

THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS

EPIISODE



NINE

ALTHOUGH EVEN THE MOST OPTIMISTIC OF YOU HAVE MORE THAN LIKELY GIVEN UP ALL HOPE BY NOW, THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER IS SELF-EVIDENTLY BEFORE YOU HERE IN THIS TENTH INSTALLMENT OF A TEDIOSLY PROLONGED ENTERPRISE THROUGHOUT WHICH ONE CANNOT HELP BUT BE GRATEFUL THAT THE AUTHOR NEVER MANAGED TO INSINUATE HIMSELF INTO THE FORMAL WORKINGS OF THE SO-CALLED ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY, SPREADING HIS CORRUPTING PSEUDO-BECEKTTIAN DRIVEL BETWEEN THE GEARS OF CREATIVE PRODUCTION LIKE SO MUCH WET SAND, ONLY TO POUT AMONG THE TWISTED IRON AND OAK THAT LITTER THE RUINS OF A ONCE PROUD AND PREENING ART WHICH COULD NOT, IN SPITE OF ITSELF, DEFEND ITSELF FROM THE LUNATIC SCRAPING HIS HERESIES INTO THE ROUGH INNER WALLS OF A DEMENTED MIND CRUMBLING UNDER ITS OWN WEIGHT. NEVERTHELESS, WE SINCERELY HOPE YOU ALL ENJOY THE SHOW. SO TELL YOUR FRIENDS. ✱

POLYANDRIUM

by T.M. Camp

/one/

/a muddled view / shadow and darkness / there is the sound of breathing / and a rougher sound of something scraping / a bare foot pushes into the frame / a single green leaf stuck to the sole / we move up the leg / tracing across the twisted naked body of a man / his skin is scraped in places and somewhat grimy / his body is squashed, twisted upon itself / we move up and down his arms and legs / tracing the veins and muscles / moving over the map of his form / stopping for a moment on his stomach / we watch it swell and contract with his labored breathing / set into one wall is a large metal door / the latch is visible, but there is no handle on this side / we return to the man / coming to rest on his hand splayed out against the rough bricks / as he speaks, we explore the small space that he is confined in / we are inside a large box / perhaps six feet tall by four feet wide by four feet deep / the sides of the box are made of pale cinderblocks, stained and yellow with age / small cracks here and there let in feeble daylight from outside / there are cobwebs stretched across the corners / scattered across the floor of the box are a number of dull colored shards, broken pottery/

The hate comes to me in the darkness. Never fear.

When I was a child and the light was put out for the evening, I would lie there unafraid. I was never afraid of the dark like most children my age would have been.

It didn't seem to matter, being afraid. No matter how long I would lie there, shadows that crept and played at the corners of my eyes, flowed over me, eventually, dragging me into the dead world, the graveyard, the bone orchard.

The bone orchard. Maybe that's too old fashioned a phrase.

My grandfather was cremated, they burned him when he died because he was terrified of a premature burial. That's what they told me, at least. All of his life he had lived in fear, he would dream every night that he was under the ground, in a box with no air, scrabbling at the lid, pushing back the dirt, feeling the grit slowly seep into his eyes. Once, trying to dig his way out of the dream, he struck my grandmother in his sleep, breaking her jaw.

I remember him as a quiet, restful man. I don't know how to reconcile those memories with the stories they've told me.

She was a quiet woman with wispy webs for hair, and a strange set to her mouth when she smiled.

I don't want you to think bad of him. It wasn't as if he did it on purpose.

So they burned him. I know it's morbid, but I wonder if he was dead when they did it. Or did he wake up when the fire hit him? Did he feel the heat and struggle against the flames that rose up, burning through him, burning him to a handful or two of dry ashes that my father would spread over a patch of land, murmuring, while my mother wiped away tears and I wiped away a bit of grit that blew into the corner of my eye?

They didn't keep him in a vase on the coffee table to be put away in a cupboard when guests came over. I'm glad for that.

That says something about my parents, I think.

My father's hands looked like they were carved from marble or ivory, shot through with pale cobalt veins. His palms were dusted with soft gray ash when he finished. He stood there, he didn't have anywhere to wipe them off, so he just walked back to the car with them held out from his body and got a kleenex from the glove compartment.

/he turns his hands over / examining the grime / flexing them against the feeble light/

My mother never made me wash my hands before supper. I've often wondered why. Not even when we had company and I had to look my best. But when I was at someone else's house?

"As a guest, always be on your best behavior."

She could find significance in the smallest things. Someone's name, a picture, a piece of music. She noticed the way things were fashioned, woven by the Fates. Everything was tidy, wrapped up, fitting together.

/silence/

She died screaming. In a hospital bed, burning with fever and pain. It was warm. Autumn. Indian summer. Her body was so slick with sweat that they couldn't hold her down to give her medication. Not that she would need it, but how were they to know?

She was a neat, clean woman with a certain amount of personal style. All of that was lost when I saw her sitting up in bed screaming, her body stretched taut, full of blackened growths.

Wild eyes, like a demoniac's.

You hope things won't end that way.

There are certain things we shouldn't have to watch.

We should be able to choose one thing to forget.

/silence/

A priest sat next to her bed reading a paperback book, waiting for his cue. Last rites. All through the screaming and pain he never once looked up, never said a word. He sat there with his lips pursed, half grinning over pulp fiction's excesses.

He looked up when she was finally silent and spoke, with that bemusement still lingering at the edge of his lips: "Depart, O Christian soul, out of this world; In the name of God the Father almighty who created you; In the name of Jesus Christ who redeemed you; In the name of the Holy Spirit who sanctifies you. May your rest be this day in peace, and your dwelling place into the Paradise of God."

And then he went back to his book.

/silence/

And that was that.

They didn't burn her. My father wouldn't let them. He preferred to have her closed up in a box and stuck underground and left to rot. I supposed he wanted to keep his hands clean.

I'm sure that if she had accidentally been put into the earth alive, she'd be dead by now. It was a long time ago.

/silence/

They didn't even ask me.

I would have burned her. Burned away the black moss that was quietly growing within her, driving her insane.

In olden times they would have locked her up, cut out her brain, made her a zombie. In even older times they would have boiled her in oil, put her in stocks, broken her on the rack, made her say the Lord's prayer and offered redemption,

leading her away in pious compassion to the comfort of the stake, her eyes full of devils and her mouth full of flames.

/silence/

I don't know which I would prefer to remember, if I had the choice. The zombie or the demon.

/two/

/looking through one of the cracks in the ceiling / a small peek at the moon outside / the man below / staring up at it / back up again to the crack, passing through and out / the moon is obscured by clouds / rain begins to fall in sporadic little drops / the soft gentle rain that comes during a hot autumn / follow a single drop as it lands outside, on top of the box / slowly runs down inside / over the bricks / drop into the man's staring eye / he blinks / wiping it away from the corner of his eye / rain is falling in earnest now / pummelling the outside of the box / hollow and deafening noise / water runs through the cracks / dripping from the ceiling and running down the bricks / the man looks down and sees a small pool of water forming / a bleary reflection of his features / he lashes out / shattering the image / beating his hands in cadence to the rain

/three/

/the man's closed eyes / framed in a patch of sun / pull back / a few small insects buzzing about his head / move up to a crack in the wall above him / where the light is coming through / slowly / the crack is obscured / a shadowy shape / outside / a sharp little stick pokes trough / darts forward / stabbing him lightly / he jerks up / yelp / cracking his head against the top / falling back / he rocks himself / watching the shadow move from crack to crack / the stick pokes through another / scratching his leg / he spins / grabbing at it / too late / the shadow resumes it's cruel orbit once again / the man watches / he jumps / cries out / turning / the stick withdraws once again / a small trickle of blood running down his arm / the shadow stops / the stick pokes through / searching / the man is ready / grabs the stick / pulling at it / a short struggle / he screams / the stick splinters / drawing back through his fingers / tearing the skin away / the shadow moves off / and he is alone / staring / the blood / pattering against the bricks/

I am sure I must have done something to deserve this, but I can't imagine what it might have been. I'm sorry for it, whatever it was. I'm not a murderer. I'm not a thief. I don't fuck animals or small children. I must have forgotten.

/a low scratching sound / a spider / slowly crawls up through a crack between the bricks / his eyes fix on it / he freezes / watching / it slowly progress to a corner/

Make yourself at home. Though, I ought to ask you to move on. Metaphors should not be belabored.

*/the spider slowly begins to fashion a small web in the corner /
the man watches / sweat starting to form / the day moves on / the
heat increases/*

/four/

*/the heat is rising / baking him / sweat rolls off his shoulders /
forming a crack-glaze / running into his eyes, his scrapes / his
teeth / bared / a single fly slowly loops across the bare interior /
lazily tracing through the heat / his hands are busy / assembling the
shards of crockery back into their original shape / a small pot / he
holds them together / fingers bracing them against each other*

I have heard that in Haiti they seal up evil spirits in earthen pots, binding them with complicated spells. In the middle eastern countries and parts of Asia, an empty lamp or jar is used.

*/he looks around the box / searching for the missing piece / it is
lying back in the corner / at the center of the spider's web / fly is
caught in the web / thrashing weakly / spider darts out / wrapping
the fly/*

In the Sudan, a person is selected from the tribe at random "By the gods" and after the evil spirit is bound into them with a spell tattooed on their skin, they are driven out into the desert to perish.

*/he blinks / knuckles the sweat from his eyes / watching the spider
/ he removes his hands from the pottery / it falls to pieces once
again/*

/five/

*/the man, as before / staring at the web / a small breeze rustles
from between the cracks / toying with the dried leaf in the corner
/ gently moving the web / weaving through the man's matted hair /
he shivers / the wind increases / howling outside / a single spark
in the darkness / slowly a glow builds / fire is lit beneath him /
flames quickly leap up all around / he thrusts forward / screaming /
the flames rise / blackening his flesh / there is a subtle shift / we
see him lying, unharmed / every muscle tightened to extremes / eyes
screwed shut / holding out the darkness/*

Once I dreamt that...

/silence/

Do demons stand still? Can you look for them in the corners and the out of the way places? There is so much they have to do in this evil time, will they stop long enough to be seen?

/silence/

In the dream, my house has been transformed into a filthy hole. I walk through the kitchen full of broken pots and crusty dishes. My father sits at the table, running bony fingers across a blank page, murmuring. My mother glides through the dusty rooms, roaring. I fall to my knees in horror and fear and sadness. And my father is there putting his arms around me, holding me close, comforting me with words of prayer. I smear dusty hands across my face, and a low keening rises, building in sharp contrast to my father's muffled words. I feel the shattering, shrill wail ripped out of my chest, nearly screaming, as my father cries out: "In the name of God, I cast out this demon" Authority. All my breath is lost as flatulent laughter, black and unholy, bubbles from between my lips.

/silence/

"And then I woke up."

/silence/

Isn't that what I'm supposed to say? That I woke up? That it was all a dream? Isn't that how it's supposed to end?

/six/

/the man / staring into the web / full of small bundles / slowly / the shadow passing behind him / between the cracks / he does not see / a small sharp stick slowly works its way in through a crack / pausing / jabbing viciously / he bellows in pain / weeping with full throated horror / his hand to his eye / blood runs out between his fingers / the stick pokes in again / he screams / thrashing about / scraping the walls / pounding his head against the floor / clawing at the door / howling / the web smashed and destroyed / pottery scattered / he struggles / the sharp stick slips in and out of cracks / goading him on / follow the spider as it crawls away / drops out a hole / escapes / the man still rages behind

/seven/

/the wall / crisscrossed by curious brown lines / strange / symmetrical smears across the bricks / the man, once again / twisted and broken / start on his bloody fingers / bone showing through the tips, perhaps / a nail or two missing) / slowly / work over his entire body / coming to rest on a single staring eye / he is writing on the walls with his fingertips the bricks have worn them away / down to the bone/

I have seen these pictures they take. Pictures of people from the inside. Full of dark masses and clots and growths. They tell me that these masses of darkness, these shadows are our hearts and lungs and flesh. They say these things are alive. Small shadows living in the hollow places between our bones. I have seen these dark pictures and I think “What lives inside of me?” I have seen these shadows that people drag about inside themselves as they live and walk and play and fuck and I say “Where are mine?” What shadows have tucked themselves away inside my lungs, among my bones, behind my brain, in my heart? They tell me they are there, but I do not see them when I look in the mirror. These shadows I carry inside, these dark masses wrapped around my bones, moving my feet, raising my arms, breathing foul rank air into my lungs and propelling me through the world, doing their work. I go roaming about the earth and walking around on it, and . . . I am not alone.

/silence/

The shadow moved throughout the entire world, wandered through the gardens and the arid places searching for a home. A place to hang its hat, as it were. I was shown the shadow, introduced — a formal greeting in the darkness. An invitation was offered, a simple little bargain struck . . . and the shadow found a home. No more wandering through the empty lands, through the darkness. The shadow embraced me, nuzzling darkness found my heart, caressing me in the dry heat. In the small minor corners of my heart the shadow fed, wrapping it in darkness.

/silence/

There is no comfort in the darkness, no sleep in the shadow, no rest, no cool breeze no rain — but dry hollow hate that comes, drags me, dances me about, strings of darkness hanging off of my wrists and legs, pulling me along in its wake . . . a marionette to the shadow. A diversion, a joy for the darkness, a puppet that tumbles and chirps and dances a little jig or two . . . amusing the shadow. I serve the shadow inside. As do we all.

/silence/

/he raises his head / a noise from outside / sliding, grating sound / metal on stone / outside / two hands slowly draw back the locks / inside / the man / curled up / a shaft of light falls in / shattering against his sunken cheek / the door is opened / he blinks / teeth clenched / raises his bloody hands towards the light / outside / his hands clamber out around the edges of the door / pale spiders / slowly / they pull the door closed again/

/silence/

FIN ✱

This is a work of fiction. All situations, events, and characters are nothing more or less than products of the author's imagination — well, not really. This whole thing is true. The entire show is recorded and broadcast from inside an old abandoned kilm in a field in Southern California. Please, won't someone come and let me out?

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He's the one to blame.

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NEXT UP,
A GOOD SAMARITAN SHARES HIS HALLOWEEN STORY.



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