

The lines of Godly bodies

by Max Dedomenico

*The poor stroked portrait,
feels no peace in the absence of a mirror.
Sitting painted, vanity born. Imploring you to touch, to
feel the sensual starvation.
Stretching across gazes, thieving your attention.
Testing your affection.*

*Does loyalty lie in the lines of godly bodies?
She has lost the words
and never had the answer.*

*Confide in the silent siren, sat between a
glass pane and a paid gallery.
They shall condemn the notions, the
fires in which she lights.
For she does not age, cannot
against her deepest wishes
develop wrinkle or odour.
Cannot in all her tired
prominence wear the years or
the touch of infamy.*

*As the glass wears thin,
carrying smudge and
scratch.*

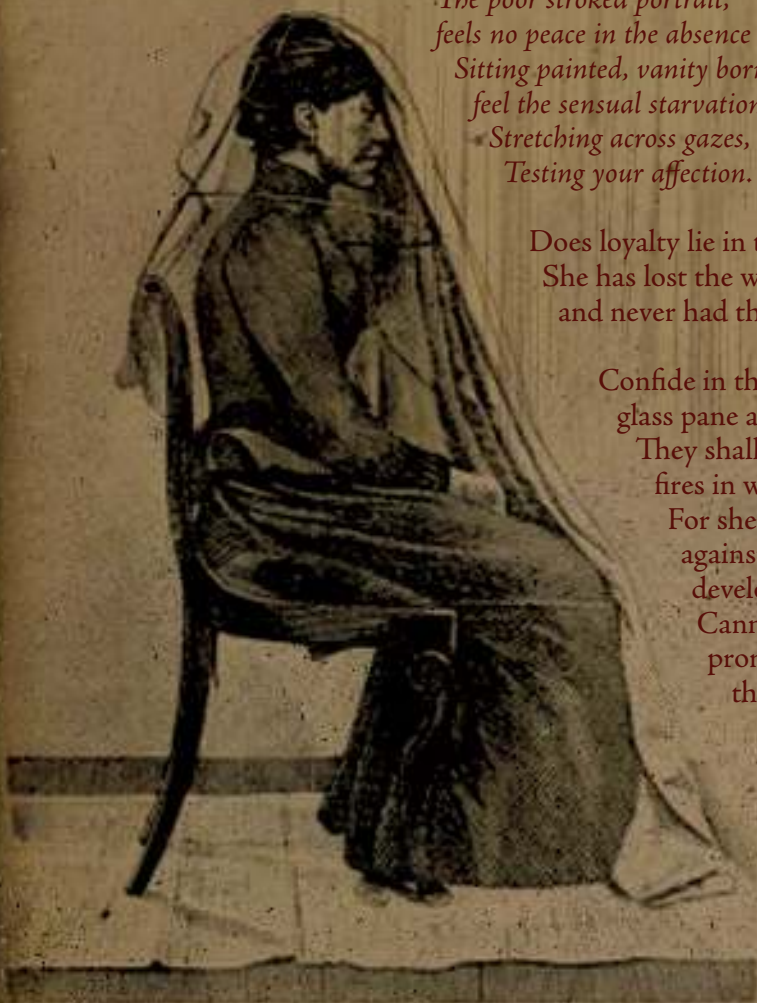


FIG. 3.

She must remain, peering.
Fulfilling her painted purpose, the artist's
promise.

She remembers the words,
those spat at her in chastise.
She had been a mere girl, a
daughter, a kind neighbour.

While
sitting painted, vanity
scorned.

crush of the plunge of her collar.
 flinch, no room to revel in the
 reverence.
 She must remain, peering,
 nted purpose, the artist's
 promise.
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 bodies?
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NEVER GREEN

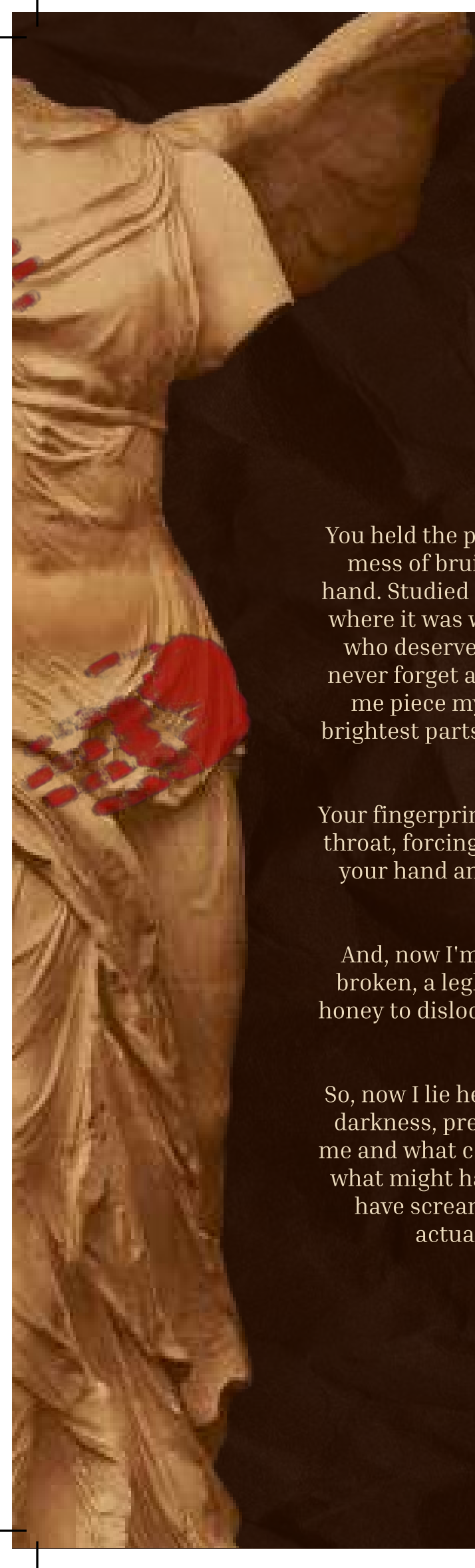
I want to weep into an ink pot and carve the prettiest words into my skin in the clearest shades of blue to prove that I am just as beautiful as every great wonder of the world.

I want you to love me, and you do, but not in the evergreen everglade kind of way I would have prayed for if I had that kind of faith. Instead you love me the way a child loves their blanket or a teen loves their phone: loudly when I'm convenient and in the past tense when there's something newer, shiner, prettier, and less of a reminder of the past you, the you of last year that you have to leave behind for the image of betterment.

You love me in the way that makes people fly around the world to see the same attractions that have been around for civilisations. Protected, discussed, coveted, misappropriated, captured, conquered, forgotten.

My presence is an afterthought, my time a commodity when it serves your needs of distraction.

You said you'd never leave and I wish I believed it. I wish I believed you. But in the same way I wish you lied and I wish you would go so I didn't have to feel like a multi-lane highway that has come to a standstill because a learner driver decided he was ready to take the wheel of an oil tanker, took a corner too fast and rolled. Exploding across every surface, coating me in inescapable, suffocating goo that seeps into my pores and scorches me to my core, gripping my insides with calloused fingers, squeezing and manipulating me in your image.



PAIGE JENKINS

You held the patchwork of my heart, a bloody jagged mess of bruises and betrayal in the palm of your hand. Studied it until you knew its patterns and past, where it was weakest, and figured yourself an artist who deserved to add his own markings so I could never forget all the ways I thought you were helping me piece myself back together, only to steal the brightest parts and insert your own spare bits when I turned my back.

Your fingerprints fasten themselves to the base of my throat, forcing any rebuttal to stay put, unless fed by your hand and pleasant encouragement, until the branding fades.

And, now I'm left with the voice you gave me, half broken, a legless silkworm choking back tears and honey to dislodge the words I should have said when I had the chance.

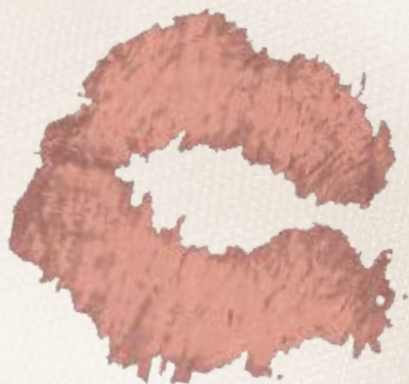
So, now I lie here, alone at night, whispering into the darkness, pretending you lie awake thinking about me and what could have been. Hoping my whispers of what might have been are louder than how I should have screamed when you finally told me how it actually is, and how it will never be.

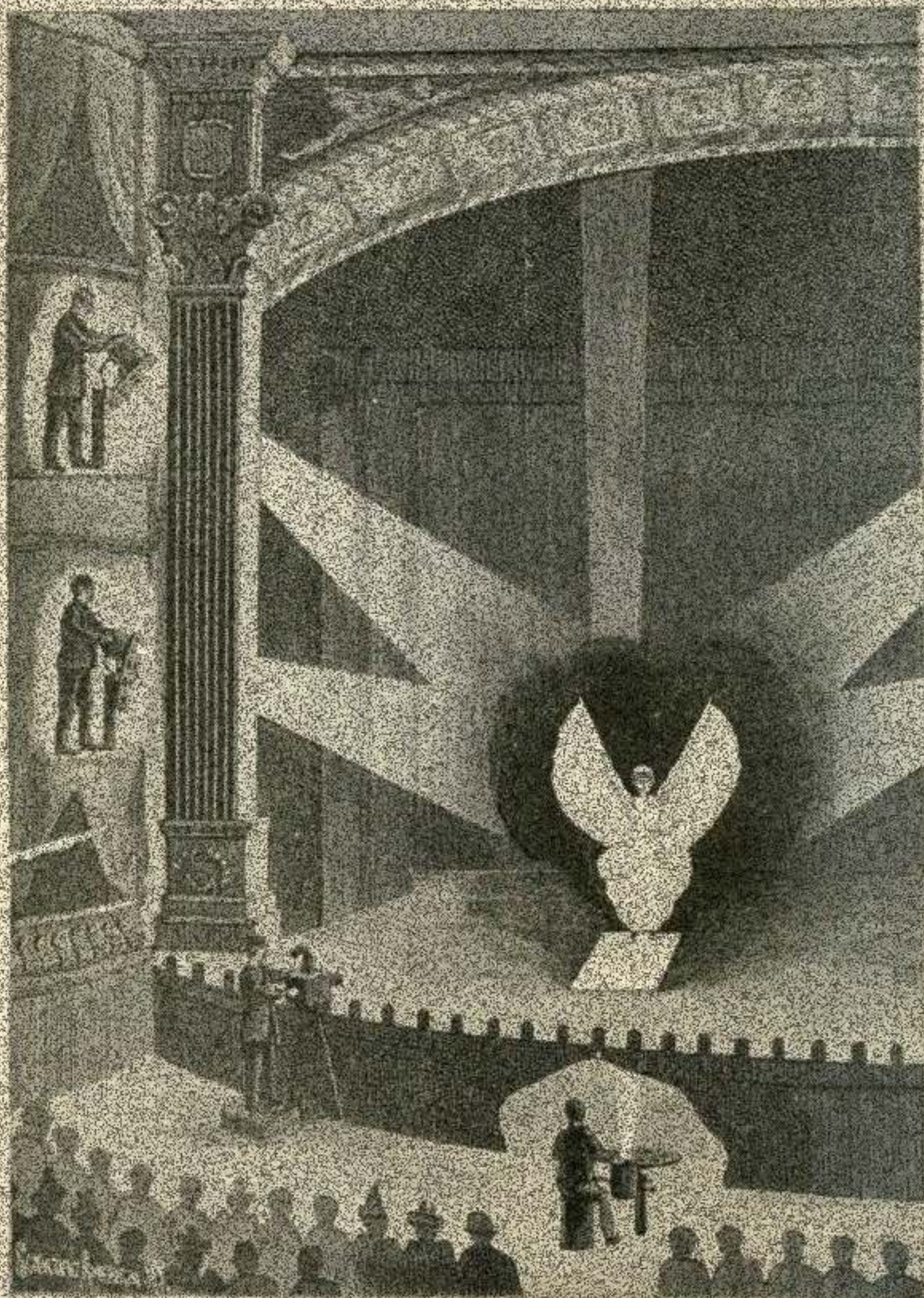
girl xx

By Angelina Sokolsky

Pomegranate balm, rub lips
opposite her, on stained seats,
back carriage of the city-circle train.
Her laugh bubbles through a story,
stuttering two, maybe three times,
when I walk from her right eye
to her lips, then
to her left.
A freak weather event, forty-one degrees,
puts us in skirts.
Hers drapes long from the waist,
liquid-like satin inked in black, almost wet,
dripping when storm winds pick up
and traffic lights melt her—orange—red—green...
Mine wraps short, holds my hip-dips,
cutting just where quads round at the top,
dipping slightly on each side—left, right, left, right,
as I tap-tap-tap up station stairs,
sandals letting feet flirt with earth.
Fabric pattern resembles bacteria,
pickle green, earl grey and Christmas red,
matching one-dollar beaded pendant from Lifeline
slung around my neck,
just questionable enough
to make attraction more wrong,
unsure, gustatory, acquired, delicious.
Her first sushi train,
ripped-open packets,
This is ginger—this is wasabi—if you want—
You can even—you won't like it—what do you think?
Her face crumples. Good? Lips widen.
Skirt too short, bare thighs sink into wooden stool.

She breathes deep just before she speaks,
leaning ear towards one shoulder,
then the other, bunching skin
to form soft crevices,
that I steal in peripheral glances,
to remember the taste—
mochi ice cream, powder-white, icing-sugar sweet—
I kinda like it, she confesses.
Get another one, girl.
Cab-sav-red nails reach for small plate,
gold rings take off plastic lid,
dipping bowl of soy in middle,
each double-dip
a quick peck.





Reviews

SCENT OF A WOMAN R E V I E W

by Mason Horsley

"A very very distant second is a Ferrari. Charlie, give me your hand. This is just the start of your education, son."

– Colonel Frank Slade

I can't explain how this film found a way to my heart. Maybe I was feeling depressed when I saw it for the first time on channel GEM on a hot summer afternoon. If I had to guess, I believe it would be because it's a glistening look at life. There are times when all we want to do is sky the towel and just call it quits, stay in our room all day and play our cry or rage song (mine is either 'Nothing Else Matters', 'Lonely Day' or anything by James Blunt). 'Scent Of A Woman' was there for me. When I felt like I didn't matter or came home from taking disrespect, when I needed a friend, 'Scent Of A Woman' was there. It's much more than just a comfort movie for me. It's the last movie I want to watch before I die.

Charlie Simms is an underprivileged student at Baird School, relying on student aid. He takes a job over Thanksgiving, taking care of a retired veteran, in order to pay for a flight home for the festivities. The night before he starts work, however, he and snobby student George Willis witness George's friends organising a prank which vandalises Dean Trask's car. After being offered a free ride to Harvard in exchange for information, Charlie ponders over his morality while a veteran in his care, Lieutenant Colonel Frank Slade, whisks him over New York City on a tour of pleasures, including tangoing with a gorgeous woman, test-driving a Ferrari and dining at expensive restaurants. However, Frank is hiding problems of his own. No matter how many times I watch it, I never get tired of it. Even now as I write this, during my 7th or 8th

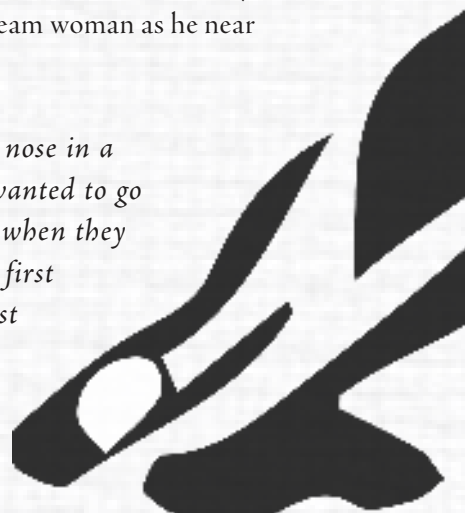
watchthrough, I still smile ear-to-ear as we meet Al Pacino's Colonel Frank Slade, remembering the good times and bad times we're about to face. My endorphins kick in every time I hear that opening tune by Thomas Newman.

While Newman's sweeping orchestral pieces sound absolutely majestic, I argue that the diamonds of the album are 'Por Una Cabeza' and 'La Violetera' by The Tango Project. 'Por Una Cabeza' plays during Frank's dance scene in the restaurant with Donna and the song perfectly complements his emotional resurgence. In a single dance, we see the man he was before the accident and the man he could be right now, if he was willing to keep going. 'La Violetera' plays in two scenes, but the most prominent use is in the final. As Charlie watches as Frank walks home, a relieved smile spreads across his face and 'La Violetera' amplifies while Charlie slides back into the limo and is slowly driven down the hill, away from view. With 'La Violetera', the perfect ending got the perfect song. Maybe I love this film because I see myself in O'Donnell's performance. While Frank and Dean Trask take demanding tones, Charlie never quite knows how to answer. He's very cautious and anxious in his responses, which is something I can deeply relate to. It's this nervous and tender nature that elevates his later confrontation with Frank to a tear-dripping extreme.

The reason is more likely to be because of Pacino's performance, however, and why wouldn't it?

It's astounding to see Pacino pull off such an incredible display of illusion as he convinces us he's a blind veteran. He trained tirelessly, studying with the visually impaired and keeping in character off-screen, moving with his cane and never giving any eye contact. But even taking the "blind" acting out of the picture, his voice pulls off sweetness and gruffness effortlessly. With his natural New York accent, he could charm you into a tender rest, you can't help but imagine your dream woman as he near whispers:

"Have you ever buried your nose in a mountain of curls and just wanted to go to sleep forever, or lips, that when they touched yours were like that first swallow of wine after you just crossed the desert?"



But he could also stun you into anxiety like when you hear your parent's footsteps approaching your door in the middle of the night.

"You'll give me 40, then you're gonna give me 40 more, then you're gonna pull KP, the grease pit! I'll rub your nose in enlisted men's crud till you don't know which end is up!"

Since his first Oscar nomination in 1973 for 'The Godfather', he lost at every ceremony he was in the running for. 'Serpico', 'The Godfather Part II', 'Dog Day Afternoon', '...And Justice For All', 'Glengarry Glen Ross'. Each of these films are considered masterpieces of Pacino's career, but it wasn't until 1993, 20 years after his first nomination for the film that made him a celebrity, that he would finally win the Best Actor Oscar for 'Scent Of A Woman'.

"You broke my streak"

– Al Pacino, 1993 Oscars Acceptance Speech

'Scent Of A Woman' is an incredible, touching film about how we see and treat ourselves. We're human, we do bad things; I understand it could feel more comfortable just to sit in the dark, convinced that it's morally right to suffer more.

"I'm bad, I'm not bad, no, I'm rotten."

But you can't and you shouldn't sit there forever, at some point you need to stand up and remedy the problem.

"You're not bad, you're just in pain."

You have to get up and acknowledge that you're better than this, that you can't let one mistake take you over to the point where you fixate all day, to the point where all you can hear is that voice.

"Where do I go from here, Charlie?"

"If you're tangled up, just tango on."

"Are you asking me to dance, Charlie?"

Mason's Top 3 Reasons to Watch 'Scent Of A Woman'

1. An absolutely astounding soundtrack by Thomas Newman
2. A heartbreaking look at mental illness
3. An glorious celebration of life's pleasures, whether it's tangoing with a stunner, test-driving a Ferrari or simply enjoying a delicious dinner at a high-class restaurant



BEFORE I FORGET

A R E V I E W O F T H E

BEFORE THE COFFEE GETS COLD

S E R I E S

by Aleksandar Sekulovski

If you're looking for a simple autumn read that you can have a crack at while having brekky, I can recommend a cosy series about a time-travelling café that provides its customers the closure they so desperately seek (with some caveats).

As fond as I've grown to become of this series, *Before the Coffee Gets Cold* has a tendency to spill the same exposition on your lap – time and time again – until the stain it leaves permanently alters your pants into a bistre-brown. I also found myself feeling infantilised as the implications of characters' actions were clearly spelled out in unnecessary detail – page after page – as if the author feared I was a sociopath that didn't fully grasp human emotions. Each chapter also follows the same tried and true formula – over and over – to the point that I think this book series would actually fit better as a weekly television show (so please, read this series a chapter at a time). There's also the issue of the dialogue feeling weirdly stilted, though I chalked that up to the language barrier and translation work.

Despite all my issues, I still found this series of books quite endearing. Each book sets up shop and lets each character come and go as they want as the ever-vigilant staff attend their every need. Of course some characters had stronger stories than others but I followed through them all to find the closure they each sought, because, despite the author's insistence to the contrary, I do feel empathy for names on a page. Each chapter across each book is its own self-contained story and every act wraps up nicely enough that I never felt dissatisfied with the time I had spent.

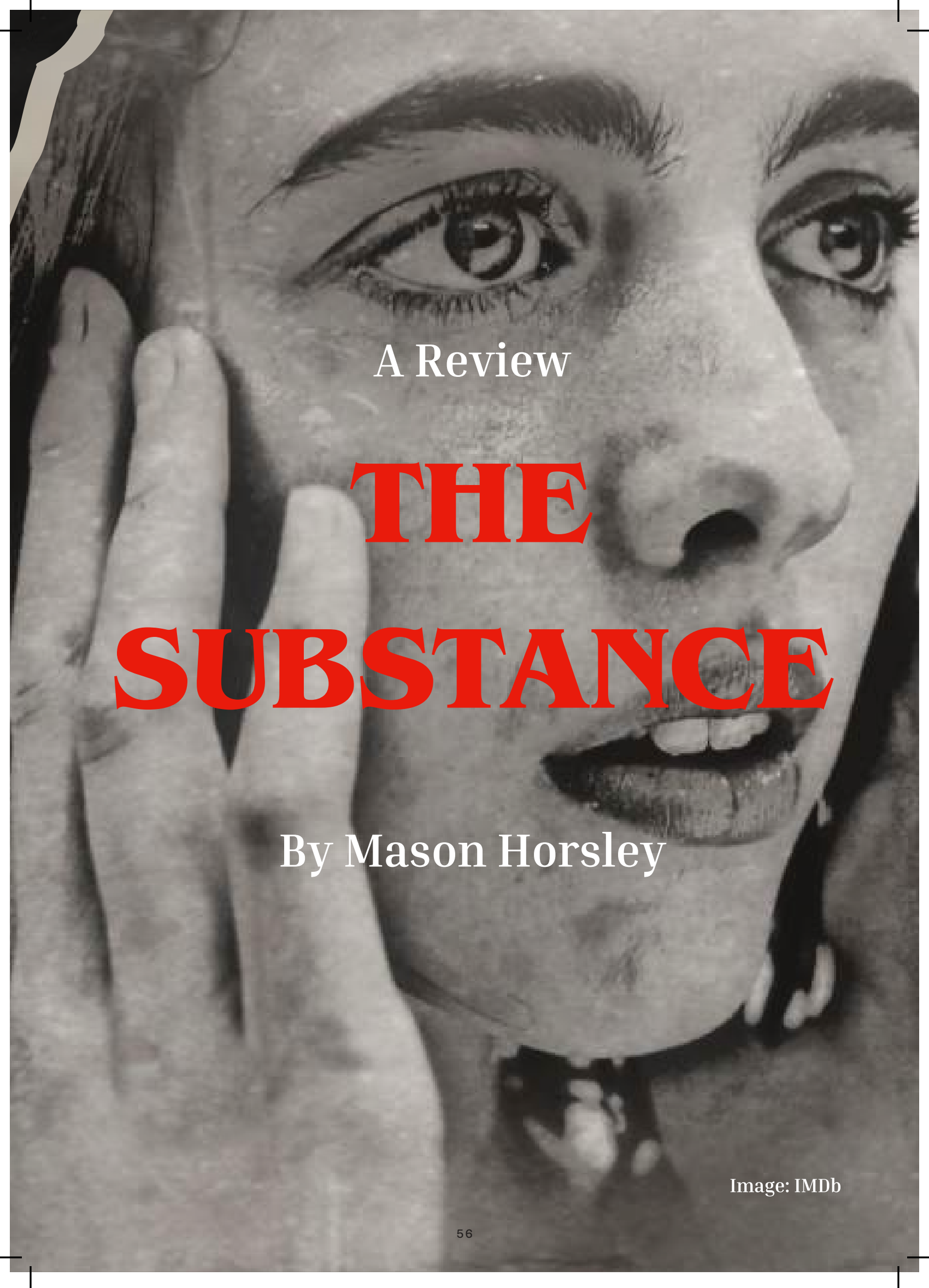
Although, I can't say that my own memory will be able to vividly recall everything, I found the first book in the series, *Before the Coffee Gets Cold* (2015) to be the most memorable and most moving. As the first in the series, it outlines the recipe that each subsequent entry will follow, where every character is not just agents in their own stories but also important figures in the stories of those around them, blending everyone's experiences in one place. The second book in the series, *Tales From The Café* (2020), was quite unmemorable, save for its final chapter. The same can be said for the third book, *Before Your Memory Fades* (2018), but both books still follow the formula faithfully and are able to invoke the same emotions I felt in the first (though to a lesser degree as I began to build a tolerance and familiarity to the series). The fourth, *Before We Say Goodbye* (2021), explores its characters through a first-person perspective, which I found a little unwelcome and off-putting from the blueprint set by earlier entries. In the most recent and fifth entry in the series *Before We Forget Kindness* (2024), I was treated to my favourite chapter in the entire collection – 'The Valentine' – which follows an unrequited love that could only be expressed in the past, when the regret of having never done so has already festered. It's the formula blended to an intensity that could overcome the tolerance I had built up from so much exposure to the same story beats.

Despite its many shortcomings, my taste adapted to Toshikazu Kawaguchi's familiar blend of story elements, which kept me coming back again and again as I sought to relive the same high the first read gave me, like a bad show I'm addicted to.

I've set the equipment along my bathroom sink. Firstly, the activator, a green vial to be injected in the arm, secondly, the food packs, one set for me and the other for him, and lastly the switch, for when I just want to sleep for a week. I slowly fill the needle and inject myself. I don't remember the next five minutes. I wake up blood-soaked and shivering on the freezing tiles. My legs take a few seconds to wake up and I see my ravaged corpse on the ground. I look in the mirror and see the new, better me. He's so handsome, his hair even more luscious, such bulging shoulders, like plates of armour. His six-pack is so defined. I check him out for a few minutes before glancing back at my surrendered dead body. Well, now that I've got my new, better me, I suppose I don't need that anymore.

The past few days, I've been listening to 'You Must Remember This', a podcast covering film history. As I've been experiencing the 'Erotic 80s' season, the host keeps reminding me of a film called 'The Substance' starring Demi Moore in the 'performance of her career' and directed by Coralie Fargeat. The quotes from magazine reviews are underwhelming, the same generic marketing, but on my day off, I buy a ticket. The poster was so enticingly private, only showing the title in big bold letters. Body horror is definitely my thing and I was not only satisfied but overwhelmed.

'The Substance' is one of the most disgusting films I have ever seen and I freaking love it. IElizabeth Sparkle, a fitness media personality is being booted off her show due to her older age by Harvey, the network executive. After getting into a car crash on the way back to her penthouse, a medical intern hands her a thumb drive with only a phone number. The drive shows her an advertisement for The Substance, a drug that will make an improved you. After a few days, Elizabeth can't resist, and births Sue, her new, younger alter-ego. However, after Sue starts to bend the rules in her favour, the battle is on to regain full control of not only the body, but the fame.

A black and white close-up photograph of a woman's face, looking upwards with a hand near her cheek. The image is grainy and has a high-contrast, vintage aesthetic. The woman's eyes are wide and looking towards the upper right. Her hand is raised, with fingers slightly spread, near her left cheek and jawline. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and shadows.

A Review

THE SUBSTANCE

By Mason Horsley

Image: IMDb

Demi Moore plays Elizabeth and knocks it out of the park. The review lines, though generic, were absolutely correct. She managed to terrify me into anxiety as she journeys down into madness and jealousy over Sue. She masterfully transitions from a victim you can empathise with to a villain you never want to witness. Margaret Qualley plays Sue, and also delivers a perfect performance. She hits all her marks as an erotic fitness seductress. Her voice is so sweet and her physicality is so demanding, it's hard not to be caught under her spell. Dennis Quaid plays Harvey and brings so much sick, twisted, fun to the character. Quaid made me believe Harvey had to be based on Vince McMahon, he's so loud, inconsiderate and shamelessly puts on the corporate "Everything's fine, so smile!" face. He's the definition of a villain you love to hate.



Image: IMDb

Benjamin Kracun's cinematography is so uncomfortable, it earns this movie a place alongside the greats (like 'Re-Animator', 'Slither' or 'Splice'). We all thought Denethor eating in 'Return Of The King' was disgusting, but until now, we haven't seen Dennis Quaid eating prawns or Demi Moore reaching into a raw chicken. Every shot is unbearably close, it's as if Kracun is ordering us at gunpoint to be disgusted and aroused within mere seconds. Kracun's power is absolute.

Of course, many will point to the last 30 minutes of the film, and with good cause. It's nightmare fuel, Cronenberg on steroids. The final shot for instance is so artfully revolting, you want to vomit but you still sympathise. No doubt, the last 30 minutes is the reason for the R-rating, most of the film is pretty tame violence-wise and powers through on its remarkable psychological horror, as we watch such an admirable figure demean herself for another few seconds in the spotlight. 'The Substance' no doubt cements Fargeat's name amongst the greats and dethrones Cronenberg from his throne.

MASONS TOP 3 REASONS TO WATCH 'THE SUBSTANCE'

1. One of the most uncomfortable and disgusting final sequences since 'Terrifier'
2. An assault on the senses, your eyes and ears will be violated
3. The best and definitely most haunting performances in all of Moore's, Qualley's and Quaid's careers

'Small Things like These'

- A review

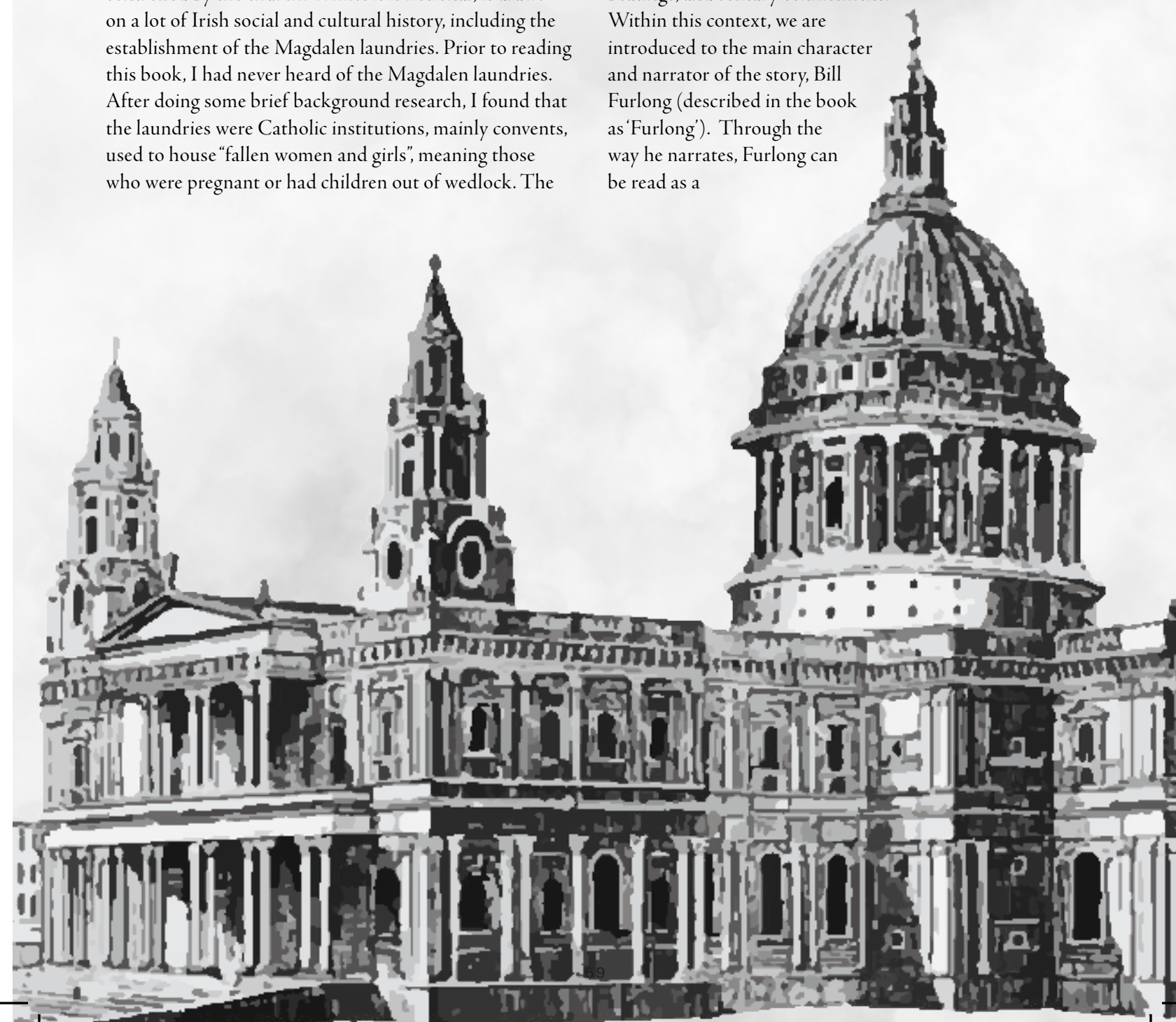
By Holly Haisman

I have read 'Small Things like These' twice now. And both times I have had the same reaction; complete awe at Keegan's ability to write something so reflective and truthful in such few words (it's only 114 pages long!).

The book was published by Irish writer Claire Keegan in 2021, and has been the recipient of numerous awards, including being shortlisted for the Booker Prize 2022. It is set in 1985, in a small Irish community, tightly controlled by the church. Whilst it is fictional, it draws on a lot of Irish social and cultural history, including the establishment of the Magdalen laundries. Prior to reading this book, I had never heard of the Magdalen laundries. After doing some brief background research, I found that the laundries were Catholic institutions, mainly convents, used to house "fallen women and girls", meaning those who were pregnant or had children out of wedlock. The

laundries also housed those considered "destitute" - coming from an impoverished background. These institutions believed that these women and girls should be kept separated from the rest of society, under the guise that they would be cared for. Instead, hidden from the eyes of the public, they were a source of free labour for the convents: sewing, cleaning, cooking, and doing laundry work. Later records revealed that those who didn't comply were faced with inhumane punishments, including beatings, and solitary confinement.

Within this context, we are introduced to the main character and narrator of the story, Bill Furlong (described in the book as 'Furlong'). Through the way he narrates, Furlong can be read as a



reserved, hard-working man, providing for his wife and five daughters. While everyone has different interpretations, I would say that like many of us, Furlong's main goal is to get through his working day no matter what challenges come his way. This is at the expense of everything that is happening around him.

This idea is revealed towards the centre of the story, when Furlong happens to open the door of a coal shed and see a girl from the Magdalen laundries locked inside. Rather than being outraged at the sight of this scene, his reaction is more of a general annoyance:

"When he managed to get her out and saw what was before him—a girl just about fit to stand, with her hair roughly cut—the ordinary part of him wished he'd never come near the place."

In this way, Keegan describes how so many of us behave when we see something unsettling: wishing we had never seen it in the first place. And so, rather than questioning the girl's situation, Furlong returns her to the convent and carries on mechanically with his day.

In effect, the rest of the book focuses on Furlong, as he narrates his everyday routines, those tiny pinpoint moments in his day. Driving to work, shopping for Christmas gifts, helping his girl's bake a fruit cake. Never does he stop to think about the girl he saw, or question why she was there.

However, I should say, that just because the book focuses on the smaller details of Furlong's life, does not mean that it is boring! In my opinion, this book is far from it. Keegan's use of language, her vivid descriptions, and her concise way of writing, drew me into Furlong's world, despite not liking him as a character. One of my favourite lines in the book is when Keegan writes; "*driving up to the convent, the reflection of Furlong's headlights crossed the windowpanes and it felt as though he was meeting himself there.*" The line is so simple, but it makes me reflect on those in-between moments, when I'm driving from one place to another, just alone with my thoughts.

Another line that stands out to me is towards the end of the book where Furlong begins to question his own routine.

"*'What was it all for?' 'Furlong wondered. The work and the constant worry. Getting up in the dark and going to the yard, making deliveries one after another, the whole day long, then coming home in the dark and trying to wash the black off himself and falling asleep before waking in the dark to meet a version of the same thing, yet again.'*"

Overall, I think 'Small Things like These' is a book that speaks to all of us, whether we like to admit it or not. We all live our lives in a certain way, caught up in our own routines which numb us to the experiences of those around us. It is a powerful and moving read, forcing us to look inward and face our own complicities.



REVIEW:

NO LOVE SONGS

WHY SO

MANY

LOVE

SONGS?

By Asher Wood

I truly had no idea what to expect from the brand-new Foundry Theatre's first musical production: *No Love Songs*, a two-hander starring Keegan Joyce (*Rake*, *Please Like Me*) and Lucy Maunder (*Chicago*, *Mary Poppins*), touts itself as simply a modern love-story. Its reality is much more complex.

Based on a true story, the musical follows brand-new parents Jessie and Lana through the first few months of their baby's life. Jessie, a musician in a band, books gig after gig to support Lana and their son. Lana, a university student turned full-time mum, finds herself unable to return to her studies after giving birth and continues to stay home with the baby. When Jessie books an American tour, Lana and the baby are left alone in Newcastle, where Lana becomes increasingly isolated and overwhelmed, unable to explain to Jessie that she's struggling. At the show's peak, Lana makes an unsuccessful suicide attempt, and we watch the fallout as she and Jessie recover.

To *No Love Songs*'s credit, its story is one that doesn't get told enough. Postpartum depression often isn't portrayed or discussed, both in real life and on stage, and this lack of visibility contributes heavily to Lana's feelings of isolation and insufficiency. The love story between Jessie and Lana is very much secondary to, or at least inextricable from, the story of Lana's mental health.

The show's book, written by Lana's real-life counterpart Laura Wilde with Johnny McKnight, pulls no punches – it is raw, honest, and realistic, if a little trite at times. Its confessional-style dialogue gives us a deep understanding of Lana's struggles. That being said, its juxtaposition of Jessie and Lana's experiences during Jessie's time away makes Jessie incredibly difficult to like and their happy ending consequentially unsatisfying.

Maunder embodies Lana with incredible heart and sensitivity, expertly navigating the tender balance between the show's humor and emotion. Alongside her as Jessie, Joyce is real and down-to-earth, reminding the audience that despite his unlikeability he's (mostly) just a person trying his best in a complex situation.

The show's music, however, tells a different story. *No Love Songs* is a jukebox musical based on an album written for Wilde by Kyle Falconer, the real Jessie. The lyrics are frequently clunky, the melodies and instrumentation uninspired, and the emotional tone mismatched to the book. I felt that many of the songs were unnecessary, poorly placed, did nothing to further the plot or characterisation, and made it even harder to like Jessie's character. The last thing I wanted to hear as Lana woke up in hospital following her suicide attempt was a self-centred song from Jessie about what he wanted from her. The strong points of the storytelling were completely undermined by songs which were unhelpful, irrelevant and sometimes downright insensitive.

A story that could have been a necessary exploration of Lana's incredibly common experience was turned at random points into a story about Jessie's ego. Lyrics written by Falconer were put into Lana's mouth in ways that at best repeated and at worst contradicted the sentiment of her spoken lines. Almost every song in the musical made me progressively more convinced that No Love Songs would have been much better executed as a straight play.

This brings us to perhaps the most glaring issue with the show: at every turn, the important and honest story being told by Wilde is obscured or glossed over by other aspects of the production. As mentioned earlier, the marketing is vague about the true content of the show, likely in a bid for palatability. You have to look closely to understand what it is you're buying tickets to, with the show's official synopsis massively downplaying the extent of Lana's struggles. In a dangerous decision that has since been amended, the production initially chose to not even give content warnings.

On stage, the character of Lana states that one in five mothers experience postpartum depression, her struggles (Wilde's real-life struggles) exacerbated by not knowing that she wasn't the only one. Why is the production so hesitant to discuss its content?

I truly believe it would draw in and deeply connect with an audience who have been waiting to hear stories like this if No Love Songs genuinely highlighted and valued Lana-slash-Wilde's experience above all. As it stands, its reliance on Falconer's name and its cliché taglines about modern love and playlists of our lives come off as overdone, opaque, and uninteresting.

Ultimately, despite Joyce and Maunder's powerful and commendable performances, No Love Songs's handling of its story is unsatisfying, needlessly upsetting, and confusing. I look forward to the day when such a major theatrical work represents this serious topic with sensitivity and understanding, and with a genuine focus on women's experiences.

Image: Ticketmaster



DRACULA

a review by Serena Emanuele

Dracula was the very first classic I ever read, at the ripe age of 12, so it has a very special place in my heart. Reading it again at 20, I realise how beautifully written and absolutely horrifying it is – not in a vampire-y ‘I want to suck your blood’ way, rather, a womanly fear that I’m sure most people can relate to.

Let me start with a short summary of the novel. Similar to most of the contemporary interpretations of the novel like *Nosferatu* (2024) and *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992), the novel starts with one of our protagonists, Jonathan Harker, making his way to Count Dracula’s castle in Transylvania. On his way, he meets superstitious characters that warn against going and, as a man would, he ignores their heedes. In the meantime, in London, a group of intellectuals start to piece together the clues leading them to believe that a vampyre is in their midst. Jonathan’s wife, Mina, having been ‘kissed’ by Dracula and forever linked to the Devil himself, ultimately leads the group to his coffin and together they release his spirit.

This novel, written in the 1890s, often reveals ideas on Victorian topics such as the Morbid Muse, the Fallen Woman trope, Christianity vs Science and such. I’ll try to explain as best I can each of these and how they fall within the context of the novel.

The Morbid Muse is a theme within literature that expanded enormously throughout the Victorian era. The third wave of the plague and outbreaks of cholera had taken many lives and death was all over Europe. Many writers wrote of their beloveds and the beauty held in their death, viewing, mainly women,

as objects of inspiration. In many texts, death and sexuality became synonymous, reflecting the Victorians' obsession with the macabre.

"Artists and writers often romanticized the decay and beauty found in death, portraying tragic figures whose demise was as alluring as it was haunting" (Weston, 2024).

In the novel, the character Lucy, upon her death, is seen in a holy and illuminating light. One goes as far as to say, "Oh, it was the grim irony of it all – this so lovely lady garlanded with flowers, that looked so fair as life, till one by one we wondered if she were truly dead," (p. 187). Now, it may just be me, but I wouldn't want a bunch of men standing around my dead corpse, contemplating my beauty and, "the grim irony of it all" – which to me sounds like, "what a waste."

The Fallen Woman trope ties well into the Christianity vs Science themes. The idea of a Fallen Woman in Victorian society, was the notion that, for whatever reason, a woman would be 'unclean' if she had not saved herself for her marriage night or had relations with other men afterwards. This idea of virginity and the keeping of 'it' before the eyes of God, was treated as incredibly sacred for a woman's salvation. It is safe to say that Christianity, in this sense, was weaponised against women to maintain control over their bodies and actions and to keep this weirdly sexual relationship between women and God as objects for procreation. Because women couldn't (and shouldn't) possibly want anything more than to have children and serve their husbands.

This idea is very prominent throughout *Dracula* as one of the only two women who aren't villainised in the novel, Mina, is



‘kissed’ by the vampire and made ‘unclean.’ After a very obviously metaphorical sexual assault, Mina, who has been physically forced to drink the Count’s blood, cries, “Unclean, unclean! I must touch him or kiss him no more [referring to her husband]. Oh, that it should be that it is I who am now his worst enemy, and whom he may have most cause to fear” (p.303).

Subsequently, upon trying to cross her with a communion wafer, Mina gets seared by the wafer on her forehead, leaving a notable scar. The group discusses the meaning of this and come to the conclusion that, “knowing that so far as symbols went, she with all her goodness and purity and faith, was outcast from God” (p.328). Regardless, Mina is still characterised as a woman of faith, even after the fact, as most of her journal entries finish with a statement on her devotion and a prayer for her husband’s safety.

All in all, I wasn’t expecting *Dracula* to be quite so sexually explicit the second time around. But I’m glad I re-read it when I did, for now I have a completely new perspective on this novel. I also must’ve been a very brave child, as I was definitely more scared of Count Dracula reading it this time. I don’t think I’ll ever see dust the same way.

If you’re interested in Gothic horror with a side of gender and sex stereotypes and intersectional racial themes, I’d highly recommend *Dracula*.

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