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The Overtoun House (excerpt)

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Cover Page Footnote

This piece was written and workshopped in 18F. It was brought into workshop as a chapter of a longer novel. Because we operate under a workshop model, we see value in an excerpted chapter. This piece also has a content warning for suicide.

The Overtoun House

III

This morning, I was consumed with thoughts of my friends and family six-hundred miles across the sea. But for the pale bale blue light of dawn, my wonder possessed immortality. Mist from White Mountains fell on Hanover, quiet like the wind of New Hampshire - its frigid vessel. The color of my paintings escaped as the early light crept in, and I felt at peace in this place - such an abstractly dull medium for thought. Remember in darkness, midnight woke me hours prior. And, unable to reclaim rest, I mulled at the sight of my ceiling until it became an abyss.

Dusk gave rain and an eternal ensemble, enough to raise me from the silence misery shared with me. But it was the smell of soaked grass that forced me out of bed. Water had shaded the carpets before the front window, which must've stood open through the entire night. And I could only stare at the darkening puddle beneath me, partly puzzled, but mostly petrified. In this existence, my eyes surely lied, but in this instance they were allowed to tell the truth of one the living seldom visit. I saw her face in that pool of rainwater. She had returned for me. And within me, I still wanted to run at the sight of her - never before had I witnessed the torture of the underworld. But without me, she assured me, with soothing prose, earth would still precess, unshaken. And she reminded me of my deepest will to return the greatest gifts: my life along with my melancholia - my greatest companion. Camilla, how could you?

Rainwater continued to spill over the windowsill, lapping in with the cold air to send my skin dry pangs of discomfort. I broke my gaze from the broadening puddle to look at the sky. It took on a color particular enough recall the memory of a sad tale. So in the arm chair, which served as an outlook from the front windows of our house, I came to sit. My cashmere robe was the only thing I donned to keep me warm from the moistened wind. I kept my breath deep, consuming each as if it were my last. I felt my mind soon begin to drift as the scene outside my window melted away before my eyes. It was like water over undried paint, but I was aware of the circumstance. I closed my eyes and let myself melt alongside while Camilla borrowed away my soul to a place of sorrow.

West of Glasgow lay Dunbartonshire, overcast just as my home town, wherein my body lay, still frozen. And in the west of this ancient shire lay the Overtoun house, overlooking the River Clyde, where beneath its haunted bridge so many had died. I was, however, returned three years before the date of my birth, standing in the garden before the castle-esque, worn, gray stone of the estate. Hundreds of years prior, this mansion was inhabited, but now the grounds remained cast in the shadow of the lives lost here.

My robes grew heavy and dark with rain as I walked across the field, edging closer to the mansion. In its prime, I'm sure it was once a quite charming place, but as I forced open its massive birch doors, I heard those old hinges warning me to turn around. The handles were slimy and rusted, untouched, perhaps for decades. Yet, once in its the dark stone halls, it became more like centuries. I walked up the decrepit, coiling stairs, blindly ambling in a glunness stronger than the one that took over this sorry land. And the smell of rotting flesh grew so strong as I neared the top that I had to spare my burning nostrils with my soaked sleeve. Soon the stairs ceded and I began to see the faint glow of the day once again. Somehow, and for some reason, my heart continued to sink the higher I climbed. Like an affliction welling up to raze me to the ground, Overtoun's

depression drove me to silent weep. It was as if the house knew my melancholy, enough to be even therapeutic. Instead, it chose to mock the pain I felt when she was taken away from me. And it was all it took to drive my remaining happiness away. Yes, my tears grew stronger, but I used my teeth to draw blood. I would bring my body pain - to ease that brought by the sorrow in my heart.

The stairs brought me to a columned terrace, and through the expanse was another large door, sprawled open to reveal the evil that lay at the heart of this forsaken place. The Overtoun Bridge. On it stood a brooding man, clearly tall and strong - yet as clearly ill and so terribly troubled. He wasn't created that way, I was sure of it. But by something far darker even than what tortures the soul of Camilla, whose shade still strangles my mortal neck across space and time. For in his great left hand was a bundle of red, silken cloth. And, absent an umbrella, he let the rain fall - paying the torrent no mind. He just stared endlessly over that bridge as if trying to fathom all the boundlessness of the universe - captured even more abysmally than I this very same morning.

I walked across the terrace, covering my nose tightly as the rank odor began to pierce. Still I wept, still I wept. On my left were rounded columns, overlooking the garden whence I came, and the light grew an ill hue as it kissed the stone. The walls to my right had been embossed with ornate reliefs depicting Lord Overtoun and the history of his family line, long deceased.

The vista looking onto the bridge was a daunting one, and still I wept. I wanted to hold the hand of the poor man before me and, with him, sink fifty feet below. For surely, he knew my pain. There, the bank would drink our blood and break our bones to nourish the land alongside the many who once stood here on this bridge. The vibrant below plants grew grotesquely strong as if to taunt those above, for they knew the blood of the afflicted would bring them new life.

I came to the head of the bridge and looked at the man, resting my eyes hard until he turned to look at me as well. His eyes were bloodshot and deranged. Sanity had indeed long left him, and now his mind lay in pieces. He now only knew his affliction: the demon who revealed itself at his back. Its large blackened left hand rested almost paternally on the man's shoulder, but then it saw me, too. And when it looked at me with its sunken red holes, a smile cracked upon the face. A gate to hell, a black hole. And its rotted teeth pressed against each other so hard that the gums bled and with saliva, fell to the stone. On that pale, evil face was...Ah the cold that it sent through me.

My eyes were drawn away from it when I heard the penetrating sound of a crying child. I focused now on the cloth, still wrapped in the man's hands. It was an infant no more than three weeks old, but its cry could be heard for miles, I was sure. It was so strong and piercing that I had to draw my hands from my face to instead cover my ears, lest I end up as mad as he who stood there. But he who stood there stood still no longer. He crept towards the edge. And overlooking that slow, dragging stream, which carried with it the bones of dead men, he cast his young child down to the bank below.

My heart lunged before my body stepped out onto the bridge, soundlessly shouting. In shock, I ran too look over the edge, helplessly reaching. And when I looked back at the man, his demon had vanished and he had turned away from me. Instead, his eyes were fixed on the painting he had made below. Something changed, however. With the death of the child, left the smell of rot. And the rain was not afraid of the man any longer. As it soaked him, he turned to leave me there alone, and when he disappeared fully into the gloom, I fell to meet the young soul - dashed against the bankside fifty feet below.

I could only hope never to return to that forsaken bridge. Never again could I behold the great sorrow of Overtoun.