

from “Laüstic” in  
STORIES OUT OF OMARIE  
by Wendy Walker

... *T*hessala will always remember the days of their love: the ambush of sweet immobility, desire soothed by its own return. They find nothing imperfect except the limit of their pleasures. Each treads ethereally, satisfied and glad, a stillness pitted with bright hungers. These cravings, instant and desperate, tunnel the cold ground into spring. When Raindurant leaves Saint Malo on business, commending his wife to strict watch, Guivret feels he can hardly bear it. To have Thessala so close he can see the moisture on her neck, and yet not to be able to hold her! In the starriest cold hours, when the two households are fast asleep, the lovers sit in their windows and whisper. Guivret hallucinates touching thorough as moonlight's; Thessala finds rest in frank draughts of his face. She feeds on his eloquence, hoarding it for later surfeit; he drinks in the lustre that bathes the edged slopes of her skin.

It continues this way through the tumble of leaves into snow. By midwinter, though no word of struggle is uttered, the tones of their silence have changed. They read in gesture, in pause, the fateful evolution of quietude. As they certainty waxes, they speak the more with less and less. Love grows invisible as it enlarges; can this continue? Thessala shuns ecstatic doubt. She keeps sentences at a distance. She turns Guivret's notes, even his heady text, into shapes. Guivret, watching her, passes out of his shining elation; or learns art of hiding. He quashes his body's proud speech. His adoration modulates into a loving discernment; he sees what her love for him means. And the excessive room of his happiness welcomes sad safeguards, limits, decrees. As he practices a more restrained wooing, Thessala feels her passion quicken. His recoil exposes a broad field where trust can cavort.

But all that autumn she watches the ivied wall shiver and molt. Its wasting reveals stones whose harsh, unmatched edges float as such sharp things never do. All winter, as she stares, they obtrude through the long brittle branches. Their blotched skin shows freckles of white.

Her gratitude makes arid landscapes fertile; but why shake one's hair in the wind? She seeks weather for sudden spaciousness; she awaits giant furnishings. No stormy cabinet supplies her. Guivret's tact makes Thessala survey distances as she has never done before: how wide, how tall, how far away? She attends to the smallest measures. On her pilgrimage to Morieux she emulates all she sees. Her body performs secret gestures. She takes the postures of pinnacles, the long stretch of receding tides. Borrowing crazy balance from boulders, copying, she collects enough peculiar habits to populate her solitude. Like gowns stiff with riches, they await her need. Branches' jagged meander, the green hair that drips by the sea, the languor assumed by dead fish, all become Thessala. The months pass until she is Brittany. She leaves Morieux, returns home. The wall burgeons; she is ready for that lace. Feeling certain her close observation abets the new buds, she watches each tendril's unfolding. When the air simmers with fragile wings, the wall has entirely succumbed. Its shaggy coat surges and breathes. That the sea, in disguise, should so infiltrate the city's heart makes Thessala's love seem more possible. She receives new hope about stones; she meets her husband's eyes completely.

Everywhere she looks the world seems to be uttering. The green blush, birdsong thick as bushes, the orchard's white bursts, press upon her. Imitating these, Thessala plummets. And in that exulting wordlessness she finds her own love. Emerging, she speaks with a difference; her sentences live in two worlds.

More and more the night finds her sleepless. She waits for her husband's breathing, then slips from the sheets. She cannot deny herself. She leans out the window. There he is, in a casement below. He hovers, blue in bluer dark; she makes a like shape for him. Guivret feels its sorrow. She reads his intense lingering. She wants to publish her desire to the night. But joy battles fear for dominion over her sentences. Her feeling for truth contends against the breathing nearby. Both summon arabesques of knowledge. So she broods in the guises of things. If she could only be things, not Thessala, she could have innocence and love; moreover, things don't shrink from murder. For things, the world is always whole.

Then one night while she keeps her vigil, Raindurant's voice breaches her thought.

"Why do you rise so often, Thessala? You never sleep when I'm in bed."

Though the question surprises her, she does not start. She amazes herself by how blithely she answers, "Do I really rise that often, Raindurant?" She sighs back at his silence, and turns again to the window. She seizes upon the first thing that strikes.

"Listen! Can you hear it? It's the nightingale! We've never had one in the garden before. How its voice dissolves the night! It expresses everything! It is to listen, husband, that I sit here, awake, in sad hope of clues as to saying; and for the joy of it! This bird takes hearing beyond music, beyond reason, beyond all reproach and appeal! Who has ever heard such a singing? What viol could so stir the heart?"

Raindurant hesitates in the darkness. She feels him considering. He makes his displeasure precise.

"Come back to bed now, Thessala. I want you in bed, beside me."

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