

## Chapter I: A High Room

Jason enters his room, high at the top of the house. Through the gauze of his exhaustion, as the tensions within him roll away like spirals of steam, his surroundings begin to transform. The floors fill with oceans that turn furniture into islands awaiting the images of his waking life. When the first figure appears in the late evening light, he follows in her path to the lumber room.

He entered the room  
with the early evening, placed  
his coat on the scrubbed table,  
locked the door, and sat  
watching through the dormer window.  
The street below looked in blankness back,  
its opaque stare  
shining through a haze of amber,  
its cobbles,  
like corneas of the dead,  
crawling with shadows.  
Each of the solitary figures he saw  
he fixed with a fierce gaze;  
and receiving this gaze,  
hurrying on,  
each of them seemed  
to take a part of him  
and carry it off,  
unknowing and anonymous,  
through the falling curtains of rain.

And when there didn't seem  
anything left of him  
to be taken,  
he let his hollow frame  
fall back on the bed,  
whose high wooden struts  
seemed to catch the light  
leaping to surrounding walls  
from the gridded fires;

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Never before had loneliness drained him  
like this.

He felt its amorphous presence  
growing  
in this last stronghold,  
its agents,  
assuming the shape of objects.

Under the cover  
of the encroaching gloom  
he felt their breathing,  
and, as the shadows rose,  
their linking dark hands.

So, he knew,  
the ring would close.

He leapt to his feet,  
grabbed furiously for matches.

In the instant of light  
his room re-emerged  
to assure and calm,

to rescue from an exile  
that was almost complete.

And now,  
there again  
were the unmoving friends  
like frozen animals:  
his menagerie  
of chairs and wood  
and stone,  
though even they  
seemed more distant  
and strange,  
dipped in the light  
of the candle's blue flame.

And he sensed all about  
the touch of visitation,  
a dissolving of shadows, presences  
of vacancy that pulled  
him to the spaces they absented.

Wheeling, he tried to conjure heroes, his captains  
from the early years,  
his idols of pubescence.  
He stretched for unseen hands,  
spun to the touch  
of phantom breaths, missed,  
caught, a retinal image, glimpsed  
drift-dust, a window,  
stretching lands.  
His exhaustion skewed  
his sight to perceptions of extremity.  
He sat down.  
The room bulged and moved.

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In the next moment he heard  
thousands crying for release  
in the red cellars  
of his head, their cries  
more fevered with each passing second.

His skull  
seemed to crack as they rushed  
out like flocks of birds,  
as thick as smoke,  
beating the panes of his eyes,  
the flies of Beelzebub.

He sensed further  
extraordinary changes both  
within and without,  
as though spaces  
were being cleared,  
vacuums created  
in readiness for some masque  
or play,  
or visitation.  
And he was able,  
for the first time  
since skies of seaside,  
to let the coils slip away –  
the twists of tension,  
the racks of worry that  
even now were spiralling  
down to his feet  
and seemed to roll away  
like bundles of wire on the wind.

And he realised  
that his eyes too felt freed  
from some fine mesh  
he had not before perceived  
as fibres of fear  
were washed like cataracts.

Already the landscape  
of his room was changing,  
had changed. The chairs,  
the looking glass, the years  
of lost lumber – all drifted  
through oceans of helical vapours  
that poured  
from his feet  
into islands, forests and turrets  
for the fevered figures of his head.

For each awaited  
new occupants, it was clear.  
Such vistas they looked on.  
The grilles  
of the fireplace had become  
a portcullis,  
black gates  
to hold the groans of the world,  
distanced  
by seas from the dresser,  
whose bottles of bric-a-brac now  
rose in minarets  
from the ramparts of wood.

Each part of the room (and no doubt each room in the house), had become a land, an eidolon, separated by a steam that increased its acreage with each second, obscuring the waters that were surely beneath; each awaiting its tenant, its Queen.

And Jason knew that only he could install her; for this night was his night in a way no night had ever been before – to construct and govern according to whim.

This was the land he had begged for.

Yes, all night  
he'd see ghosts  
rising  
in stone  
from the dreaming day,  
more tangible now.  
For only here,  
in darkness,  
could he give them shape,  
those movers  
of his waking life;  
time  
for their consideration,  
a sorting into chambers  
before their light dissolved,  
before  
again he lived out their drives.

Her first.  
Jason sat up.  
Her first: his first mover,  
his blood moon.  
But on which ground  
to meet her?

His eyes flew round  
the room,  
landing  
on each visible minaret:  
the fireplace  
with its cages of genii  
locked in the coals;  
the mountainous  
tables of stone;  
the jungles that sprang  
from the fronded ferns.

It was then  
he saw the start  
of her slow formation,  
gently emerging  
from beyond the waters  
and the islanded  
lumber, and detached  
from all of it,  
falling  
in soft showers  
of lunar light  
through  
the half-opened  
shutters of the high  
window, sculpted  
by the blades.

And beyond  
her, in an emerging  
night, stars lit nets  
to gather hair  
that tumbled out

of the firmament  
in lost jets  
ripped from the pages  
of past skies,  
cascading  
through this one window  
on her lambent head  
and drifting again outside,  
across the pillowed clouds.

And from eyes,  
that pierced holes in heaven  
to pull in worlds,  
and from her skin,  
that burnt with inner lucency,  
her song rose up  
in silence  
and filled the room.

It told  
of how her melting hair  
quivered through his finest nerve;  
that in his veins  
her body swam,  
flushing every fantasy.  
He felt her open  
all his pores  
as in the growing  
beads of sweat  
she raised  
his each forever world.

Her first:  
his first mover, first blood moon.

Come.  
And she advanced  
in the jet,  
hair in tides  
across her candle skin,  
her hands outstretched,  
ripening.

He ran  
forward, falling,  
moving senseless feet,  
falling  
through her eyes,  
her smile.

And door-frames of wood,  
reflecting  
their oblongs  
on the flooded floors  
as gates into heaven might  
rest on the reflecting seas,  
framed his crashing progress  
as he passed  
below lintels  
and followed to the lumber room,  
sprawling on its boarded decks.

## Chapter 2: The Lumber Room

Its shutters burst open by the storm outside, its dust-sheets blown into sails and its webs to rigging, the lumber room transforms to a boat with the first queen of the night now as its figurehead. Fragments of his childhood memories conjure into a masque around her. Jason watches as her form recedes to dissolve as card in the raining seas beyond, and with the voyage over, he turns the handle of the far wall, set as in a cliff-face, to enter the conservatory.

Moonlight,  
given substance  
by dust,  
breaks in bars  
through the broken shutters.  
Glass,  
given its own face  
by dust,  
hangs  
mute and inscrutable  
on walls  
peeling their histories  
backward:  
infantile scrawl  
on the bared plaster  
where all around rear the bestial shapes  
of silent, sheet-draped lumber.  
Outside, beyond  
the broken blind,  
glaucous filaments of energy,

as eyes of insects  
in molten resin,  
stare jaundiced  
through their cast seas  
of amber lamplight,  
lashed to boiling  
by the sheeted rain.  
Here and there a chimney stack,  
stretching desperate fingers of wire,  
thrusts into the crumbling sky  
like the high point  
of a drowned city  
where black-shelled shapes  
scramble sideways  
below vapoured waves.

Screaming breaths  
of frozen darkness  
blast through boarded windows;  
like sails the covers fill and rise,  
the shutters burst on roaring skies,  
on nights rotating backwards!  
The dust is flung  
in sprays  
of sea, lost webs  
enlarge  
to broken rigs  
as all the chests  
spring up their lids  
to show their moving contents.  
And there,  
at the chamber's end,

she looms:  
a figurehead fixed and moving,  
leading to forgotten lands:  
the infant tales  
of withered hands,  
magic-lanterned by the moon  
as all about  
the pieces stand  
discarded from his early years  
around her bowsprit effigy.

He turned around the sailing room  
where things that in a theatre's gloom  
are given animation,  
shift around the figurehead  
or rest on top  
of chests of drawers  
from which, like grins  
they'd quickly crawled,  
moving with the tilted floor  
in strange and spectral dancing -  
bright puppets, lost forgotten joys,  
paintings, palettes, crystal toys.  
Wooden jaws with scarlet lining  
range in smiling rows,  
through the window's furious seas,  
their painted eyeballs  
dead and shining.  
All the past  
now grows in trees,  
the forests of puerility  
upon the faded woven screen  
as ever nearer draws the dream,  
the moving, phantom bowsprit queen.

A yellow drape,  
a hat, a gown,  
rise to take on headless shape,  
then over her gavotting ghost  
fall in silent crumbling notes.

Jason sat down  
before the plundered fantasy.  
He peered through broken blinds,  
captain of a cargoed past.  
He watched the iceberg clouds cruise by  
southward on the frenzied blues,  
then quickly, to a sudden voice,  
swung and faced the infant masque.

*Why Jason, my dear,  
how divine of you to come,  
to come back after all these years.  
Your mother and I were such great friends.  
You remember me?  
You've searched for me so many times.  
Tonight we find our origins.  
First I'll set my fables free.*

And when she spoke her voice rustled from her mouth as paper birds, flying in the leaves of nursery books spilling from the open trunks, hauling out a host of beasts to crawl around her naked feet. The very contours of her form changed shape, melting in the rhymes and tales, merging with the swaying room, as bursting in the shapes of words, through the dark the song birds flew.

*A cow leaps over my belly's moon;  
it lands in the seas past the window's rim.  
My eggs balance and fall from the peeling wall.  
Scarlet marches slowly in from a flaking crack  
and will not seal, but climbs the distant hill and back.  
My world is air, the cupboard's bare,  
as blind as mice I'm locked in clocks.  
The poor red robin's fallen dead,  
the vision's lost, the cleaver chops.  
Oh, my small friends,  
how you break and recompose me!*

And suddenly she strode to the looking glass, striking aside its membrane of dust as a caul might be torn from a covered brain to flood its crevices with sight. To Jason, seated and surrounded, it seemed as to an explorer who bursts on a secret lake through a covering of trees, understanding a native sacredness that blinks with nascent knowledge, swallowing the stars in its oblong world. Through the mirror drifted nebulas, evolving, breaking their clouds into sudden focus. Ice and leaves, rains and streams, forgotten, lost or waiting. And eyes gently swimming in her image, she mutely mouthed her songs with mist; like fish the words began to rise.

*Here I am green.  
My skin captures the spring meadows  
and lavenders my royalty.  
My bloodshot eyes contain the skies,  
my hair the wind that shakes the pines.  
So mirror, mirror, on the wall,  
swallow and dissolve them all,  
let me rise without them –*

*take the murdered robin's breast,  
give the perch his scarlet vest;  
take the cow, her dog and dance,  
make an aphid milked by ants;  
engulf the boy and racing clock  
within the dandelion and frog;  
take the weapon from the yew  
and cleave my broken frame in two.*

And breaking the mirror's surface as it shattered in lightning, she stepped onto the deck and stood before him, washed clean of all. Her dripping skin flowed, verdant, through the darkness. Imminence plunged between caverns of bone; crystals flowered the hanging face. Three moons arose – her forehead, breasts – on another world; her comet hair glowed through space. And all the nursery cast that in telling she'd engorged crawled back within the books, left her whole and distinct. Redeemed, as was he; free to perceive her creation.

Yet even as his thought spoke, as he gently moved to embrace her, he saw her glimmering form return to the recurrent queen of so many early tales of dreaming and fable; and even as his aching arms reached out, her form receded, turning to card, retreating on its own plane to the window, like the cardboard figure of a toy theatre. And, on stumbling to the window, Jason found her framed by the sill – the illustration in a book he'd once owned: a captured heroine left alone on a secret island by her pirate lover, disconsolate and unobtainable, her beauty pinned, fading in melancholia, dissolving her captor's wild dreams.

And as the seas of rain even yet lashed the stone cliffs, the stunted forests of flues, the roofed islands of slate, his cardboard heroine began to dissolve, and knowing he must always search for her, and would never again find her, he watched her growing fainter and fainter in the lamp-light.

Then the winter winds, piped through the stops of shutters, and stuttering their raging rains on the shining walls, began to sing her final song:

*Sinews of water pull and tear,  
what distances I tumble through!  
Reflect the stare of swallowed skies,  
my eyes, burst open all your dyes of blue!  
Who ties my hair to skulls of rock?  
What locks, what shades, it's lashed into!  
Down where hydrothermals grew  
the mollusc lanterns light and loom,  
my flesh begins to flake and fall  
drifting through crustacean rooms;  
watch it shower in crystal coats  
as cutis on the coral walls,  
my lips produce anemones,  
my ribs reform in sunken boats.  
Raining screams of all the scales  
on sea-torn rocks, through wails of weed,  
cry from aisles of crowded eyes  
through palaces of filtered greens;  
the innocence of evil sings,  
it flings my form through pebble teeth,  
my garments foam in swirls of white  
where beasts of darkness groan beneath.*

As the last lines of her song slowly sank in the room's dust, Jason felt his ears blocked by the soft-soot silence of the new night, which no wind or rain could sound through. And as the rain clouds were pulled away by distant winds, the moon dawned in a startling whiteness. And looking round the room, bathed in electric lunar light, its covers and contents now as when he had entered, Jason realised it had reached its journey's end, all storm power past. In front, set in the high plaster wall at the room's far end, as the entrance to a cliff face against which he had just been beached, stood the door of the conservatory. Frantic for land, for arrival, he grasped the brass handle like a welcoming metal hand, and, slowly turning, pushed hard against hinges that screamed, then opened.

## Chapter 3: The Conservatory

In a clearing among abandoned plants and carvings rises a girl who seems to hold all the forms of the earth in her frame. Her body dissolves in and out of the shapes in the en-forested room. She draws Jason in her path to the stairwell, ascending through a trapdoor set within the ceiling.

All around the legs are green,  
green the veins,  
green the leaves,  
green the skeins that tumble through,  
green the light from strangled blue.  
Plants that once were bound and cut  
now stretch their muscled arms.  
As Jason steps within the room  
they softly stroke his face, his palms.

Their bold riot  
redefining form,  
extending the contours  
of their frame supports  
as they fall  
in sliding scales;  
all the ivies that a room can hold  
drape their dragon tails.

They guard  
mounds of dead leaves,  
    , the gold  
wrested from trees that stand like kings  
    beneath green crowns  
that palm leaves splay and fringe.

And lions of blackened stone,  
    their hollow heads holding  
the jungled fronds through which they peer,  
    petrified as forest rocks  
    making castles of coal  
    against the growth.

How the tiles check the ground  
    red and white;  
red stepping stones the water weaves  
that falls from cleaved stoned basins,  
    their fountains leak  
    to rivulets  
re-crossing on the floor.

In the arc of the sky  
ironworks fly, flung through  
    vaporous clouds,  
carved rainbows cast in white  
to hold the night on sheets of glass.

And all about stone spectators stand,  
    serried and alone,  
    forcing their silent forms  
    on the humming land;  
they face the room's shimmering centre,  
    their eyeballs blank as light.

Within that space  
has risen a girl  
whose wild brown eyes conjure  
all the birds of the air,  
flying forever;  
her hair shapes the hot rising air  
in its gossamer nets  
where shoals of silver dust  
swim upwards,  
before cascading in roars  
of silence,  
as tallow on her lustrous skin.

Each breast is full  
with forests of rain;  
the soft earth of her pudenda  
pouts a cinnamon flower  
whose pollen, blown by the winds  
of her breath, could dust his every crevice.  
Her mouth smiles resolution.  
On the damp soil of the hill  
around his earth-bound fulcrum,  
eternally dance a barefoot ring of,  
long-skirted women.  
When she turns her beckoning hips  
how can he halt  
the impulse that pulls him  
in her willow tread  
to marvels,, all the bursting fruit  
within her menses, in her ground.