

PATRICK FRIESEN / A Forgotten Thing (A Monologue)

(Crazy Bone, a woman around fifty, sits on a tree stump near a phone booth. This is in the country, not a city.)

One of them might call. Or...someone who can tell me...I could use some luck.

(She rummages in her purse, pulls out a coin, and flips it.)

Heads, they call.

(She slaps the coin on her forearm and gazes at it for a while, then looks up abruptly.)

Two things that summer. A face at the window. And the thunder, waiting for the thunder. Lightning on the horizon, night after night, but no thunder.

I'm talking about time on my hands, and the feeling of time. Silky, almost. I mean time passing and time as "the time", that time, and everything gathered within that time. The lie of time, that word, the doom of everything flowing out of it, all the ideas and books and agonies. The steel of memory bending in the heat.

(Pause.)

And I am a forgotten thing, a walking grave. Where the seed of death is planted, in a woman's womb, and from there death. Do you know what I mean?

Barefoot in the garden. The heat, the thick smell of it, and a bowl in my hands. A rose painted in the bottom, vines along the lip, my green thumbnail on the cool enamel.

My grandmother's. I don't know how I came to have it, but I do remember her sitting on a stool with that bowl in her lap, her knees apart, her dress scrunched between them. Her old fingers, working hands...the ping of peas on the enamel...

I inherited it the way we inherit so much, not even knowing. It just came to me. Some of her did too. We both liked barefoot for one thing and didn't always walk the straight road.

But I'm not talking that far back; I'm talking that summer. The heat and the humidity ...

(Pause.)

The summer dress...it was stained...

There's much I've forgotten, have had to forget. The gift of forgetting. Forgetting, sometimes, is just making room for something else. Or, for nothing.

I wanted...

(She begins picking flowers nearby.)

My heart was going crazy. It went on for days. I couldn't do anything, I couldn't think, couldn't take care of the little ones, nothing. Just that racing, that pounding. Imagine it, imagine if you were completely aware of your heartbeat, days even weeks, just that constant awareness of your heart beating hard and fast. Imagine how close to dying you'd feel, that heart racing, and you're thinking it can't take anymore, it has to explode, or just skip, lose its rhythm and collapse.

My heart trying to leave me, ready to burst out of my chest, but I had to do what I had to do. I knew that. It had finally come to knowing that.

I couldn't bear it any longer, couldn't bear the walls, the dirty windows. The sound of water dripping from the faucet, the taste, all of it. The smell of that house...

I made it through the first years. It wasn't too bad, but then duty, or something like that, a rigor that wasn't mine, chopped the room in half. I came into this world clean, but somehow I ended up in debt, you know? Just by living.... It was harder to be

going somewhere, the air grew stale and the windows yellow, and I was sick to my stomach. My belly swelled up, poof, with nothing in it, though the doctor wondered if I had a tumor. But to me it wasn't empty, it was a stone where nothing would ever grow again, and I wanted nothing to ever grow again.

And the steady wind, the hot wind, all summer, and that wind got into my blood, I could feel it there. The crazy-making wind at me all my waking hours, and then I dreamed it.

(Pause.)

It wasn't the man, that wasn't it. No, it was those I can't speak of, they had me by my hands, by my knees, my breasts. They had me. The man disappeared, at least most of the time. I felt no hate, not even bitterness. I felt an unbelievable desire, and I had to get out. I didn't know what the desire was for. That nagging voice didn't tell me, just kept quietly saying, "world, world."

The man snored, and he wouldn't change. He woke up early, and went to work still asleep. I could see it in his eyes. Eyes soft with dreaming, and then going hard as the dream vanished into work. And still, with his hard eyes, he was sleeping a dreamless death. The others, the little ones, I could see the dream in their eyes too; they were dreaming the first and only dream, a life before birth and, in their dreaming they were not here.

I don't just mean the dream inside the womb, I mean before that, the dream that is given to each child, a dream for someone's womb on earth. Like a bee to its hive. I still don't understand how that works, the choices, how they're made, by whom...

These are dreams I'm talking, not memories. These are dreams which have nothing to do with time. They are cars, or rather parade floats drifting through fantasy streets. You could see God on a float, or your dead grandfather, or people, people like who? Well, it could be Mozart or the Czarina Catherine. Dead ones, the ghosts of their ghosts.

And we know these ghosts. We know the death born in the womb, we know the death in the child and the death of the woman who bears the child. Her days riven with an anxious longing, and a need. It's no one's fault, there is no blame.

Like with grandmother and her bastard son, how they left when they had to, there was no fault, and still there must have been a guilt, at first anyway. Though I didn't see it on her face, ever, right to death. I was sitting with her.

Anna lived off her hands, sewing, laundry, washing floors. All over town. She gave, saw her once, when a neighbor who was over for coffee praised her dress, get up, go into the bedroom and come back with the dress folded up, and give it to that woman. A smile on her face. People began to be careful in what they said to her. She had no debt, didn't owe anyone anything. No money, no guilt, no long goodbyes.

I saw the O of her mouth as she lay dying, not a round O, but long. That O going longer by the hours. Gravity, and something else. It made a space for death to enter. At the same time, not yet dead, and her mouth opening slowly, what was it? Her leaving herself.

It was a terrible O. Such a horrible entry and sly escape. I thought I saw death crawling across her dry lips. Her hands and feet going cold and blue. I didn't see her escape, but I heard a sigh. She was still alive, breathing, but I knew she had gotten out. And I forgot time, I forgot the word. I had to bury my wrist watch, anywhere, beneath a tree, a willow with its endurance, and its bending... I had to bury the watch. Somewhere along that road, the road away, I had to bury the watch.

(She draws photographs from her purse. She looks at one photo after the other, lays them on her lap. She stops with one and gazes.)

Yes, that was the summer.

(Her hands vaguely, almost unnoticeably, touch near her breasts for just a moment, then drop.)

I never washed out the stains...

(She gazes at another photo.)

Such a strange thing, to live in a house. Walls and windows and doors.

(Pause.)

The back porch.

(She looks at another photo, touches it gently. She lays the photo down, stands up and slowly, gracefully, removes her dress, letting it slip easily down to her feet where it lays in a pool around her. She moves over to the clothes line and pulls down a white dress. She puts it on, letting it slide from her head down over her, like water. She picks up the red flowers she has been picking, and holds them in a bouquet. She turns slowly around completely, three times, and she speaks as she turns.)

I shall marry...no one...and no one marry me...

(Pause, as she gazes into middle distance.)

My one true wedding. Me, Crazy Bone, marry me, me the body in the white dress becoming ghost...

Do you, Crazy Bone, take Crazy Bone to be...

(Her words fade away. After a brief pause, she goes to her knees and digs a hole with her hands. She places the photos in the hole and pushes the dirt back over them. She lays the flowers on top. She gets up.)

I walked away, slowly. When I got to the end of the long driveway, I turned to look.

(She suddenly walks over to the phone booth, steps in and picks up the phone, which has not rung.)

This is Crazy Bone.

(A long pause.)

Yes, those are their names.

Nowhere? You tried everything?

Well...call when you find out.

(She hangs up the phone, comes out, pauses to think of what she was saying.)

When I turned, there was a face at an upstairs window.

I raised my hand to wave.

(Pause.)

Then the window blazed yellow. I saw nothing.

(She motions at the sun with her hands and motions in the direction of an imagined window. She stops, thinking, then re-enters the phone booth, finds a quarter in her purse and dials a number.)

Police? "Let whoever seeks not cease from seeking until he finds. When he finds, he will be troubled. When he is troubled, he will marvel and reign over all."

Are you a religious man?

You are? Well, I'd like to report an absence.

Yes, this is she.

Where? Right here, of course.

(She turns around in the booth, craning her neck, looking all around.)

There is an absence, and I'm coming to an end of words. I'm not myself.

No, I don't need a minister, thank-you very much.

(She hangs up the phone and emerges.)

I have to find them. I need to explain...

(Pause.)

The heat of that wind blowing low and steady. It didn't shift all those days. It can make a person crazy. It's happened. Frosty, I forget his name, Frosty died. He was in the bush for days, lost most likely. When they found him he'd opened up his wrists but was still alive. When he could talk in the hospital, he said he was trying to leech the heat from his veins. It was making him mad. And he sure seemed mad, the way he talked in bursts of half-sentences, never finishing. Or the words came out strange like he couldn't quite shape them. I heard you could see the fear in his eyes. And a few days later, at night, he finished the job with a shard of glass from a mirror he broke. I heard a nurse found him in the mirror. I mean his shape was there, his features, his eyes looking back at her and, what was stranger, was that she couldn't see herself in the mirror. But I wouldn't be believing that story real quick. Rosa was a bit cracked herself; she'd been baptized into the Pentecostals outside of town, talking in tongues, and all that.

It's the wind some summers. And it was there that summer. The wind, the radio on static, and me riddled with anxiety. That's how it went.

Waiting for thunder on the horizon, it might bring rain. All day, and waiting for an answer, not knowing what to do. Either way wasn't any good. And no answer coming. Till I understood there wasn't going to be one, but a decision had to be made. I couldn't stay in that place. No way out. And there was just me, no one else, mulling it out, only me needing to decide. And, I guess, finally I realized if it was

all up to me, it was only me there, thinking it through, then I had to decide for me.
That's what I came to.

And want was so strong, stronger than need. Want...wanted...

(Pause; she laughs.)

Dead or alive.

(The phone rings, and keeps ringing. Crazy Bone, half-rises, puts her hand to her breast.)

There it goes, my heart. There it goes again.

(Crazy Bone sits back, touches lightly at her breasts for a moment.)

Getting away.

It'll stain me. Those mouths...

(She rises and walks away. The phone stops ringing.)