

ChangÉ persists

Joseph Brant



The moon is silent.
It is empty.
In your world it is a rubbish dump of flags and plaques and giant rings from burnt out rockets, and
 little metal huts that were easier to leave than take.
Your moon is like a temple festival compared to *my* moon.
Some empty space, like me, hanging between the Earth and heaven.
Here, there is only...
a withered tree,
a great pestle and mortar,
and this lonely woman.
Oh.
And the rabbit.

I despise the rabbit.
The silent, staring, stupid rabbit, sent to this place as company for me as I perform my task.
They knew. Whoever they were. They knew the rabbit would torture me.
I don't remember what I did. I don't remember who is punishing me. The story has been told so
 often and so many people have been blamed.
I stole
I was greedy
I was miserable
I was naïve
I was petulant
I was self-sacrificing
I don't trust myself anymore.
I don't know who I am anymore, but... I do know one thing.
I despise the rabbit.
I hate it.

I would rather any other animal had been sent as my companion
A cat. Who would mewl like a child, and chase my skirt strings.
An ape. Who would beat me and scream in my ear and.. I don't know.
The Rabbit just stares.
It stares as I pretend to sleep. It stares as I work. It stares as I shout at it.
I do not know if my words have any meaning anymore
The rabbit can't understand. I may be speaking eloquently, or jabbering like a madwoman.
Does any sound come from me? Or am I as silent to it, as it is to me.

If I walk towards it, it hops away. If I throw a rock at it, the rabbit always moves out of its way, and then... it stares at me.

The stare is blank.

I can read no emotion on a rabbit's face, but I often try to imagine what its stares mean.

Scorn

Pity

Judgement

Does it despise me?

The old tree is more comfort than the rabbit.

At least it weeps.

Every day, I collect the weeping gum from its cracked bark, and pour it into the pestle. And when I have enough. I pound it.

I don't remember if I was taught to do this, or shown, or if I am doing this to make myself feel useful, but I pound the sticky sap until it yields. I pound it till it is a lozenge of amber, the size of a pin head. If I did this for ten thousand years, I would have a pill which would complete my deification. I could leave. My Immortality is a prison. The pill is the key.

The rabbit stares.

Silently

Silently

Its eyes, I remember, were shining black, like river washed stones.

But if I think now, and look past my failing memory, there isn't a hint of black in them. They look more like the ugliest of cowrie shells. I do not know if it can even see... except...

it still stares.

Its coat is grey as the moon's dust.

As I walk towards it. It still hops away, but it looks painful, and slow.

How long do rabbits live?

I chase it around the whole moon three times before I can catch up and scoop them up in my hands.

He feels like a jumble of bones in an old fur bag. Its pelt is wiry and patchy, like an old man's beard.

How long has this rabbit lived?

I carry it back to the pestle. It hangs limp in my hands but still I feel it staring at me.

As I set it down next to the heavy stone bowl, I see its nose twitch, as it catches the scent of the beaten sap.

No.

No you can't have it.

It's mine.

I need it

The contemptuous little creature lies at my feet. Still staring with its dust blotched eyes.

I should let it die.

Let it die and tear it open like an old shabby bag and take the rough leathery meat off its brittle bones.

I think this as I shake out a little bottle of pinhead sized lozenges, counting them against some unknowable tally. So few. So little to show for all the years.

They are a pearly pink, and near invisible against my hand, except where they roll into the dark creases formed by eons of gripping the pestle, but even then, they disappear as my eyes begin to fill with tears.

I squeeze the rabbits jaw, popping it open, and try to roll a single grain off my fingers into its open mouth, but two, no... three fall in.

The rabbit looks up. Maybe to swallow.. maybe to stare at me again.

They are gone, but I don't feel anything has changed in the little creature.

I try to feed it a couple more pellets, and it takes eight.. or was that twelve.. I can't see and I don't care.

I loathe the rabbit. I hate it. But if it were to die, then I would be here on my own, for 10,000 years

I am sobbing as I kneel, the rabbit is eating

I feel sharp pains as its buck teeth catch my flesh.

I am shaking.

I am sobbing.

I pull my hand away, and spill the last few amber beads onto the moon's dusty surface.

I scramble for them in the rocky dust, but I cannot tell their smooth hardness from the tiny pebbles, through my wailing tears.

The rabbit can.

I see him hop from spot to spot, nibbling and licking up what must be the fallen medicine.

I collapse, screaming and crying like a new widow, or a newborn. Howling in the silence of the desolate moon. Until I cannot move,

and cannot think

and cannot be.

So I lay there and just am.

I lay there as the withered tree drips its weak tears
I lay there as the thin dust of the moon settles on me like an embarrassed teacher draping a thin
blanket over a child who has burned through a tantrum, and when I finally open my eyes
again...

The rabbit is staring
Silently
Staring
Staring

Its eyes are black and shiny like river washed stones. Its coat soft as clouds.
And on the empty, silent moon, I cannot remember how often this has happened.
How often have I gathered my paltry efforts to escape, and sacrificed them for another?
How often?

And I realise that they, whoever they were, were far crueller than I had ever imagined.

Joseph Brant is a habitual outsider, lending their talents to queer / neurospicy / ethnically diverse projects, most of which they endeavour to keep their own name out of. They have written for various national magazines, Hugo winning fanzines, and while not fiddling with failing technology and esoteric lore, help run various geeky meet ups and paint tiny gay orcs.

FEATURES



Image by Mariakray