

Call It a Premonition

*Translations from the
Voynich Manuscript*

JESS FELDMAN





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“Here, in Jess Feldman’s *Call It a Premonition*, you get to finally read the Voynich Manuscript, but through one of those red cellophane decoders. There’s something behind the language that we can’t see, or maybe in front of it, that we can’t see, but what lights up in between is an enigmatic pain that proves the most beautiful translations are the impossible kind—there’s only truth in those.”

—ZACHARY SCHOMBURG

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WINNER OF THE 2015
CHAPBOOK COMPETITION
SELECTED BY ZACHARY SCHOMBURG

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100 SUSPECTS

sir gawain won't look at me
even though I wore my best frock
even though I prayed and on sunday
my brother hid a toad in my slipper
and my dad slaughtered stag in the wood
with his man friends and mom is dying
again of childbirth and sometimes it's nice
and a relief to meet people everyone
agrees are super out-of-line so we can
all be friends and laugh. And I'm not sorry

SILVER SPRINGS

Be this song-
bird, but quiet
Your lute, play
but restraint
please We don't
want you
'witching us
with your Stevie
Nicks circa Lindsay
Buckingham
lovechild gaze
We don't want
you putting
the bird in
your mouth biting
down warm
crush of bones
slop of brains

LADY DAY

Never seen a day so dull even
my brother rocked himself in the dim corner
of the kitchen Cook doesn't like us but the man
we call Sir Man does And a wooden spoon
can't beat me thanks to my million skins What is
the mixtape for being a lady now? Hum a bar
embroider *Thou Thou Thou* Become a silent fortune

I SET MY HAND TO WRITING

Gentlemen: Hildie saw a shade in the living light
and what a party trick But no man wants
that lifetime of stained glass Man wants
bass to hold to strike against In my
fiercest pinafore I am solid cherry and
everyone breaking glass around me
- jars, saucers, cups, plates -
christen me, girl busting and new

I AM GOING TO THE FÊTE NO MATTER

Grey day No hands
but my own
plaiting
many miles of my
cinder tail
Small wonder

ANOTHER DEAD FELLOW

Unchained melody for Rafe-somebody
Blunt cut, some alms, and what to wear
beneath these hastily-dyed outer garments — It matters,
people. This is Friday, so act like it. Throw your bit
of dirt in the group grave and dine big. Look:
I've a shiny new hairpiece. See, cuz: a mermaid

DAD TRIED TO READ MY DIARY

All my life I wanted to disappear
by pony cart, by plague, by blade
Mary says Execution is the means
for wings outta here Two thieves hung
She said it wasn't so bad
I haven't seen anyone die but there's
a boy in the stocks angel-faced
muddy They say he's got the hands
of a murderer If we're lucky

FINGERS CROSSED

Don't wonder Don't share
your hopes Five weeks I
crossed my fingers Cut
a strand of my hair for the alter
and wetted the Virgin's lips
and the smudge stick I used
and the sludge in my mead
and the crystal-cut rosary beads
and yet only a tortoise crossed
the threshold of our stone yard
and the sky remained an empty
ballroom and the wheat fields grew
no one ever knowing you
were in my prayer

ALL TOLD

Look, all told sometimes I sneak into the stable
present the dray horse the silver bridle Over his furred
ears slip the headstall Tuck two fingers into the corners
of his mouth 'til I feel that hard gumminess When his lips part
his mouth yawns ease in the snaffle Our stable boy the poet
can't read or write but watches from the hayloft Hey not everyone
can be having a good time amiright?

HI

Don't have time
to write much All's well but
brother's sick Sole heir
to the estate the country throne
wheat & barley crown bastard
Plantagenet Dad's one true love
And I am no great beauty

GRAMPY CAME TO DINNER

Did you hear the one about the French maid and the —
Whatta beast — How about the one about the — And the drunk
says to the friar — How about the time a swordsman came across Alice —
Helluva time he had just — Did you hear the one about when your daddy lost the —
Strange sauce you got here — Reminds me of the time that I — and she — and you were
And then he said, Property?! That asshole had a paper route!

I DREAMED OF

a leashed hart young doe collared in soft pink bouclé
the king's own grazing animals A long sunset string tied
to my smashed purple hand If I could walk straight
on a narrow stage without looking down I could enter
the leaves o' green in the King's heart be fierce
win money fans who knows friends even

WORDS I HEAR

Pasty gout *Commes*
des Fuckdown patsy
No hoof, no horse
Rafe Rafe Rafe boy-
zombie Pray thee
Blow the old man down
Obey girl obey His
many blessings Grammarcy
bubble-bow a burden I do

THE SUMMER OF 1438

I'm learning

Sometimes
Unsolved mysteries

It's better not to ask

DAD ALMOST FORGOT TO FETCH ME

nunnery, today: weak broth, got preached at, daydreamed mostly

I was in a boat in the middle of the ocean I hauled in a billfish

over the gunnels and hugged it tight to my chest

The sailfish eventually stopped fighting

The nuns eventually let me outside

Dad sent Rafe and I was home in time for late supper

Mom swears a giant girl in her belly craves saltfish

like when she was with me and I turned out to be a girl didn't I

There's no dessert quite like stewed figs Boy, I've always wanted to be a sister

#TBT

This day
one year back
I was madly in love with
well I can't say his name but
suffice to say it begins with G
and I actually ate a snail
off a stile &
then made up words
that sounded an awful lot
like a witch's hex
I was scared thinking Man,
what am I gonna tell
my mom my dad Brother,
they're gonna burn me
at the stake But
now I know that
true love is just
two people deciding
to wear blinders
together and dying
Because they can

RABBLE-ROUSERS

Shake out the furs
The knotted loon necklace
unknot it
The world spins on the exploitation of vice
When we feel really good
we plan trips
outta here Ruminant
on places we'll never set foot in Maybe
it's just the satisfaction
of saying *I'm never coming back*
Rafe says
God is dark but can be cheerful
backlit with votives if He exists

CALL IT A PREMONITION

In a distant future
I look like a boy only
still a girl but in slacks okay
I am moving my lacquered
fingers so text materializes
across a framed fluid tapestry
without seams Without origin
unmarried far from dead
childless and leather-booted
I say words like Co-workers,
I hate this fucking job and
I mean it but I am happy
enough I think
comparatively speaking
nonetheless

BIO

Jess Feldman's poetry has appeared in *Vinyl*, *Transom*, *Tuesday; An Art Project*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, and elsewhere. She holds an MFA in Writing from the University of New Hampshire, and currently resides in Brooklyn. She is a member of the band The Immaculate Corpses.