

The Barber stuffs the wound with cloves and honey, binds it tight with linen, but it does not take.

Usually gruff, he softly apologizes.

Now it smells. Sharp yet oblate, and wafts, emitting out, like an object with clearly defined borders. Diot, lying in the corner, holds the hand and the wound and the smell.

Primed with miserable significance. The visiting Aristocrat tours the workshop, asks for an outline of a days work. It is explained to him and he is quiet for a short time. 'Bleak' is all he whispers before moving on.

Diot opens the index finger of the supporting hand whilst sewing. A sharp quick wound. A slip and a gasp.

Refusing to bleed for seven long seconds, Diot stares at the whitening flap. It sheets out blood, followed softly by pain the very moment it stops seeming unreal. Transversing two knuckles, it cannot be stitched closed. Too clumsy, the barber must wrap it. He looks sad as he does this. His own hands too large to perform the delicate work of weaving Diot's finger back together. He softly apologizes.

The wound, and the blood beneath it, go sour. Diot, dying, has been brought to the workshop. Diot must come to the workshop each day even if Diot cannot work. None of the

young weavers are to be trusted in the dormitories alone - a sickness may be a ruse, explain the Masters, to let them steal their coworkers pathetic possessions.

And so Diot watches, through a cold painful fog, as two spinners make thread with spun silver, ten thousandths of an inch thick. Twisting a helix of invisible metal. A dance of aching backs and stiff joints. This is the role Diot might aspire to as an applicant-apprentice not born of a fully invested member.

Murdered by the labour, throbbing like a song, Diot's finger becomes a bigger and bigger thing. Pulsing, as if with its own heartbeat.

The world bubbles and roils. It seethes. At vision's edge, it crackles and fizzes like rain on a stagnant moat. And everything feels so slow! Swollen beyond comprehension. Diot looks down into defeat and destruction. Bilha, fellow weaver, floats away with a full cup.

The finger pulses like a new and separate heart that grows as Diot dwindles. As if the finger is scheming to bud off and begin anew, untroubled by debt or obligation.

Bilha brings water again but it tastes like sand, Diot cannot drink. The smell of the finger now also a taste. Unhealing

cuts in the mouth taunt and mock. Cold black once-blood, rank, oozes around loose teeth and a thick tongue. Gifts from a short beating about the head, punishment for getting the finger's fresh blood onto the in-progress tapestry. The room feels yet bigger and bigger, the finger throbs harder and harder, difficult not to imagine it as the body's new centre. As if the new heart growing is the principal of two unsplit halves.

The world begins to end for Diot, all heat leaks from the bones.

Bereftness, misery. Diot stares down at life that refuses to stop leaking, at a pulsing finger, tumid and huge. Heartbeats like footsteps, walking away. Diot stares at this, the death of all things. Throbbing like a song. The leaking wound that sings a universe.

None of the other apprentice-applicants want to carry Diot back to the dormitory. It is summer and they have been here laboring since before the sun fully rose, leaving now only after it has fully set. They do not want Diot to die in the dormitory for fear of ghosts and hauntings and curses. And so Diot is left in the workshop, in a corner. Bilha weeps, and Mahaut smirks, and Jeneve looks away, as they and all the rest walk away.

In the darkness, alone, too tired and cold to be angry or sad, the body shrivels, head and spine shrinking. All thought processes shift to the finger, now bulging and huge. The stench has transmuted again, finally, into something almost elegant. A crack appears in the finger's thick skin, as an alembic gem of New Fluid emanates from the hollow finger. Diot watches in mute wonder as, Divine and translucent, it drifts through the air and alights, homing in, on the last patch of blood the opened finger left on the in-progress tapestry.

This time the Barber wraps Diot's whole body in linen, softly apologizing as he goes. The tapestry is sold, one year hence, to the Aristocrat who visited during its making, for three thousand florins.

You are already dead. You will be eating your neighbor one year from reading this. This brief span of time that you now exist in (the now of your reading, the 'now' of you remembering this text, the 'now' of you eating your neighbor) is a dwindling, twilit thing. You are a lie in a quaking mind.

Sam is nervous, he stands outside the gallery space.

It is a room filled with friends and friendly people and not one or two somewhat hostile individuals (critics, or curators

perhaps?) but a happy place nevertheless. He is proud he gets to share his work with his community. Sam is a good person. His community is beautiful. Nevertheless, he is nervous. These performances are not usually like this. Not usually set up this way. He walks in, costumed, sheaf of papers shaking slightly in hand. He clears his throat, struck by the theatre-seemingness of the dynamic, and begins.

Sam's brain is obliterated the moment he reads his first word. Nottingham disappears from behind the doors. A sort of spaghetification occurs. Sam, falls sideways infinitely. Sam becomes less than a man, less than an individual. Sam is now a thing. Everyone in the audience, falls sideways infinitely, they become less than a crowd, more like a kind of solar panel array. Technically everyone has died, but they are all still screaming. The screams produce light. Distilled New Fluid dewes upon all things, in all directions. It glitters, illuminated. Time stops happening in any useful way. A finger cracks open and something comes out. The room buds off to form a universe of its own, everything it leaves behind now by definition unreal. Everything before only theoretical sophistry.

Some clockwork part of Sam recognizes and understands the role to which it is welded.

Sam becomes the indexical meat.

A finger pointing at words on a page.

The particle and the wave - that all the little bickering individuals are made of. The thrust and repost of all the Transactions and the arguments. Sam bounces, hiding between and inside the characters: the dead and the never living, passing from allegory back into some stuttering performance of life and back again. New trees of life, flaking off. New beings born in a world without time, flensing and reskinning. Sam, the threading needle, weaves a smuggleable universe. One for the pocket. Paper, meat, and New Fluid. A kaleidoscope of wincing horrors. An infinitude of despair, lacerations, and inebriated joy.

At the end, and forever,

Sam dances with Diot, each ventriloquizing the other.

Joseph Buckley 2023

A finger pointing at words on a page.
The particle and the wave - that all the little bickering



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text written for Sam Keogh's 2023 solo exhibition 'The Unicorn is Killed and Brought to the Castle Cartoon' at Primary, Nottingham, UK.