

The Disease He Gives To Himself

By Joseph J. Wood

Everything that could be sold is. What was there the whole time was not even hidden.
Just ignored.

The endpoint. This endpoint.

The bottom of the spiral. Existential realities flushed away end up sludge here ankle-deep. Cans and bottles floating in it. Trudge inept and aching through it all. To the jagged onyx beach where ropes hang from the dark above slick with grease adorned with shards of glass.

Jump. Clasp your/my/our hands around one. The broken glass will cut deep. Do not let go. Pressing teeth together slowly descend. New wounds being opened. Existing wounds opening further.

Until feet touch the ground.

Two palms red. Two thumbs wet. Eight fingers warm.

Wander through the filthy streets despondent. Sour alleys, walls the aluminium and iron of car crashes, train wrecks, aeroplane disasters. Mottled rusted corroding. Peer through a hole slowly devouring. Peer into pink darkness, brown light, a man in the road legs, arms and tie twisted pointing, head cracked open spilling toenail clippings and cigarette ends onto the tarmac.

Lacerations drawn across your/my/our forearm. Thin milk curd blossom between the slits of skin. Warm wet artificial snow coming up through the sewer grates.

Eyes dry.

Mouth dry.

Spitting brown flecks, tongue caressing broken molar, tongue caressing sore gum where the sharp remains scratch like gravel on a toddler's soft knee, like glass that lingers in the window frame, scraping a woman's soft thighs as she leaps from an inferno her bedroom, blue sheets on fire blue carpet on fire white wallpaper curling smoke embracing the furniture,

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caressing the ceiling. Her wings just strings of thin skin her hand out to break the fall does nothing. Her wrist snaps. Her face hits the ground. Eye contact with her one remaining eye, vowel-only words her teeth dust rising.

Turn away. Kidneys starting to kick and they're not going to stop.

Think this is pain?

In half an hour you won't even remember these twinges.

In half an hour you'll be dragging yourself by your bleeding fingernails through empty hospital corridors, sticking your face into every yellow medical waste bin, licking hoping someone threw some diazepam solution in and it splashed up onto the sides. Tasting plastic and chemical residue stench.

But until then,

walk.

Past the reinforced shutter windows of all those shops that sell soap and all those shops that sell lingerie and all those shops that sell greetings cards. Noises from behind them a cacophony of groans wailing songs out of key like a foul smelling breeze. To the shore where soap and lace and greetings cards float disintegrating in the shallow surf and dead grey fish. Where the tide twists, where the ignominious come to wash their browneds sucking bricks noises in the back of their hundred throats a shrug.

Hands reach out for something but there's nothing there to touch.

There are no boats on this horizon and there never will be. There are no warships with their guns erect, there are no oil tankers on fire, no cruise liners half submerged. Just empty black waves, cold and tired.

Mouth dry.

Feet hot. Throbbing hot.

Shoes falling apart. Of the right there is no heel, of the left no toe. Shoelaces snapped and frayed.

A girl singing collects dead fish from the shore. Her lank hair bejewelled with crystals of

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salt. Her smile curling like cigarette smoke. Her blue eyes bulletproof glass. Her arms cradling two hundred dead stares. Her footsteps are soft on the sharp ground. Her skin is wet paper.

Low hummed discords.

Pale hand reaches to touch cold cheek. Strokes down to chin. Fingers creep into mouth. Over teeth. Rest on tongue taste of petrol.

Other hand reaches beneath belt traces substance of arousal. Grabs hard and twists. Lets go weeps and stands presses her hands to her face crushes her nose reaches into her coat pockets stands.

Kiss her.

Her mouth tastes of sour white.

Her teeth are shards of bone in a soft gum tomb.

Deft hands entice orgasm inside.

Favourite colour hidden behind a new varnish laquer of white.

In the distance a forest crumbles. A soft noise sent on the hurrying gales. The bruised clouds ready to shed their loads. Her laughter like tiny wooden pins. Escape together. Steady paranomes from somewhere above, the old wooden ceiling straining, brown water dripping from the gaps spread open. Sex that isn't quick enough then two naked dry people in the darkness. Dull thuds, rasped argument, dull thuds again. Lying beneath a thin sheet. Snow stroking gently the black window. The radiator chokes and kicks. Mould on the wall. Coughing dizzy coughing out phlegm and flecks of tooth.

In the desert they dream of disease. In the desert they bury their feet in the ground and stand like trees shedding their sunburnt skin. In the desert where there is no weather they draw shapes in the dust with their fingers. They pull salt from the flowers with their tongues.

In Cambodia they start every fight with their fingers broken.

In Liverpool the rain is screaming and the streets are empty.

She throws her shoes to the side of the road and strips her flesh. A languid corpse falling away from her as she runs. Curling fluttering on the ground tinged with the dampness of lust.

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Gets in the back of the throat. Coats the tongue.

A shrill of wind and it becomes a kite.

Ejaculation still inside. Leaking out down one of the empty thighs
and clinging to it hanging in the air a viscous liquid string
then catches in twisted pylons.

In the grey wash at the shore driftwood and dead batteries a hermit crab dying in the
green acid spilt. A decision is taken; to reach inwards remove a rib from your/my/our cage and
use it to carve into the wall:

All people are hermit crabs,

All people are shells.

Stand turn and see that it is already written there, carved into the wall:

All people are hermit crabs.

The End

Joseph J. Wood bio: Joseph J. Wood is a British writer of dark, sometimes experimental fiction. His work has been featured in a variety of publications and anthologies. Some of his work is available on his website, <http://josephjwood.blogspot.co.uk>