

THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS

EPIISODE



TWO

CASTING ASIDE THE ARTIFICIAL STRICTURES OF THIS DEEPLY FLAWED NUMEROLOGICAL SEQUENCING, THE INDISPUTABLE THIRD EPISODE MAKES A CHIEF CONCERN OF IDIOSYNCRASIES PERSONAL, MATERNAL, AND OTHERWISE FAMILIAL INADVERTENCY HUMOUROUS AS WELL AS MELANCHOLIC. DESPITE THIS REGRETTABLE NOSTALGIA, THE AUTHOR MANAGES (HOWEVER WEAKLY) TO INCORPORATE THE ALREADY QUITE THREADBARE THEMATIC ELEMENTS OF NOCTURNAL HALLUCINATORY EPISODES, MATTERS FUNERAL (QUITE IMAGINARY), AND SHAMEFULLY NARCISSISTIC RECOLLECTIONS OF A DUBIOUS AND POSSIBLY FICTITIOUS NATURE IN THE HOPES OF LEADING THE REMAINING FEW WHO STILL CLING TO THE POSSIBILITY OF GLEANING SOME DIVERSION (HOWEVER MEAGER) FROM THESE FALLOW MOMENTS IN ORDER TO TRANSCEND THEIR AUSTERE AND BARREN EXISTENCE DESPITE THE FACT THAT THE AUTHOR'S DAILY LIFE BEARS NO SMALL RESEMBLANCE TO THEIR OWN, EVEN THOUGH HE HAD AN EXCELLENT GRANDFATHER WHO LIKED TO STICK OUT HIS DENTURES AND BITE DOG EARS. ✱

LACQUER

by T.M. Camp

We buried our mother today
Laid her to rest on pale satin
Enveloped in gleaming mahogany and brass
So peaceful in her sky blue dress
Slender hands folded at her breast
Those pale birds
Nails lacquered till they shone
Hair immaculate
Face like a corpse
We did not kiss her goodbye

THE FACE GAME

by T.M. Camp

My mother has this game she plays.
“There are two kinds of people in the world,”
she says,
“Two kinds of faces.
Pig faces and fox faces.”

When she goes out,
to the market or a store or to a restaurant,
she says to herself as people pass:
“Pig face, fox face . . . pig face.”

She has a pig face.
She knows it.
But she didn’t always.
No, not always.

When I look at old photographs of her —
and there’s this one picture I’m thinking of,
the one of her as a young woman,
standing at the beach with her best friend (pig face) —
they’re in bikinis, holding their stomachs in
so they will look long and sleek
like foxes.

In the picture, my mother is smiling,
her face very long,
her teeth very white,
like a fox.

My mother never smiles for pictures anymore,
not like that.
No, now her smile is flat,
almost a grimace,
forced on her by time and age
and disappointment.
Time has taken my mother's face in its hands
and carefully, slowly,
pressed and shaped it
until the fox has gone.
I look at pictures of my mother now,
photos from reunions and holidays,
and I think to myself —
I can't help it, I do —
I think: "Pig face."

The last time I saw her, we went down to the mall.
It was crowded and she tires easily,
so we sat for awhile and watched the people go by.
"Pig face," she said.
And then "Fox face."

"I have a theory," I told her,
"That there is another kind of person in the world,
another kind of face:
People too long and broad for foxes,
too flat and sharp for pigs."
I nodded at a man hurrying past
and whispered: "Wolf."

Pig faces are soft and friendly
and quick to laugh,
easy to hug and easy to love,
like my mother.

Foxes are sleek and quick
and clever
and beautiful,
but prone to snap and hurry away
if they don't trust you.

There are more pigs than foxes in the world,
and more foxes than wolves.

Wolves are rare, solitary,
endangered.

The people I have known,
the wolves I have met over the years...
Well,
I have never trusted them.

I have a fox face, like my father.
He was a fox, and he was an old fox
when he died.
Time never laid a finger on him.

It's late and I should be asleep.
I stay up too late, I always have.
I roam the house, stalking through rooms
and sniffing the air,
looking for trouble all night long
like a fox.

It's late and I should set this aside
and go to bed.
In the morning I will rise
and yawn,
showing my teeth to the bathroom mirror.
And then I'll shave,
drawing the razor up my long cheeks,
across my sharp chin,
and down my lean throat.

And, as I do every morning,
I'll play The Face Game,
looking to see what work
Time and age
and disappointment
have done to me during the night
while I slept.

Fox face, pig face . . . wolf.

BIG POP

by T.M. Camp

A plastic bowl of grapes.
The dusty, almost-black globes
polished by our fingertips.
The tart snap of the skin between my teeth.
He teaches me to spit out the seeds,
the stones bitter on the tip of my tongue.

Wrestling old Smoky to the ground,
he bites the dog's ears, both of them growling.

I watch, I laugh,
wondering if he will get fleas.

The rigid line of his dentures,
sticking them out at us when no one was looking.
Laughing, terrified by the sudden appearance
of that slick pink plastic, the crown of his teeth.

The walking sticks, later the canes
by the door.
The carved one, the snake's head
poised to strike.

Wrestling him to the shag carpet
in my aunt's apartment.
Two year old champion, I pin him down
and I strike.

My mother flares with anger: "Don't you hit my daddy."

Photographs posed,
the stiff movement of home movies.

Memories, stories told around the family, heirlooms.

Mythology now.

So little I can claim for my own.

His voice, surprisingly high.
Rusty, wavering and punctuated
by strange, inarticulate sounds
like a crow in flight.

Surprising myself with tears,
when I introduced my wife to him.

She in black, long hair pulled back.

He already under his stone, so long.

This is a work of fiction. All situations, events, and characters are nothing more or less than products of the author's imagination — except for the one my mom dreamed up, that one's all hers. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is most certainly intentional but by no means should be taken as factual in any way. To wit, the author's parents are still among us. My grandfather, regrettably, has passed on. And my wife *does* have black hair. So those bits are true. Also, I don't really have a wolf face. But, with each passing day, I see more of my grandfather in the mirror. Not that I need a disclaimer to dispute that, of course. Literary people are above such vanities. Right?

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It'd make my day to hear from you. Honestly.

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THE WORLD IS NOT WORTHY OF HIM WHO HAS FOUND A CORPSE.