

12/5/08

I we she

On Monday I push on the silver handle of the butcher's shop and hear the bell that always chills us there was a bell like this at the place that father used to take me he would go there to see the lady out the back while I waited and kept quiet and if I kept quiet I would get a lollipop that would last half an hour if you let it sit on one side of your tongue in a pool of sticky saliva without sucking

The shop smells like a cold messy kill there are two other people here but I don't know them she's not here yet I walk to the counter today is the day she comes to make her weekly meat order, and I will hear her talk and watch her face and her body hopefully she is wearing something that allows us to see her better than what we saw last week when it was raining I am asked if I'm right am I right of course I'm right it doesn't take much more to say *Can I help you?* but one never gets this in a butcher shop because it's all manly types in stripy blue aprons and knife holsters that knock like cow's bells when they swagger from the cool-room to the bandsaw that cuts through bones very easily I want to try the bandsaw I like the little green knob they press to make it start we like its nasty whirr

I say I'm not ready yet and I walk along the counter looking through the curved glass that would cost a lot if we smashed it right now because a piece of glass that big and curved just like that would be very expensive to replace we look at the butcher's face and imagine his mouth open and eyes disbelieving as shards of glass glitter all over his pretty rows of flaccid red flesh there are big sausages and small sausages and even though I like the idea of small sausages I would never eat them because they are for children and that wouldn't be right she doesn't have children yet I'm sure this is so because there is no ring on the wedding finger and this is a respectable part of the city and of all people she would not have children out of wedlock the thought of her being defiled makes it a little harder for us to breathe and we become slightly unsteady and put our hand out towards the curved glass and my fingertips brush against its coolness the other people are looking at us so we pull ourselves together I am now back in control and again I am asked if I'm right although this time I think it's because the butcher thinks I look unsteady I tell him I'm right and am looking for sausages to have in bread he points to fat sausages and we want to scream at him thin sausages please I say carefully ten, thank you

The butcher shop doorbell tinkles and makes Father emerge from the backroom tucking his shirt in and smiling at the lady putting the lipstick back on we stop the darkness taking over by thinking about sausages and turn to look at the butcher shop door and I see her closing the door behind her we turn back to the counter casually as if we don't care her heels click nicely on the tiled floor and I watch in the long mirror on the wall at the back of the shop behind the counter she has spent more time on her hair today we look across in her general direction, but carefully confine my line of sight to slimy pile of honey soy chicken wings beneath the glass I see her slender index finger point to the bacon and we are aware of her voice but are too busy watching her nailpolish she has never worn such a deep shade of

red we inhale and exhale for a moment and focus on the brainy coils of mince in front of us red fingernail polish is most unexpected

'That's three twenty, thanks,' says the fat butcher with the hairy mole on his chin he has intruded on the moment and we want to smash his face with the back of his cleaver I pass him five dollars and look past his retreating form at her heart-shaped face it's hard to see all her features because the butcher hasn't cleaned the mirror properly and this is very disturbing despite the disgusting smudges I see red lipstick inhale exhale inhale exhale I turn to examine a poster showing all the grisly bits of cows that can be eaten and steal a glance at her form just three metres from me her ankles are clearly defined beneath slender calves that tell me her weight ratio is correct she's in sensible black shoes this concerns us I see a freckle on the inside of the calf which is not good but can be fixed our eyes slide up her freshly pressed black dress and we enjoy the curve from the thigh to the waistline which is pulled in perfectly by a slender leather belt today has been a good day there are many things to remember for later the fat butcher is watching me a little too carefully and I decide it's time to leave the doorbell is loud over my head and brings Father back once again I'm crying by the time we open the front gate of home

On Tuesday the sun never comes up he hated Tuesdays because the money had always run out by then I think it's best to stay inside with the curtains drawn to stop the world coming in I sit on the floor of the hallway in the dark listening to the sound of the clock he's here with us getting bigger each time the pendulum swings he stuffs his yellow fingers into a leather pouch and teases strands of tobacco apart dabbing them into the hollow of his palm he takes the Tally Ho paper from his bottom lip and slips it beneath the tobacco tucking its tapered edge and rolling the little parcel between his calloused thumb and forefinger he raises it carefully to his pasty tongue and his eyes lift to stare at me I look down and thump thump goes my heart I hear the rip of a match and a hoarse inhale the clank of his belt buckle slices the air and I try and become very small

When I wake up at lunchtime I eat the sausages but the gas has been cut off again and they're wet and earthy at 1pm the telephone rings and the little answering machine clicks and then I hear my own voice saying to leave a message It's my brother, who has rung to talk to me about the police he has a nasty tone in his voice we want to grab the telephone and scream at him but he would then know that we are home and he will come and we will have to open the door to the world

Wednesday starts out as a better day Wednesday is payday and the day He would study the form there's a very strong chance that we can watch her buy fruit and vegetables at the market it's 5am and Frank is barking again next door Frank will be fed a special meal tonight I can't afford to lose early morning sleep not when we are so close and time is running out we must be sharp I want a shower but there is no hot water so I wipe down with a wet towel I lean into the blue haze of the fluorescent tube the reflection is not me my stringy arms are disappointing but are capable of much the dark rings under my eyes concern me Frank must be dealt with my hair is matted in one place so we flick open the hunting knife and cut part of the fringe away we dress quickly and walk to the train station

At the market I wander through the delicatessen and pause at the counter of the fresh poultry shop the sticky sheen of the pink flesh is entrancing there's congealed blood at the end of a fine vessel on one of the chicken breasts the red drip is perfectly formed and the light from the glass cabinet traces a white stripe across the tiny sphere it's quite beautiful I try to look away but it's everything right now the sound of the market dies away and the darkness sweeps in the bare light bulb in the shed swings its long cord straining against an old cobweb He has finished with me for the last time He turns away twisting his torso to the side to insert the steel-capped belt into the first loop of his pants my heart is pounding I look over to the sack where I have hidden the hatchet I reach in and step forward quickly quietly carefully raising my hand high just like we practised it enters between his shoulder blades punching through the flannelette shirt mashing through flesh and muscles with the sound of a gumboot pulling from mud he falls forward, crushing his face into the steel vice on the bench the body falls off the end of the axe and lands face down in curls of fine wood from the lathe don't know what this is and it threw me out mercifully we lift the axe again this time it comes down harder and goes in deeper and we are glorious we look at our hands and they're covered with hundreds of perfectly formed droplets beautiful and then it goes on and on and on

'What would you like?' says the man with the blue apron and the white gumboots 'You OK?'

A bead of sweat falls from the tip of my nose

'Thank you nothing just now,' I say turning away and wiping my sleeve against my face

I position myself in an area where I can see across all the stalls and can view three of the four entrances she's late today I wait as long as I can but I'm not shopping and people will start to watch us if we're not careful by 10am we are shaking the man in the poultry shop has looked at me three times in the last fifteen minutes she is very very late this is most unexpected

At half-past ten we take the main exit and stand on the pavement looking for her shape but seeing only all the wrong types of hair and bodies crying doesn't help so we decide to go home and the very thought of this makes us feel black because there's nothing for us at home and to go there without any of her this morning is all wrong

At the railway crossing the boom gates are down and the red lights are flashing and the bell is loud we stand very close to the tracks and as the front of the train goes past the driver looks at me and he's yelling behind the glass we can't hear him the big wheels thud slow and dangerous over the join in the track and the leading edge of the wheels would slice like a guillotine if you laid your leg underneath them the train is so heavy that there would be no pain I want to put my hand out and touch the train but it's dirty and has disgusting graffiti on it this is very disturbing

I stop briefly at the butcher shop to buy some diced meat for Frank's meal tonight and the fat butcher with the hairy mole doesn't smile at me like he knows something but we are very calm and smile at him and pay him and everything is under control until we open the door and the doorbell rings and I stop and there He is, standing there across the road staring at me thump thump thump we look down and hurry along the pavement towards home expecting him to put his filthy yellow hands on our shoulders at any moment at the corner shop we quickly look around and He is not there we peek around the corner to see if He is waiting for us near the house and we see flashing blue lights and police cars and men in suits on our verandah and policemen carrying bits of Him in plastic bags back to

their van and there is the next door neighbour just outside his gate in his dressing gown with Frank on a lead barking at them

Everything is so hard now and I am very tired from this morning's disappointments we lean against the weatherboards of the corner shop and look up at the grey sky misty rain the droplets are so fine that they fall in silence I turn and throw the brown paper bag with Frank's meat into the bin the rain is gentle and soothing on our forehead as I head back up the pavement towards the butcher shop and there up ahead we see her outside the shop inhale exhale inhale exhale she's placing a brown paper bag into the nice wicker shopping bag she always has she has that three quarter grey raincoat on again but you can still see her finely shaped calves she opens out an umbrella continues up the pavement and turns at the next street as we pass the butcher's shop we look sideways at our reflection inside the shop the fat butcher with the hairy mole looks up and watches me pass we turn away and walk quickly to the corner

We have made up some ground she is much closer now just twenty or thirty paces away we stand watching how her hips swing from side to side while the umbrella remains perfectly steady and this is excellent the rain is falling more heavily now a car passes with a long swish and we move forward our steps in tune with hers left right left right just like an army drill she stops at a gate and is suddenly out of sight we step toward the road to see which house it is and watch the gate close number seven by the time we push open the gate she's in the house a light goes on in the hallway and the sound of her heels on floorboards fades away I step onto the chequered red brick path and up onto the wooden verandah softly softly unrenovated victorian needs paint there's rainwater on the decking from a hole that has rusted through the bullnose verandah I push my fingers against the frame of the bottom pane on the front window but it's locked we continue along the verandah step down and slip past a mountain bike in the side passageway a frosted bathroom window is too high to access everything we are seeing is new so we stop and look so no mistakes are made there's a wheelie bin in front of a side gate made of tall pickets we try the gate but it's locked we push the wheelie bin closer jump up and step over the top of the gate onto the first railing there may be a dog and we are angry that we didn't bring the meat we step onto the second railing then down to the cement path that runs toward the back corner of the house he's sitting on the cement path up ahead staring he's smiling with big yellow teeth and we bring out the hunting knife and hold it out to show him that we can hurt him again I take a step forward in front of the window of the second bedroom He cannot be here not now I see myself in the reflection of the window and she is right there looking at me with her coat off now and she's screaming and running out of the room into the hallway

'No... NO!' I yell out to her through the glass I want to hold her to calm her she mustn't be scared of him we can protect her.

We push at the frame of the window but it's locked firm we smash at the window with the hunting knife but it doesn't break through we hit the glass again and it cracks slightly near the frame and again the crack grows we look up and He is gone from the path so we run to the corner He may be in the house this is bad now we must be quick we slip on the wet bottom step of the back verandah and stumble up to the back door we hear raised voices in the hallway she's crying and calling out for help

'LEAVE HER,' I scream through the door 'GET AWAY ... NOW!'

We smash into the door with our shoulder but it is very strong we run across to the window and look across the kitchen and she is on the phone talking loudly staring at me and there He is right behind her smiling at me.

‘NO!’ I smash at the window and she’s screaming now ‘LEAVE HER, YOU BASTARD.’ I’m half sobbing as I smash through the top pane with the butt of the knife my hand pushes past the glass and there’s a sharp sting against the underside of my forearm I turn my arm over and there’s blood seeping through a long clean gash in the skin I pull my hand out and smash into the pane reaching through the widened gap for the lock I’m panicking now she has run out of the room and He is nowhere to be seen and I can’t release the lock I hear the front door open and I turn to run down the steps and around the corner of the house then I am at the side gate and up and over but we catch the leg of our pants on the tip of a picket and it tears through and rakes at the inside of my leg I push back and then forward and over landing awkwardly on the wheelie bin beautiful red droplets splashing into the pool of rain that has settled on its yellow plastic lid

We get to our feet and run along the side passage around the corner and up onto the deck the front door is wide open and the gate is ajar we must be quick now

On the pavement we stop and look to the corner she is running she turns mid stride and whimpers running on frantically up ahead He leans out from behind one of the plane trees smiling at me inhale exhale inhale

We run now very fast the lady at number fifteen is at the gate and shrieks cowering away
‘PUT THE WEAPON DOWN. NOW.’

He has her at the corner we slow down holding the hunting knife high at Him
‘DROP IT! DROP IT! NOW.’

Yellow teeth yellow fingers touching her defiling her we’re crying inhale exhale inhale
‘NOW! DROP THE WEAPON.’

He must pay He will not do this to her He must not do it to her
‘PUT IT DOWN!’

We walk forward we’re stronger than He thinks now inhale exhale inhale

Exhale.