

dance for one

by saoirse sowell

the road is quiet as it always is.
its hands grip the steering wheel,
shaking.

a white-knuckle grip to stop it
gets tiring fast,

it has learned to let the tremors build as they please.
a beast is kicking inside its chest.
it's not sure how long she's been there,

teeth and claws thrashing and
thrashing and
thrashing and
thrashing and
thrashing and
thrashing and

she scratches and bites its insides, dry and burning like whiskey on an empty stomach,
swallowed sandpaper
familiar pain.

a deer jumps into the road, right where it always does:
just after the 45th mile marker,
a lifeless fast food ad for some long gone seasonal special.
its swerve to avoid the deer is smooth, practiced.

the road ends as many things do, abruptly,
and it gets out of the car, clutching its chest.

its plan is simple and never changes:

1. go to the woods,
to the place where the road ends as most things do, abruptly.

2. rip her out

3. scream.

scream loud enough that the ringing of your ears and the raw red of your throat drowns out the
dull ache that keeps building, and building, and building, as she skitters off into the bushes.

it shuts its eyes tight during this step.

this helps it avoid what comes with seeing the way the moon glints off her silk
smooth skin, her hips, her chest.

its plan never changes because it works well
well enough at least
it will be days, weeks, and if it's lucky even months before she finds her way back.
but she always does.

crawls in through the window as it lies in bed,
past the boys clothes littering the floor
broken glass it left to stop her,
and in through wherever she can burrow best.
its broad shoulders,
large brow bone,
flat chest,
narrow hips,
all doors, wide open.

this time when it tears her out it takes a full minute of screaming to realize the ache never came.
it opens its eyes to her tiny form sitting in the snow, frail and bloody.

it just stares.

waiting for her to scurry into the bushes.

she stares back.

she doesn't move.

deep down it knows it has lost. it has known for a long time.
but admitting that is something deeper than defeat
something much, much older

it runs.

maybe to try to save itself.

maybe to mourn what it knows it will lose.

the chase is short, but then again she had spent years chasing.
the last thing it feels is a sharp pain in its chest, spreading through its skin.

most things end abruptly.

this does not.

when she is done skin hangs like deer velvet, sticky rags draped at the feet and hands of an
amaranthine fruit flesh form, gilded and crowned in ivory.

the body is soft wet and moves like clay in the hands,

weaker than before, but limitless. the touch of snow is agony.

as is the car seat leather.

the body drives home as the cold sun flashes through the trees.

her hands don't shake like they used to.