know things like that ought naught be spoke? Ahm gonn teach you, ahm gonn." Dolores expects him to come after her, so she grabs her knees, but he doesn't. Instead, he grabs dirt and sticks and throws them at her. He grabs stones and pine cones and throws them at her. Her words

are in her head, and she can't stop them. Her blood is on her skin, and it won't wipe clean. Her body's beat is loud and fast and she vomits the forbidden words. She wants to eat it all, to shove the mess back inside where it's hidden from the world and him and herself.

When he stops throwing and she stops bleeding, she takes the words "love" and "die" and locks them underneath. She tucks them behind her skin. She hides them in her blood. She hides them from herself within herself, all over herself. She finds new forbidden words and continues to shove them under her skin. She worries she'll run out of space but continues to stuff. She stuffs words and feelings and faces and experiences. She shuts herself tight, her elastic skin stretching to accommodate new naughty things.

No more. No more love, death. No more danger.

98

Dolores thought she had lost it. On the airplane, a woman who touches her whispers "Do it" into her ear. Soon they are all whispering things. Into her face, they say, "Bleed," "Shine," "Love." Dolores holds back. She clutches the sides of chairs as she, head first, stumbles into the bathroom. She looks sideways at the old woman in the mirror, knitting hooks in hand, and forces the tiny objects into her ears. Her mind goes blurry and she sees blood on her hands and it looks like shiny love. Soon it's all over the mirror in sticky handprints and all over the counter and walls. It pulses in her veins, it pounds against her skin, it begs and pleads. She can suppress the revolution no more, so she holds her breath and smashes her head on the mirror and smashes her face against the broken mirror. It spouts from her, it gushes and pours. It is blood, tears. It is warm illegal thought bursting into the open air. It is forbidden secret private parts. It is withheld passion sex frenzy. It is attack violence menstruation baby. It is swinging smiling shiny girl. It is four year old vomit giggles hiding. It is

twiggy frail arms substance heavy fuming. It is puppy-chewing dirt-digging bloody blood. It is happiness and confusion. It is weakness. It is. And it is everywhere. She tries to look away, but it is everywhere. It is in her eyelids and under the toilet seat and between her legs, it is wrapped around her tongue and gurgling in her throat and she flees from the room covered with Dolores into faces that cry out and look away, into new walls and into carpet. It is shining. It is shining. It is shining. It is stunning. She always loved shining. A reflection. It is stunning. She watches it soak the carpet around her. She watches her soak the carpet around her. She is shining. She always loved.

Dolores had thought that she had lost it, but she knew, really. Really, she knew, and slowly became all shine.