

3. Das Boot

MOM MIGHT ALSO HAVE BEEN a rain runner if she wasn't always at rehearsal, school, or yoga. I grew up on the 4-M plan: mother's milk, music, and martial arts. At five I was enrolled in piano and tae kwon do. Guess which one I stuck with.

A few years before I saw Kate out in the rain, Gloria thought she was hitting me where it hurts when she threw me out. No bigs. My wallet was fine, and moving out improved both my slinging and my dating. I was still a little young when I got the boot, nineteen, though you don't grow up by numbers. You grow up by getting things done and by having the minimum amount of shit done to you. Another hard lesson from Glore. Getting kicked out was the last young thing I did. So I say.

Ultimately, her throwing me out was just more theatre, one of the three Williams family trades—tunneller, smuggler, liar. At university, I'd already propped Gloria's door open by enrolling in engineering, not something respectably useless like philosophy or English. When I quit without a degree, I was practically moving out the first box. As for my truck and ladder work as a painter, well, Mom was right to think that where there was smoke, there was smoke.

She threw me out during a bullfight. Sunday night. We'd been watching *60 Minutes*, and there was a segment coming up on Spain's latest bullfighting phenom. Anyone wants to fight a tonne of horned muscle, that'll keep me awake. This Spanish guy, somewhere in that glorious age between twenty-five and thirty, promise and accomplishment both. And inhumanly gorgeous. Slow-roast a taller Tom Cruise over mesquite coals, give him an accent that strokes you from throat to knee, and you'd have a fraction of this guy's power. Mom let out a little "Hubba-hubba."

The brown eyes, the tan, the dark stubble—Mr. Olive Cruise dissolved wedding rings with a glance. And he was the shit, the reigning Spanish bull tha-hing. Mr. Contemporary doing the traditional glam. His grandfather had been the bull king in his day, same again for his father. But apparently bulls, not matadors, decide when a matador's career is over. Gramps was killed in the ring. Papa got gored on live TV. So his mom dug in, decided to save the son no matter what. Took the boy out of Spain, educated him in America, all the private schools and blonde muff he could hope for. Thrill juice in the blood? Mom encouraged him to ski, got him sailing. Adrenaline management, not prohibition. Had him flying down mountains on bikes and climbing them with thin rope. Anything but bulls. The whole nation had watched his father die. Generation after generation, the only adults in the family that lasted were the women. Bit of a pattern, that. Mom and I didn't share a word after the first ten seconds.

But the Spaniard came home a man, and home meant bulls. Dad and Grandpa gone, how'd he even learn the dance? Who knew, but Don Cojones had the touch. The old leathery men they interviewed, ring rats their whole lives, they all agreed that the kid was even better than his father, closer to the grace of his grandfather. *Mitad toro*, one of them said, part bull, a minotaur with a convertible and dozens of marriage prospects. The kid couldn't stop. To his mom, that was *wouldn't stop*. So she threw him out.

Still he won and won. A villa, a ranch, all from a wave of the cape. He piled everything into the ring. Bought land to raise bulls, personally mated them. Stick around with the smell of spunk up your nose, you know you're in for the long haul. "This is who I am," he told the show's only female interviewer. Everyone—the interviewer, his mom, mine, me—we all knew he was saying a version of that old line: a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do.

Crime. Bullfighting. Enlisting in the army. All these rituals sons invoke to divorce their mothers. I figured this was definitely going to earn me

one of Gloria's kitchen-counter notes the next morning. *Antony, you have always been.... X is good about you, so is Y*, but stop being someone I don't want you to be.

Apparently she was done with half measures. She hadn't forgotten about the trebuchets I'd been building for half my life and knew better than I did that much of the Windsor shoreline is just six hundred metres from the Detroit border. She, not I, had met a Trevor Reynolds who drove over the Ambassador Bridge into exile, the Stars and Stripes fading in his rear-view.

Two years before the goodbye bullfight, I'd essentially stopped asking her for money. She came back from an MFA year in Chicago to a teenaged son suddenly keen to pay his own way. She heard me take a lot of brief cellphone calls, and I paid cash for everything, my token rent included. The next time the camera went in close on Don Handsome's face, him again with the *I must, I must*, Gloria turned to me long enough to say, "Get out," then left the room.

I was nineteen. I could have pleaded, showed her the paint freckles on my forearms, handed her invoices. Honest money, I swear. She could have followed me to the next day's (legitimate) job site. But I liked the feeling of an open door in front of me. She hadn't yelled, so I took my time packing a few things. She got the last word, so I went for the last note. *I'll come for more when you're out and leave my key when I'm done. I'd like Voodoo when I'm settled.*

And that was it. No more little boy. Slept in my truck the first two nights. Not at Gran's, certainly not at Nathan's. Kinked the shit out of my neck then ate large breakfasts in restaurants. I already owned a little cooler.