

Thoughts For The River Gods That Live Inside My Faucet

written by Guest Contributor | January 29, 2016



I am standing at the kitchen sink. I turn on the hot water, a little to the left, until it is on the verge of scalding but not quite, not quite. I hold my hands under the flow, feeling the heat, burning a bit. Seeing steam but not burning. I fix a lifeless gaze out the window and clamp my teeth. This is my thinking pose. Many people prefer to detach in the shower but I suppose my sadness is matched only by my aversion to the circuitous routine I feel obligated to perform after bathing.

You're in the other room getting dressed for the day. Not for the day itself but for a moment of the day that requires you to be dressed. We are all so multi-faced when it comes to embarking upon a day. All the masks. We put them on and take them off almost without even realizing it. Perhaps if we were forced to hang them all up on hooks on our wall, we would realize what we do. We would see our wall filled with grotesque daily masks and be disgusted with our own fear. This is how I feel when I unzip my makeup bag. My mask laboratory. I hate that I need it but without it I don't know the part I am supposed to play today.

You are in the other room getting ready for a particular moment in the day, your day, because your day is not my day. Our days are two planes that overlap for moments here and there, in space or in time. I don't often get the sense that the planes of our day are skewered together, like complementary hors d'oeuvres on a toothpick. I would like to be caught on a toothpick with you because I love the way we talk when you have nowhere to go and nothing more interesting to watch than the sound of my voice in the darkness.

If my hands could feel emotion they would be shaking with delight now, rosy and dried out with the hot water flowing over and off of them and down the

drain. I don't register what is before my eyes out the window. Some bushes, I guess, and an intersection where a couple of teenagers are crossing against the traffic light. They are jogging through the crosswalk and I remember a thought I had a few weeks ago about crosswalks. It is no coincidence that they are painted like jailbirds. I imagine that every time I am in a crosswalk, the black and white stripes absorb me. I lose a dimension or two, I am a projection passing from one side to another with only the promise of this safe zone. In crosswalks we are all prisoners to the promise of immunity. We would not cross them if we weren't handcuffed to the mirage of control. Holograms dodging vehicles.

You emerge from the other room, wearing the safety suit that will get you through the next couple of hours at least. Mask in place. Mind elsewhere, not in my day or on my plane but just a few meters away. Most people don't know you are wearing one because you work very hard to craft the illusion that your wall bears no hooks. I am not sure if you have ever taken off your mask for me but I know it's there. I am the keeper of a laboratory, remember? You dash out the door and I turn off the water to listen to the sound of your footsteps plodding down the stairs. A door opens and closes somewhere. I turn the water back on because I don't know what to do even though the deluge is beginning to etch itself onto my knuckles. I close my eyes and imagine stepping into the crosswalk. The cars don't stop. They pass through me like colored steam, a mirage on the road. I am masked. I am not in control.

Sometimes you tell me to grow up and I am never sure if you are joking or serious. Your sense of humor is like that, you have perfected the art of intentional ambiguity, nudging me to mold the gray space into every imaginable antithesis. Once when we were resting you told me a story. You enjoy telling stories and I enjoy listening to them, head on your chest, neck a little stiff but I don't mind because I want to hear your stories echo inside the cavern of your chest before they roll out of your mouth. Once when we were resting you told me a story about one of your exes. You described her to me even though underneath my mask I was begging you not to tell me anything, not one single thing about her plane that overlapped with yours. You didn't hear me. Everything you said about her was the exact opposite of me, and then you said that you fucking loved everything about her. I folded myself up into an origami bird.

The sound of the water slapping my skin and pattering over the sink is calming to me. It doesn't change anything but I like the endlessness. I can stay here breathing in and out, extending my hands like a peace offering to the river gods until the hot water runs out. Maybe I should go but I am frozen here in the crosswalk, frozen here where I should be thawing, frozen here in your space, a hologram dodging vehicles.

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