

Gigantic Black Monster Truck

Christine Boyka Kluge

The woman sleeps in the middle of the road, curled like an embryo on the double yellow line. She has lost all fleshy softness, has shrunk to weatherworn stone. She is deep inside herself, translucent and distant as a pebble of quartz.

The silence churns with inaudible vibrations, the low visceral thumping of a spiked and monster-wheeled machine. The teeth of gears noiselessly clench, the metallic whine and chew still beyond the dark funnel of his ear. As he leaps from his parked car, he can hear its approach with his bones, the skeleton's twitch of recognition. Diesel fumes reach his nose, twist his gut. Fear sprouts in his marrow. He runs toward the black scent. He will never reach her in time.

The polished black machine lumbers over the horizon, chrome grille snarling. It's so huge it erases the landscape, eclipses the moon. The roar from its sooty lungs is deafening. The powerful headlights siphon all images from his eyes. Blinded, he calls out to her. But illness has carried her faraway, beyond hearing. She has fallen inward until she is lost inside the labyrinth of her own body. Paralyzed, he can only wait for the truck to descend. The machine rages downhill. He prays that at the last moment it will swerve, straddling her like an insignificant stone. That it will thunder past without touching her, just one more time.

You Traded Your Body for a Knife of Carved Bone

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You were hiding from the jagged stars, from the moon swinging like a scythe in the western sky. Or was the moon full, a cold sphere of veined marble staring through the keyhole? Your forehead throbbed where the skin had unzipped. Like saloon doors, your skull swung open, pulling inside the darkness: a wad of crushed velvet. The doors creaked shut.

In the earth-scented hours of night, dreams sprouted from your brain like white roots. Fine hairs and capillaries, digging and drinking, searched the thick air for images. Those gnarled roots clawed like fingers at the tilted horizon. Or tunneled like worms in and out of your mind, excavating words like labyrinths. Making hollow, convoluted sentences you could almost read. You squeezed through the corridors of cursive, patting the walls like Braille, somewhat perplexed.

One thing for sure. You really liked the shuffling and swirling of the world's pictures, the kaleidoscope way time softly tore and stitched itself back up into something new and seamless.

You traded your body for a knife of carved bone, your soul for a spear of ice. You luxuriated in a mahogany case lined with black silk brocade. You were beautiful, just beautiful. Elegant and slippery and a little bit dangerous.

Your soul was dripping. You floated in an arctic puddle, an ivory sliver of a boat without sails. Each time you drifted into a miniature iceberg, you twitched. You grew a dragon-necked figurehead. As the water froze around your Viking ship, you shivered uncontrollably. The stagehand lit your face from below, teal and acid green. You couldn't scream. Only a cloud of crystalline breath puffed from your lips.

You traded your voice for sleet pinging into a pie tin. It melted. You drank it. You traded it for a braid of copper hair hissing over the thawing tundra. The wind unraveled it. Your voice became the stutter of a moth fluttering against the screen. You wiped the pale yellow dust from your lips on the twisted pillowcase. You swallowed a handful of white stones and sank deeper into sleep.

Beneath their waxy lids, your eyes kept their wild blossoming to themselves. By dawn your head was stuffed with plucked petals, pine needles, and a tangled skein of bristled vines. Your tongue was overgrown with moss. You opened your woolly mouth to let an enchanted forest spill out. The room smelled fake, like little air fresheners cut in the shape of trees.

Listen to you, breathing in and out with that rapid nose whistle. There, there, little kazoo. Open those baby blues. Let your unfocused eyes watch it all evaporate like steam from a teakettle. Poor little scrimshaw letter opener. Poor little quaking walrus tusk. Come on. Trade your body one more time. Whack a new window back into the summer morning with the dull ceremonial swords of your arms.

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