

Erazmous: the Upside Down Clown
Julie Mannell

1

For all of the untruism, he merely aspired to tell a joke; listen, I wrote a fairy tale when I was twelve about Erazmous. Witches invariably assumed each laugh was at them—which was fair. The clowns were cursed to live on the ceiling, making their vision an ocular falsity performed with pendulous movements of hair and its shadows on floors they could not touch. This was true for Erazmous. He was my friend; the upside down clown watching upside down but still speaking right-side up. Telling a bad joke and hoping if only I stood on my head I'd tolerate confused observations of the silly and the wrong but the alive and dangling.

2

Late nights with my father fueled a character I was befriending. We'd drink beer and rootbeer and watch what he regarded as the philosophers of the light hearted; the cement fingered art of sagacious culture warriors or astute people perceivers. Joan Rivers sat on the diamond-encrusted ceiling for chandeliers and abortions of the wealthy. Every fat broad clicking long nails against a risqué rag while gulping gregarious booze from flashy glasses. Richard Pryor barely hid himself behind the lone bulb dependent upon a single string above some crack heads and yelled like a rabid dog until he lit his own glass pipe, himself so upside down and the fire right side up, he set himself aflame; went screaming into an air vent and burst into a million sparks in the sky. When the police arrived this time they only found smoke. Carlin hung tight and bravely suspended over the oval office surveying injustice like a dark vigilante with a heart for the pocketbooks of naïve voters and docile believers in heavy falsities. Then there was Barr. Roseanne watched my mother from her consoling bedroom's crown and whispered, like a prayer, "Don't do it. Don't be that. You don't have to." And some heard her but not me, nor my father, nor my mother. They were all around us, crawling like spiders, watching and speaking but forever grieving the unconscious unknowing of worlds flipped.

3

Was Erasmus that good? Did it matter objectively if it mattered to me, in my world, with all of its proper but still subjective angles? Turned on my head with my fists to the floor and peered into a reality where windows were dangerous threats and flowers grew backwards and gravity kept the blood rushing and water was always frozen. I believed in the terrible failures of his tea date with the bat or the difficulty of the bath. Hot water is hard to sustain when you are unfortunately arranged in relation to the rest of the room. Erasmus was always uncomfortable and fidgeting. Before speaking, knowing the unpopularity of all he'd have to say, he'd repeat, like a stutterous child before a group of grown boys, repeat, "just, just, just" and then fall into a million trailing misunderstandings and their false preface and their lack of penetration. The superficial ideas of a watcher who lives at such great distorted distance, in the high walled rooms of a castle his hands can never touch another's hands. They are soft and know no labour but also know no real love. I tried to graze fingers but the best they can do, the upside down clowns, is spit on you. So they are difficult to forgive.

4

A failed sexual attempt that occurred because I was taught to worship him. Call us both magnets constantly turning sides, playing the game of reject and attract. I took off my clothes and contorted my limbs into the letter T. Volume plus velocity and the terribly anamorphic impressions made the semen land on my bed and explode across my belly. I felt sticky. He felt terribly. That was not the argument.

5

The argument and the understanding were simplistic. The logic was hard and good. If $A \& B = A \& B$ then why are our visitors so quick to accept C when C is never truly an option? Put murdered and missing aboriginal women in the place of A. Put sexual perversion in the place of B. Substitute aboriginal women for abortion and replace sexual perversion with masculine notions of domination. Take each and follow heavy lines of slut shaming and gay bashing and race wars and political wars and religious wars. From the ceiling the cross is always pagan. $A \& B$ still = $A \& B$ but that doesn't mean it is inhuman to cry for one's friends. The logic of Erasmus' $A \& B$. The odd newsreels that turned left instead of right in that place that rolls in the brain.

6

His death was kaufmanesque. He simply slid away and everyone had a story. Some said it was gay stuff. Some said the bat came back, like the cat, except bit his neck and turned him animal. Some said he let it happen and simply flew upwards into the sky: the world of objectives. Some said he tied two weights, each the weight of himself, to either hand and wandered bravely outside to confront the witches. Some say he just died, some say. I don't know fully except he left me a parting note, simply: "I've grown tired of this. For whatever reasons" and no period to signify that anything was done. Reluctance to perform in a dress, some said.

7

I swear on my mother that Louis C.K. hovered along my dorm room canopy. The lesbians swore they saw Meghan Murphy or Sarah Silverman or Wanda Sykes creep along. Depending on the frat boy, there would be a story for either Aziz Ansari or Dane Cook. The police were called when a group of feminists were trying to pry Bill Cosby down using a series of hooks on sticks because of something Hannibal said in the unisex bathroom. Then the outsiders had stories about dingy basement bars where Doug Stanhope gawked, overbite in tact, failing to recognize his own shortcomings while swallowing his drink. Someone had tied Stewart, Colbert, and Maher to a militant helicopter like balloons. When they inevitably floated off there were the balloons of Oliver and Noah and Wilmore...swirling over war crimes like an inevitable combustion of astute observation and eventual polite excuses to let go and drift towards the sun. I couldn't blame them, even, for they were only balloons prone to drifting and flying. Drunk and fancy, I spot Kathy Griffin egging me on. Pregnant—I could see Whoopi or Diller. When I ended it then I was gazing towards Schumer. A million names and manufactured stories because life is implicitly uncomfortable and if we are laughing then we're not crying.

8

For all the untruism, they merely aspired to tell a joke; listen, I wrote a fairy tale when I was twelve about a clown who lived upside down on the ceiling. The ceiling is blank and white and neglected but often the last thing we see before we die. We look into the faces of the strange gnarled likeness of our perception of our own reflection; the truth with a wink. And I hope when it happens I am laughing. And I hope when it happens I feel total. For the body of a clown is forgotten but the words churn the gut: an unfortunate blow job, terribly convenient rhymes to an unlikely song, the startling observations of the observant, the rhythms of an offbeat wordsmith forever descending on the earth beneath them, forever suspended like a light above the flawed living room that exists in every home, of every family, in each country, forever.