

The First Book. Lucifer in Starlight

*How you are fallen from heaven, Lucifer, son of the morning.
How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid nations
low. You said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven; I will
exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will ascend above
the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most
High. But you are brought down to hell, to the depths of the
pit...*

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ARGUMENT: *How the two lovers from William's Farewell, having suffered an unrecoverable loss, wandered across the country; and of the strange things that befell them on their way.*



CHAPTER 1

Autumnal

IT WAS about four o'clock when we arrived. The fields lay deep in fog. The tarmac of the avenue sped quietly beneath us, marbled with oilslicks and rainwater. It was Edwardian apparently, the house – all pale stone and subtle volutes. Suzy came out to meet us on the front steps. Her expression was warm, and her hair was a mess.

Then we sat down for tea and cakes. With the big bay window and the grim weather outside, we all felt glad of the fire. I was so nervous, seeing Suzy again after all this time, I lost my appetite, but she wasn't the sort to take offence. Absent friends were toasted. Suzy grilled you excitedly about life back home in Vienna. When we'd finished, you stacked the things up onto the tray, and I carried it out.

In the kitchen, Suzy introduced us to one of the other women, Jess. She must have been half Suzy's age, twice ours – and yet already there little streaks of grey in her ponytail. She was nice, something of a gentlewoman. She talked in an animated fashion about a faith healing at a recent prayer meeting, emphasising certain points with the knife with which she chopped the onions. I thought how she must have had the lads running after her when she was our age, and wondered if she was married. Then Suzy ushered us into the garden.

Apparently it had been a good year for the jasmine, but it was October now and what hadn't been cut back hung shrivelled and brown. A narrow path ran out across the lawn, down to the river. The cherry tree was full of droplets of rain. Through a plastic window, the shelves of the tool



ES

Afterwards, we drove back to the hotel,
The lights in the dockyard just coming on
And the sun bedding down under the causeway.
The night was heavy with rain and you fell asleep
To something by Snow Patrol or Radio 4.

Chiswell Beach

You blessed the meal when we sat down to supper,
And after, with your hands around the cup.
In the room, we kissed & drank old fashioned,
Watched the first ½ an hour of **Heartbreak Ridge**;
Then you pulled off your teeshirt with the chinese
prints.

I could never admit that I liked it: but
The light from the lampstand gentling your body,
A touch of bois des îles behind each ear,
You laying yourself back on the duvet like
You were a teenager and this was the first time.

shed presented arms: the tines and blades properly oiled and stacked. I said to myself, It'd be good to find work here, over the spring. Then we came in out of the cold.

A long windowed corridor separated the kitchen from the chapel: a handsome room, oak-panelled and oak-floored, with bean bags spread around the altar. In place of a cross there was a painting of the crucifixion, almost like a photograph. His eyes were bulging, bones visibly broken, the hair on his chest matted with blood. I remembered a passage Suzy had given me on a piece of card during our first acquaintance – ‘Christ has no body on earth now but yours’ – then I looked at you. You didn’t seem to pay any of it much attention, but perhaps you just kept your eyes lowered out of respect. I find you very hard to read sometimes, and that gets to me.

Sta Teresa de
Ávila

After that, Suzy took us upstairs to another room. It was as big as the lounge and similarly furnished, but the chairs were laid out in a more formal circle. Suzy said that everyone gathered here every day, first thing in the morning and after supper. In the evenings, the women might want to say sorry for the sins of the day, or tell stories about the things that had happened to them in their lives. There was never any pressure to speak though, she said, nothing to worry about.

There was a library just across the landing: a gorgeous space with a thick red carpet and a stone fireplace. There were eight mahogany bookshelves protruding from the walls, four on the left and four on the right. Then in the centre space, beneath the window, was an enormous copy of *Pilgrim’s Progress* laid open on a lectern. The binding had been carved out of a rich red leather, and inside were the most intricate woodcuts: Apollyon was there with all his teeth and fish scales, and Discretion with suitably come-hither eyes. I called you over and asked if you’d ever read it. You said you tried once when you were fourteen, but it didn’t really work in German.

Then Suzy led us up the final set of stairs, to where the bedrooms were. Near the gable end she showed you into the

place that had been chosen for you. It was fairly bare: a small wardrobe, a desk and a bed, the walls painted matt magnolia. I placed your holdall on the duvet and began to unpack: your jeans and t-shirts, bras and underwear, your blue silk dress, your Bible. The window looked out onto the garden and over into the valley beyond: the moor and husks of industry. Everything was black or gold – except the river, which was silver – the sun being stayed an inch over the col.

Suzy said to me, ‘You’d best be going now. I wish I could let you stay the night, but really I’m breaking the rules just having you here now.’ And you looked at me like we were the last two people left in the world, like the cripple at the Beautiful Gate. We hugged tenderly, awkwardly.

‘Don’t worry,’ I said. ‘I’ll be back in a couple of weeks.’

Moreover, there were two blond women drinking Campari at a small table in the far corner of the taproom. I raised my eyebrows; you consented; they seemed happy enough to be chatted to, and so the four of us sat down together round the same board. They both looked about thirty years old, with that slackness in the flesh – here barely perceptible – that a woman can’t help but acquire after her second or third child; and they were dressed shabbily, although it was clear they were wearing their best clothes. The conversation went well; it was awkward, but all parties were eager to get on, and we were both happy to bring the two of them drink after drink.

Later, they were sat on the sofa of our living room; you were laid back in the armchair opposite, and there was I stood in the middle. Then the larger of the two – that is, the taller – quickly stripped naked and, leaning back on the cushions, put two fingers inside herself. I pulled her up by her right hand and hugged her close to me. She seemed tiny now; my forearm easily spanned the width of her shoulders, and she was bony – not emaciated, but quite thin. Meanwhile the



I woke up between you & your sister. FC

(When you were kids you'd sleep in the same bunk,
So you say; now she's apt to feel jealous.)

All three had fallen asleep in our clothes.

You knelt beside me and gave me my glasses.

Someone stirred and checked through his phone.

It was night-time: a rich lampblack dark. In the hallway
Streetlights fondled through the fronds of a birch.

David himself would've run out of verses

In praise of that kiss, the deep scar at your waist.
In the dark, the heel of my hand found your breastbone,
Guessing its line by touch & the mind's eye.

Were it not for you I would've missed the snowstorm

Blanching the path down to the weir from the railbridge,
The emptiness beyond the arbour,
NEVILLE'S CROSS and PITY ME.



Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

other woman had stripped herself too. I felt the weight of my joy in the back of my throat. I wanted both of them. Then the taller one knelt down and pulled down my shorts, and all could see that I was already well hard.

I picked her up and laid her back on the sofa. I knelt between her legs and, with your permission, entered her – quite forcefully, although she showed no sign of discomfort or distress. Now how can I describe the innermost texture of any woman? All I can say is, it was sweet.



CHAPTER 2

Hibernal

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Christmas Eve

Morning

DM

I'm not used to sleeping with someone else.

I lie $\frac{2}{3}$ asleep holding you stirring –

A hand round your heart, the prickle of your *mons*.

All this morning I've been thinking about

That tender morsel of lukewarmth,

While the moon & the stars wear themselves out.

The snow is quietly silting up the glasswork

When you open your eyes and paw my palm.

The flesh of your neck is like opened fruit,

And your arms around my waist hurt.

Here is your tongue, and here is your navel;

These are your hands & this is your side.

HR

I remember the first real girlfriend I had,

Blue eyes & a scholar's stammer.

She was an atheist; she was the only girl

I ever knew who slept more deeply than me.

I used to hold her, of a wintertime, and

Trace the sign of the cross on her brow.

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The tide turns in the river, day becomes dusk,
And you, as shy as a fox (or
My own heart), steal in
In your mother's red silk nightdress,
Fringed with fur & a hem of white satin –
A quaint match for your 15 years.

*In Praise of
Older Women,*
Julika

Fire is not quenched by the dark, but
Love, sometimes, is blunted by fear:
You have untied the cord from your waist,
Unstrung your softnesses into the dûvet,
But, for all my teenage desire, I
Could not make myself hard for you.

Auden

You pressed your face against me when we kissed,
After, I remember, and my head swam –
'Young girls should show their nightgowns
To men worthy of the name' –
The branches blackened & bare in the courtyard
Because they could not be otherwise.



Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

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CHAPTER 3

Vernal

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Kavadias «Evα
Μαχαιρί»

I got this knife off an arab trader
In odds & ends in a stall in ALGIERS.
I remember his hoarse voice and hollow stare,
The grime staining his lips & fingers.

See that mark there. That's hand-worked sheffield steel.
Those are real rubies set into the hilt.
But every man who ever held its weight
Ended up killing someone that he loved.

A father who walked in on his young wife
With his own son gutted him in the street.
A greek sailor sawed through his boatswain's windpipe
Over a bad hand & a packet of smokes.

I keep this knife tucked into my work-belt,
Where the sunlight catches those wine-dark stones.
And I, that care for no one in this world,
Am terrified I'll only turn it on myself.

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BRIDGETOWN, a night in a gale with a girl,
The doctor I met on board, talking over
Old lost lovers and **The Last Picture Show**
With cold beef & chocolates & a rough scotch.
Darkness. I lay in her bunk
And travelled in dreams back to a garden in ROME
Where as a younger man I'd man spent one summer.
You & *Alex* were behind the bar. It was freezing,
And the snow fell through the rich blackness into our
drinks.

Ah there you were, *Isla*, with those curious clear blue eyes
And tangled soft brown hair like a river of living bronze.
The time between us is nothing at all,
Nor death and the river of forgetfulness.



\ ۰۰۰۰۰

A cup of wine was offered me, and I drank it in the sweetness of my delight in you. My feet have found their furrow, my mouth its bridle. The lover has found his beloved, and Jack has his Jill. A cup of wine was offered me, because your vines were heavy with the riches therein; because whoever dips his lip into this wine tastes life itself, and whoever drinks it into his own heart becomes immortal; and if the whole world perished, I would not. I will live by the wine of this cup forever. Alleluia.

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CHAPTER 4

Aestival

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Blind Girl on a
Train

She's only nine tenths beautiful,
And yet we men are standing reverently around,
Watching her listening
To her tapes, and sometimes smile, belle of Coach F.

Her hair is tangled & black, like black-bryony,
Ringletting down to her seat, beneath which
A violin case
Edged with red velvet is tucked between her calves.

And those cheeks, as tender as meltwater
And as clear, that small voice purling
More rosily than mulled wine,
That six hand waist no soul has yet handled.

hand = 4 in

Shak But the light fails, lovers meet and journeys end.
She alights, to be met by her first sweetheart,
Whose head she kisses
As if the world, and not her, had gone blind:

And nothing matters more than a girl,
Of a velvety, late august early evening,
With her fingers
In the lapels of her lover's jacket.

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I remember smoking hash by the railtracks
Dribbling down from PONTE CASALINO
With that giggly albino of a dutch girl
Who never could stay pregnant.



Propertius IV.7

A ghost is something – death does not close all –
And a spirit seeps out, untied from its body –

Prof Lee For I have seen *Silvia* peering over my bedhead

Though we'd buried her ashes by the side of the road
Only that day – as if she'd been fished out of the fire

Leopardi And the waters of LETHE had not yet worn away her
lips...

‘How can you?’ she said. ‘How can you sleep?

Aren’t you forgetting those nights we shared together:
The zip of my sundress, worn down from overuse,
And the scent of rose oil mingled with cigarette smoke?

We often made love under the railbridge,

Our bodies warming the bare earth.

Alas for all the pleasures of sweet life

That time & heartache blindly washed away...

‘But I’ll say no more about that. Water under the bridge.

You paid me your respects in what you wrote.

If you still want to make amends: bury your notebooks
next to my grave,

Plant myrtle over us both, and carve me a stone

Where ANIO waters *Caesar’s* ageless orchards

And ivory, thanks to *Hercules*, never yellows:

Here lies gold and Silvia, bringing

Glory, Father ANIO, to your banks...

‘And pay attention to the entreaties of the departed.

If word gets back from the dead, it must be worth
knowing.

Daylight keeps us in chains; night sets us free,

And *Cerberus* only watches the backs of his six eyelids.

Others may hold you for now;

You’ll be ashes yourself soon enough.

You’ll be with me, and the good earth

Will mill each of our bones into the other’s.’

Thus she spoke, and laid herself beside me,

But when the morning came her warmth was gone.

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Aenean vehicula dapibus magna, quis ultrices erat ultricies vel. Vivamus fringilla nunc lectus, a pharetra odio ullamcorper vel. Aenean ac viverra ligula. Etiam et justo feugiat, feugiat eros et, mattis nisi. Mauris at rhoncus mi. Cras eu nisi nunc. Quisque id mollis arcu. Curabitur eleifend mi vitae tortor egestas porttitor. Aenean nec scelerisque quam. Sed vestibulum, sem et condimentum auctor, nisl leo porta risus, ac efficitur ex libero nec purus. Ut augue.

END OF THE FIRST BOOK