

SIMPLE TALES

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A CURSE

He was a well loved man. He went to the café and the faces looked up, blue glow and caffeine, and they loved him. They loved him.

He was shot in the street. A word! the shooter said, full of hate. Two ugly words!

He had a funeral to which no sons or daughters came. He didn't have them and his parents had disowned him. They loved and disowned, unable to own such a man.

On the coast his mother looked at the boats. The dinghies bobbed and the sails swayed. A pod of dolphins shot for the sky.

Arthur, she said, I wish we'd had a son. I wish we'd had a boat.

Yes, he sighed. I wish we'd had the time.

The funeral was a party of hats and champagne. They loved the man, this gentle man. The man who'd cursed God so.



WET

A small boy laughed at him as he stumbled from the bar-room steps. Manuel! the father scolded, and the boy skipped on down the street.

It'd been like that all morning, these small boys and their names. It'd been like that all year.

He took in the mail at his front steps. *Mr. Smith: You're in danger of repossession. Mr. Smith: Vote for me. Mr. Smith: You're time is near.*

He stumbled to the top of the basement steps. Maude, he shouted, bring up some beer! But she was working—her day at the plant—and the steps were steep.

He got a Coke and sat on the couch. The weather said it'd rain by noon. It said it like that, and then like this: *que va a llover al mediodia.*

He stumbled down his short front steps. The sky was wild

and dark. The dust was brown and wet. He'd too be lashed,
before he made the bar.



SIMPLE TALES

He'd been a millionaire for about four days. That's how it worked—one story in and then comes the money.

It was a story about a man who killed a woman. Those were the ones that made the money. Turn it around and you wouldn't get a dime.

The man killed the woman because she was so beautiful. She was tall, shaped like love, and he ached for her. Yes, he ached for her. He killed her because of all that love.

The story was plain-to-speak. Love like that always is. He wrote a noun and then a verb, and then another like that, again. The money like death came rolling in. Death in its hands holds the diamond.

The dialogue came quickly. You are the shape of the sun, he said. You are the blood on the red-spoiled ground. The dialogue and then the violence and the man running for his life toward the sea.

For four days he was a wealthy man. Four days, and then like that was the ruin of him. Death comes quickly and is gone. Fame like death spills out on the ground.



SOME UNOBSERVED

She put her hat in the middle of the sidewalk and took the bench. For half an hour, the people stepped around it. It was a big hat and red.

At home she asked her son what he was doing. He was dressed in black and his fingernails blue.

He put his chin on the top of her head. I don't know, he said, I'm sad.

My love, she answered. My great one.

He drifted through the door, her true-loved ghost of hair and clothes.

On Saturday they went to the park, husband, ghost, and she.

You two are quiet, the husband said. Through his bottle the bright sun shone.

Yeah, she said, I guess we are. She missed her hat, her sad, unreasonable hat.



LOST SEAS

The guys sat on the porch. That was where they had all the beer. Hey, they crowed, out onto the walk, Oh hey!

Soon as she got home she wanted a shower. She swam in her skin and it was like oil and salt. Why? she thought. And why?

Her boyfriend got home at midnight and they watched the movie about dancing. The woman wore a yellow dress that fit like film. The camera liked to see her work.

This is good, her boyfriend said, about the movie, or about the salt he licked from his popcorn hands.

Why? she asked, about either one.

She had a dream about her brother who wore a Navy suit. He looked at his magazine as the water frothed beside him. Oh man, he said at the magazine, Oh *man*.

She woke with the covers to her neck, as her boyfriend watched the ceiling.

You cried, he said, out loud, and then he turned to rock her.



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