MILK PUDDING FLAVORED WITH ROSE WATER;

BLOOD PUDDING FLAVORED BY THE SEA

by D. Fox Harrell
Wrapping his wrists in black satin bandage strips, he assumed himself.

He questioned himself. Without thinking he had cast it aside with shock at the flavor, texture. A white fleshed peach has not the crunch or crispness of an apple. He had spit it forth, but dried juice dribble remained on his chin. While riding, his hand had plucked a peach from the peach tree and in the same movement he bit a warrior’s bite. Apple.

Now he questioned the assumption of his self. He tasted his beard and again, apple.
He could not simply forget, the apple prodded his mind as would its seed were it in his belly: as soon as he would have settled to sit at ease, the seed’s roots would have grown from his stomach, grown through internal loops, would have poked out of his anus “pop, no peace, I am here.”

But so! If a peach wanted to assert itself “apple,” then that was fine. Fine with him, but not with his sense of things.

Perhaps, and he believed it was so, an orchard had been slaughtered there a while back. A peach pit weaned on apple sap. In apple hallowed tragic land. This odd peach was not an assertion of ancestry or history though, this one fruit had deemed itself apple. He had tasted as much.

He now leaned back against the brook lapping willow. The brook’s crispy sound gauzed his thoughts. He wrapped the bandages between his fingers, and over his biceps. It was midday, breezy with cirrus clouds. The sun: moon-like, pale and watchable. He bandaged black across his face, under the left eye, across the bridge of his nose, around his head, and across his chin (touching his bottom lip).
He smelled apple.

His stomach soured with the afterthought of unnatural fruit and forethought of battle. Loquats and pussy he thought of instead—sweeter fruits and activities to him.

He was, or soon would be one of the Black Riders. A glorious title, there was no other option for him. To drink blood sweetened with sugar cane, brain pudding with tapioca and vanilla. These ran in his veins, his father’s body was nourished with these, and thus his father’s sperm, and thus his father’s son was born of these warriors’ desserts. A Black Knight.
The Black Riders fought. Never each other, but nearly anyone else. A philosophy against mistakes designated their craft, like it would the pursuit of any other human endeavor: Art. Not perfection to the point of efficiency...efficiency slays perfection. Rather, Black Riders doted over their passions, intensely and warmly. They were more of a craftsman’s guild than a mercenary’s clan. They were not slick killers, not assassins. Just brutalizers.

The Black Riders were not sadistic or malicious. The pain portions of fighting were as fumes to the painter. Despite the terrible awe with which they were perceived, the fact was that they killed less often than spared in battle. And woe unto the lover of a Black Rider—her flesh featured dried brown and red bleeding nicks on all sides and in-between from her mate’s razor tongue. The doleful sleep-eyes of a Black Rider’s spouse marked
her among women. Not that she was pitied, no, her pout and
drooping eyelids cast her as the dreaming beauty. A figure maybe
more loved than her dark and violent mate.

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A pink milk splash, rose shaped, floated on his chest as an
embryo in a jar. His armor featured a circular glass bubble,
liquid filled centered on his chest. Centered in that was that
familiar sign of his trade, the pink and drowning or suspended
rose. The pink bud head bobbed as each step he rode brought him
closer to home. The ragged road swished the water in a toilet
circle, the rose head nodding and spinning on his chest—bob, nod,
swish, nod, yes, yes, no, no, no...

His own helmeted head stayed focused on the white-washed
turrets in the distance. They appeared more as pale gray horizon
thorns and irregularities than as buildings. The distance was
still great. A jealous or mourning raven gave him a call: Acaarw!
The Black plume in his helmet stopped eating dust particles for a
moment and lowered its filaments in deference to the bird.
Homecoming was a strange event for any Black Rider, but for an odd
and pensive soldier such as himself, it was a bit haunting. He
looked inward at his heart, off-set it was a grapefruit sized
pearl in his lower esophagus. Its beat was just barely irregular.
Black Riders’ cardioectomies occur relatively early in life, just
a speck remains that grows back set in the mold of their earliest
exploits. In his case, experience jarred that heart speck to
prolapse into his digestive system where it was lodged and natural
processes made it into a pearl—hard like a round tooth.
He did not reflect upon his travels. At the age of fourteen a brooding and brutish youth may wrap himself in the black bandages and leave home. Some used yarn. He had used a long satin strip. He left his town with that long black ribbon trail unwound in its streets and dangling from its gates. Later he would either pull on that cord and be jerked back by the recoil, or he would pull it out and be lost without any ties but only a black cord with a bloody mess on one end. He was being pulled back, would soon receive the first change of his ribbon. He had been wrapped up in his same blackness for eight years. Ribbons washed in many rivers, grown foul many a time, and laundered and perfumed even more. He was headed home.

He had no reason to think of his travels. This was a man who lived his life with only forward steps. He did not think of his travels at all now. Travels such as:
Book I
The land: Curr

Early in his travels he floats through the land of Curr. He becomes a man with a boy’s face in this land, everyone is shorter than in his homeland. Curr’s masses and crowds funnel through narrow passageways and alleyways. Those aloof people are lubricated, bodily, with their taut personal spaces. On a sunny day, the blue tint of their skin casts a glow on his cedar one. They slip past each other with neither warmth nor cordiality. They slide through crowds, flitting eels, here then just tails slipping away.

His odor becomes foully citrus. Their fishy perfumes set his mind reeling. Their pointed upturned noses slice their paths through the packed streets. He has no such advantage. It is his first day and he is disoriented. His sense of focus is spinning inside of his brow. He puts up his arms, hands on his head, elbows slashing his way through the crowd. He is running.
Without an arrogant snoot, his elbows have to do. Faces and faces flash by. He falls and feet flash by. Sandal wearing feet step on his fingers, someone accidentally spills some syrupy drink droplets in his hair. It’s his fault. He stands. He sets his elbows slashing again. Runs, lubricated not with a tight impenetrable sense of personal space, but with almost tears. He steps on someone’s feet with his heavy black boot, they glare–his teeth turn yellow in the glint of their bright white chompers. In a snort they are submerged in the crowd.

It is chilly, the sky is blue, ice blue like rain. These people must have never seen the sun he thinks. His sense of vertigo increases as each step feels like a forward fall into the crowd’s vibrant colors, aromas, and textures. A fat woman’s uneven breasts nearly knock the wind out of him. An old man’s vibrant square dentures nearly blind him. A young woman’s pointy nipples threaten to poke his pupils. That last one is the most dangerous of all, already disoriented, his sense of direction changes from liquid to vapor. An open door reveals itself, tall and majestic, in front of him. He pulls its silver dolphin shaped knob. The fourteen foot tall navy blue painted wood doors swing in. A thick sweet smoke, much heartier than tobacco, powders him and draws him in.

A dance hall. The music grinds him down. The Currs are grinding on each other. He becomes alabaster, he becomes stiff limestone crumbling on himself. Noticeably he cannot move in the slippery shifting pelvic movements they do. His hips disappear. His skin becomes wooden. He is frozen and stiff.
Reflections of smoke curl in the polished steel floor. Tufts of black and wispy, red and stringy, ebony and curly pubic hair dance in the up the skirt reflections beneath his feet. He looks to the ceiling. Torches line the wall near the upper boundaries, they cough black smoke. Why does not the ceiling catch fire? The crowd is thick with slender, but soft bodies. Men and women here seem to be long proportioned but unmuscle. No one but him is looking at the floor, he sees his furtive and nervous glance look up at him. He becomes sleazy. Stiff and sleazy. Then stiff in his crotch.

She smiles at him, he tries to smile and succeeds. In his homeland, the long camel skin drums are waist high and played only in pairs. They beat hollow and spooky rhythms that can play you into a trance. Her cleavage is the dividing line between camel skin drum beats. With each hip twist the mouth of her low cut blouse speaks to him in drum voice: boom (left breast rises), boom (right breast heaves), boom (left breast swells). Those titties drill that rhythm into his temples.

She is blue, it is unclear whether it is from the blue flame of the torches, the blue tint of her skin, or the uncertainty that would sette in his heart a twelfth day from now. Shadow and light games, dancing and accompaniment to herself, reveal that the blue is just a blue cast—she is not underwater. The thought that she is really blue instead of colored by a blue glow might have come from his drowning feeling. There is not time to catch a breath; he dives in.
He gyrates his hips against her booty, locked up against her booty as he only knows how. He is grooving. She is facing away from him, and his eyes find the bar. People stand around it, groups of women and men with irregularly shaped glasses holding odd potions. They smoke long and slender cigarettes wrapped in yellow paper (almost green in the light). His rhythm is off and he stabs her with a pubic bone. She turns slightly, he is surprised and stabs her again by mistake on the other side. She turns to face him, thinking it a purposeful and lascivious poke, comes face to face with his awkwardness and lets out a pert giggle. He is a penguin, no arms, no legs, waddling. An ice sculpture, he backs against the wall and stands while she dances. A crack is audible as his ice face splits into an embarrassed smile. She smiles and shakes her ass, she smiles and rocks her hips, her leggings are fashionably sliced so that her waist ribbon floats sexily upon her hips, she smiles and grows bored and leaves for one of those tubular, blue men.

A sweat steamy citrus funk. This brown penguin ice stone statue, crumbling upon himself, awkwardly a boy with a big baby’s head, creaking and clicking and being generally creepy with a lecherous glint in his eye, stands, gently thawing, in the corner for the rest of the evening.
Living in an Ocean Town

Her life at home is simple. Straightforward.
Her arched scrawl ribbons out from a small bow-tied knot at the base of one spot upon the hut’s outer wall. It flips and twists and wraps around. It takes sixteen circumscriptions to fully dress. She lifts her stylus as few times as possible and never drips. She has only once analyzed what the words really mean, in that way of traditional anthems and chants, the words seem alien interpreted, familiar only in rhythm, cadence, and spirit. The mathematical relationship they describe (when the linked glyphs are read numerically) is more accessible to her, if only because the form they evoke is the foundation of her village, at the same time as it is surface ink printed on this doorstop, on that lady’s forehead over there, or on that other man’s elbows and kneecaps. The lines of the writing swirl up, hurricaned, from top to bottom, and back down, wave-like, crossing over and over themselves.
One quarter day later she is done painting the house.

Her own eye looms, enormous, moist, watching her. Her reflection in the water wall, wavers, buckles, in a moment slick cold touches her nose, an oil spot is left behind on the aqua silver mirror. She backs up slightly, her bleared world-sized eye recedes to its proper place in her face. Intently focused, effortless with repetition, she draws out the side flicked cat eye corners, fattens her lashes, plucks rogue eyebrows. She embellishes her sternum with the same curve edged parallelepiped she described in writing, but did not think of earlier.

Exhausted from applying her makeup she plomps onto a pillow cushion.

She begins humming, which flickers and quickly flares into song. Her left thigh muscle, across her hip bone where a knight’s scabbard would go, flutters in symphony with her voice’s warbles. Then the right side, then both. Her buttocks tighten and relax rapidly, a vibration that sets both cheeks a-giggle. The wave of muscular exertion and control slips up her belly, through her ribcage, and to her center, through her vagina, down her legs and toes.

Halfway through her mother interrupts her “AYOLI!” her steep voice carries, “Have you done your exercise bodyworks?”

“Yes,” Ayoli mutters mushmouthed to herself. Her mother infiltrates again “Have you done your body work?”

A bit peeved: “I SAID YES!!”

“Did you practice all over, top to bottom...”

“Yess...”
"... and in-between?"
Sighing: "Yes."

"And...? ...?"
Exasperated, but sweet: "I’m still exercising, could you please let me finish?" Ayoli is, in the end, a diligent and respectful girl. Her little impertinences are just signs of her age.

She is exercising.

"Ayoli!" Maoli’s voice sings through the window. "It’s going to start!" Ayoli, having just finished contraction exercises bolts through the door in a whir to join her friend. The day is silver with rain, a few dots on their heads indicates that the rain may return and leave again before the day’s end.

"Lalo and Hob should be there!" exclaims rainbow eyed Maoli. That explains the hurry. In the town dance these young men are snakes, sinuous curves, bursts of motion, and perfect graceful stillnesses. Rushing, Ayoli finishes pulling up her lacy white stocking boot to her knee and rushes down the street with Maoli. Past the gray pharmacy with its blue runes. Ayoli’s foot drags and showers up a handful of water droplets, mercury balls, which burst and spread brown and gray mildew spots on her stocking boots. She smiles, her stocking boots having gained just the right gleam for the night–she could not have planned this. The brown gray spreading flower puddle stains pull the elastic white knee highs into accordance with her ashy brown knee skin.

"Are you after Lalo or Hob tonight?" Ayoli asks her friend. "Both!" rainbow eyes again.
“Okay then! That leaves Silv for me!”

“Oh...no..how about three for me and for you ...”

But they are there and enter the door at the same moment a shift of clouds shuffles the day’s patina from silver to brass with sun.

The sound, the music, the ambiance are liquid. Gulping sounds of human sized bubbles in the water troughs suspended along the dance hall’s ceiling blend with the bubbling sound of the percussionists. The pumpers work along the walls in rows, tubes run from the devices on the floor that the pumpers work using a stair climbing motion—producing their own prodigious perspiration and the water effects on the ceiling. The water movements refract the torch light in living patterns over the entire room, the water occasionally coughs itself up over the sides of the troughs to douse the dancers below. The water splashes, the sweat shined pumpers, the living gray light all work to create the traditional atmosphere that Ayoli and Maoli do not think twice over.

Ayoli does think twice about the pumper Knell, working hard on the left of the hall. She wonders what her muscle contraction exercise could draw out of him. Pumping is serious work, and she knows that an esteemed pumper should not be concerned with her. Certainly Knell has been pleasured, grasped, and coaxed by women with many more years and much more dedication than herself. Still, since he seems neglected by his own ladle woman, she picks up the bucket and ladles fluid over his body—left shoulder, right shoulder, belly, groin—then dips the ladle again and raises it to his mouth to hydrate him. His smile shows gratitude, and she is
uncertain if that other glint in it is devious collaboration with her petty, scandalous act, or disapproval. He says nothing, saving energy for the austere and draining work of pumping out the hall’s atmosphere.

Pumping is an imprecise art, so a skilled pumper is cloaked in an aura of craftsmanship and mysticism. Coaxing out just the right forms requires a concentration of luck, experience, and natural intuition. Not so with the dance.

Presently, Ayoli and Maoli are separate at diagonals on the black clay floor. The sound is of feet slapping hard earth and hands slapping thighs and torsos rhythmically. The beat shifts into chaos and then back into the eight-count. They must move, frenetically. Still a little young, Ayoli’s movements have a smoothness to them showing a lack of abandon. Maoli, on the other hand, has a jauntiness and blaring irregularity of movement that belies her years. No wonder she eyes Lalo and Hob.

Ayoli’s gaze catches Silv. His movements are near perfect. It is generally attributed to some whim of fate that he is cast with lolling eyes and a rambling off-focus way of speaking. He has a charm and an unpredictability, and no one knows if he shares the same reality as everyone else. One side of the room’s dancers begins moving to form the inner quadrangle. A long sucking water gulp slithers the music into a drastic change. Maoli, who has finally moved close to Ayoli, elbows her into the center at the same instant Ayoli glances at Silv—at the same instant that the music completes its slither change.
Ayoli and Silv stop moving completely, eyes interlocked. The dance of water shadows over their bodies effects movement in non-movement. They dance, immobile.

Ayoli’s pupils signify control, then lust, then depth; Silv’s eyes are certitude and repressed energy. Without moving, his pupils indicate wild flitting movements up and to the corner. They are the eyes of someone in a trance, eyes rolled up into his head—except they are steady.

The pats on their booties set their bodies into motion again and they fall back into the crowd. As her body jerks in rhythm, Ayoli watches Maoli dance in the center with a young man on either side. Somehow Maoli is dancing with each, one eye for one boy. Ayoli feels a flush at Maoli’s grace.

Later, half-drenched and in the groove of the after dance lights, they all talk. Maoli’s conversation reflects her dancing, few words but somehow always precise—funny, piercing, satirical, cynical—all in proper doses. Ayoli’s words ring like a bell, clear, cutting, occasionally overloud or inappropriately shrill, but also more endearing than she realizes. She recognizes in herself a girlish attraction for Lalo and Hob, a wild attraction for Silv, but she recognizes those feelings for what they are. Silv returns some of the lusty vibing, but then some raucous laugh or heinous non-sequitor crumbles their sexual bridge construction. Maoli, in contrast, stretches thin strong gossamer bridges between herself and the boys. The bridges laid, her eyes begin that flirtatious choreographed movement that Ayoli postponed practicing after her vaginal contraction exercises so that she could dash off
to the dance. Because Ayoli understands that her own lusts and desires are not ripened, she is resigned to Maoli’s elegance and is not jealous. Maoli moves and shakes those eyes, pierces and caresses with those words, and until its conclusion floods their small gathering in glimpses and full lipped voice.