

Royal

It had been his birthday today, and she had brought him blue flowers - so many blue flower's. She had enthusiastically filled the back of her old Morris Minor Estate, which she liked to refer to as her 'vintage vehicle', a term she would in her jocular moments also use to apply to herself. Blue was her colour, her colour of choice to enhance the titian tones of her hair, that visual announcement of her alleged sanguine humour. She also liked the spiritual implications and connotations associated with blue. She had been a nurse and wore the colour every day during her working life and so imbued it with qualities such as caring, empathetic, other- worldliness and ephemerality. The colour of Our Lady's robes, she would often in her more creative episodes envision an illuminated royal blue thread binding this world to the next.

In her professional capacity she sadly observed that, without exception, no one had ever brought flowers to a patient with mental illness. A physical illness almost always warrants a bouquet or, at the very least an offering of fruit. An illness of the mind usually instilled fear and incomprehension in the patient's family and friends. Visitors to her charge ward indulged in colourless silences, and eagle eyed surveillance accompanied by darting glances registering slight nuances of patient behaviour on the judgemental sliding scale of 'relative normality'. There was compassion of course, but it held hands firmly, and understandably, with apprehension.

Now though the patients and staff had all long gone and so had he, he was no longer housed in the building that stood to attention before her, albeit half- heartedly. Some things remained unchanged, the redundant flowerless pots, symbolic, cruel taunts of what could have been, an unfulfilled promise. Flowers cast as sirens, for what else could explain their absence? Were they deemed too manipulative, suggestive, abundant with vibrancy and allure and restricted from permeating the atmosphere with their olfactory calls? Were the impersonal clinical interiors fearful of being imprinted with the permanent stain of colour? This imposing house, its shutters cracked to reveal its insipid yellow wallpaper sliding down upon itself, heavy with the burden of an aged confidante holding many and disparate whispered secrets, past confessions and pleas for help. Blown plaster patches of wall pregnant and imbued with hopes and disappointments and heart breaking resignation.

It was getting darker and a thorn had buried itself into her glove, her hand though remained unscathed, it only sought the sanctuary of the suede patch on her thumb. She smiled, exhumed the offending article and discarded it; no more pricks of conscious for her, literal or otherwise. Tonight she planned to orphan her decades of sadness and shed the spectres of her past to

embrace the new unhindered 'creatively moral' self however late in the day. The door opened easily, she had thought of ringing the bell for old times sake but it would be futile, it was never going to be answered. She had kept a set of keys after her retirement and the familiar old faded scent of the ironically titled 'Flora' disinfectant greeted her begrudgingly in the hall, underpinning the medicinal landscape of the retired home. Had this unnecessary joyless interior ever helped the personal interiors of its inhabitants? She hoped it had but feared both its lack of colour metaphysically and decoratively. She had worked there as a young nurse during the decade which swung for a few but remained static for the majority. Now the once well-intentioned building had become superfluous, naked without its souls and furniture and still full of its own regimented self-importance. Stripped of its officiousness it was scheduled to be demolished in the morning.

The digger loitered hungrily by the building awaiting to devour its stone meal at breakfast time, but for now it seemed to sleep soundly generously allowing the building to bask in its last nocturnal light and granting it permission to play a final hide - and- seek with the shadows and moonlight within its many rooms. All the worries it held in its walls will be lifted for eternity in the morning. The moth eaten drapes shivered with wild abandon and discarded sepia stained textiles and crumpled papers twirled in draughty excitement like Cinderella at her only ball. No bouquets had ever lodged at this establishment, unlike the hospitals, which displayed its corsages like a group of Victorian courtesans, or a pride-swelling winners table at a rosette festooned country fair gymkhana. This building had never ever been to the ball.

Tonight, her mission would be to carpet the long disused A1 ward with thousands of blue flowers; delphiniums; blue roses; lobelia; lilacs; bluebells; forget-me-not's and African violets. For hours she scattered flowers like confetti with random haste until eventually the floor was clothed with a plush iridescent cloak of ultramarine, cerulean and every other imaginable blue hue. Celestial and aesthetically glorious, it was conceived to ape the sea or impersonate the sky or pastiche a bluebell wood, the imaginary world outside was being courted inside for a 'one night only' experience, an ostentatious offering to those whose spirits remained trapped. The expansive aromatic floral bouquet smothered the fraudulent sanitized smell of antiseptic which had burgled every room. Tonight she was Empress Josephine that keeper of both Napoleon and exotic flowers and not Nurse Josephine, the girl who had stuck to the rigid formalities, rules and stringent nursing practises of her day, She danced upon that blanket of blue, releasing with every determined step an opera of scent, dancing away the negative connotations of blue, its formality, officialdom and melancholia; qualities she wanted exorcising from her life. This enormous ghost bouquet, a fecund present to the souls who once lived there, a memento mori and most

importantly an apology to her father who's birthday it was today, a long term inhabitant of the building and who like his fellow patients never even received a mere petal during his stay.

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