

## Young death.

Sean Arthur Joyce

Young death. I know it well. Too well. I've made an art of it, lifetime after lifetime. Slippery blood of a stabbing lance on a gore field of the latest crusade. Sudden, shocking arrow ripping open my chest in a whispering forest of birch. Screaming, red-hot percussion of shrapnel cutting vision in half in a Flanders trench. Soul lights dropping, moths to a white hot flame. Fallen angels of no heaven. Cancer—a dog's slow, poisoned wither. Broken matchsticks in the back pocket of industry. But don't worry. *Everything's normal, folks*. Don't touch that remote.

You'd think this old spirit would be *tired* of it all by now. How many millennia has it been since I've been trapped here? Ah, but she's a bonny wee globe. Pinpoint sapphire in the black, birthing purse of heaven. So that's it! I've gone native. Fallen in love with a green and waking world. Fallen for this rickety chariot of spirit, for these luminous beings in a fragile skin. Fallen in love with a fellow soul-traveller. Knowing I'll have to watch yet another dear spirit drain away in the sandblasted tide. Yet some animal part of me still yearns for rosy womanhood in her full early flower. Beauty's blithe spirit, perfection unblemished, for one quick blink in the eye of time. Solace for the dread, the long, grey shifts in the salt mines of spirit.

What is it about us? Amnesia? Alzheimer's? That we can't learn. That we resist change. The most natural thing in the sunshining leafy world. That we make the same stupid mistakes, over and over again, generation after generation, each claiming clever ground over the last. Or are there just a lot more obtuse souls recycling in this generation?

Brittle soul shell, slowly wearing out. One less layer of skin than most. Feeling like the monkeys are gonna tear this place to pieces. And there's not a goddamn thing I can do about it. Watching a train wreck about to happen. Smiling faces in the windows as it speeds past. Me waving madly at the cliff, feeling like a helpless idiot. Yet compelled to do *something*. The longer I live inside this skin, the more I aspire to be a hermit.

So who *is* the alien, exactly?

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