



I WAS ADRIFT ON THE HIGH SEAS, BUT MY COURSE WAS BECOMING CLEAR. IT LAY BETWEEN THE SCYLLA OF MY PEERS AND THE SWIRLING, SUCKING CHARYBDIS OF MY FAMILY.



VEERING TOWARD SCYLLA SEEMED MUCH THE SAFER ROUTE. AND AFTER NAVIGATING THE PASSAGE, I SOON WASHED UP, A BIT STUNNED, ON A NEW SHORE.

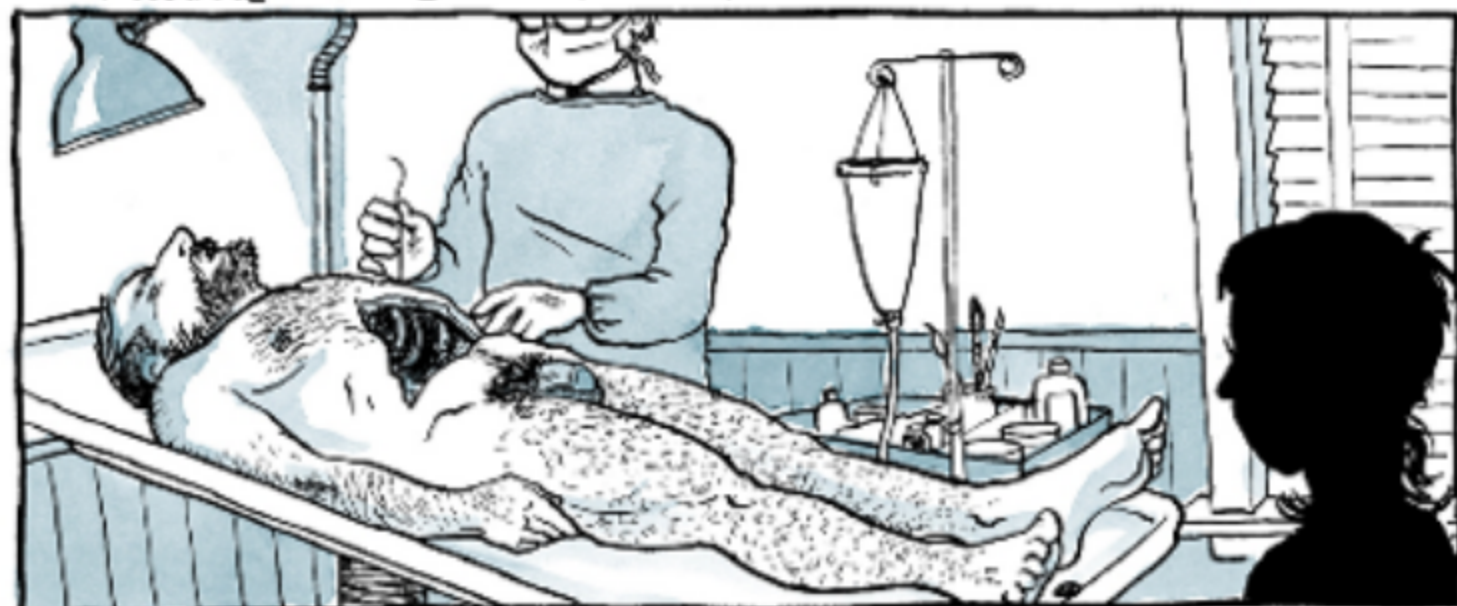


IN TRUE HEROIC FASHION, I MOVED TOWARD THE THING I FEARED.

YET WHILE ODYSSEUS SCHEMED DESPERATELY TO ESCAPE POLYPHEMUS'S CAVE, I FOUND THAT I WAS QUITE CONTENT TO STAY HERE FOREVER.

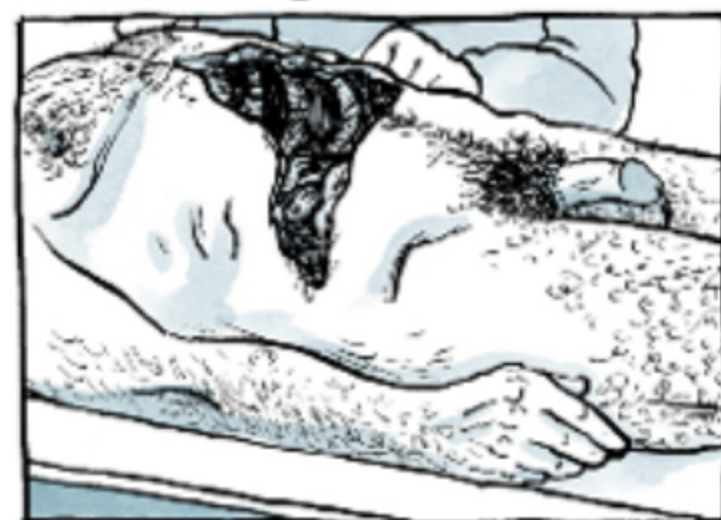


THE MAN ON THE PREP TABLE WAS BEARDED AND FLESHY, JARRINGLY UNLIKE DAD'S USUAL TRAFFIC OF DESICCATED OLD PEOPLE.



THE STRANGE PILE OF HIS GENITALS WAS SHOCKING, BUT WHAT REALLY GOT MY ATTENTION WAS HIS CHEST, SPLIT OPEN TO A DARK RED CAVE.

THERE WAS SOME PRACTICAL EXCHANGE WITH MY FATHER DURING WHICH I STUDIOUSLY BETRAYED NO EMOTION.



IT FELT LIKE A TEST. MAYBE THIS WAS THE SAME OFFHANDED WAY HIS OWN NOTORIOUSLY COLD FATHER HAD SHOWN HIM HIS FIRST CADAVER.

OR MAYBE HE FELT THAT HE'D BECOME TOO INURED TO DEATH, AND WAS HOPING TO ELICIT FROM ME AN EXPRESSION OF THE NATURAL HORROR HE WAS NO LONGER CAPABLE OF.



OR MAYBE HE JUST NEEDED THE SCISSORS. I HAVE MADE USE OF THE FORMER TECHNIQUE MYSELF, HOWEVER, THIS ATTEMPT TO ACCESS EMOTION VICARIOUSLY.



FOR YEARS AFTER MY FATHER'S DEATH, WHEN THE SUBJECT OF PARENTS CAME UP IN CONVERSATION I WOULD RELATE THE INFORMATION IN A FLAT, MATTER-OF-FACT TONE...



THE EMOTION I HAD SUPPRESSED FOR THE GAPING CADAVER SEEMED TO STAY SUPPRESSED.

EVEN WHEN IT WAS DAD HIMSELF ON THE PREP TABLE.



...OTHERS AS PORNOGRAPHY. IN THE HARSH LIGHT OF MY DAWNING FEMINISM, EVERYTHING LOOKED DIFFERENT.



...THE WALLS WERE WET AND STICKY, AND PEACH JUICE WAS DRIPPING FROM THE CEILING. JAMES OPENED HIS MOUTH AND CAUGHT SOME OF IT ON HIS TONGUE.

THIS ENTWINED POLITICAL AND SEXUAL AWAKENING WAS A WELCOME DISTRACTION.

THE NEWS FROM HOME WAS INCREASINGLY UNSETTLING.



...IT TASTED DELICIOUS.

RING!



HE THREW THE BRINLEY DOWN THE STAIRS! YOU KNOW HOW MUCH HE LOVES THAT PAINTING!

SOON AFTER JOAN AND I HAD MOVED IN TOGETHER FOR THE SUMMER, I GOT MOM'S CALL ABOUT THE DIVORCE.

AND TWO WEEKS AFTER THAT, THE CALL ABOUT THE ACCIDENT.



I'VE HAD IT.



IS HE DEAD?

OVER THE YEARS, MY MOTHER HAS GIVEN AWAY OR SOLD MOST OF DAD'S LIBRARY.



JOAN, YOU'VE BEEN SO HELPFUL WITH EVERYTHING...

SHE BEGAN IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE FUNERAL, BESTOWING A BOOK ON JOAN.

LATER, JOAN WROTE A POEM ABOUT IT.

You're sitting in the library feet up on his desk.
Your mother comes in her face warm and white floating gingerly over her bathrobe.
She tells me to choose a book.
Cloth-bound, grey and turquoise heavy in my hand as a turtle shell filled with mud.



ARE YOU SURE?

YES. AND DON'T JUST PICK A CHEAP PAPERBACK. TAKE SOMETHING GOOD.

OUT OF THE HUNDREDS OF BOOKS ON THE SHELVES, I DON'T THINK SHE COULD HAVE MADE A BETTER CHOICE.



HOW ABOUT THIS?

OH, I LOVE WALLACE STEVENS. DO YOU KNOW "SUNDAY MORNING"? IT'S MY FAVORITE POEM.



"COMPLACENCIES OF THE PEIGNOIR, AND LATE COFFEE AND ORANGES IN A SUNNY CHAIR.."



I FELT AS IF I'D BEEN STRIPPED NAKED MYSELF, INEXPLICABLY ASHAMED, LIKE ADAM AND EVE.



ONCE WE WERE AT THE BULLPEN, MY BROTHERS DISCOVERED THE CALENDAR.

THE SHOVEL WASN'T RUNNING, BUT THE OPERATOR LET US INTO THE CAB.



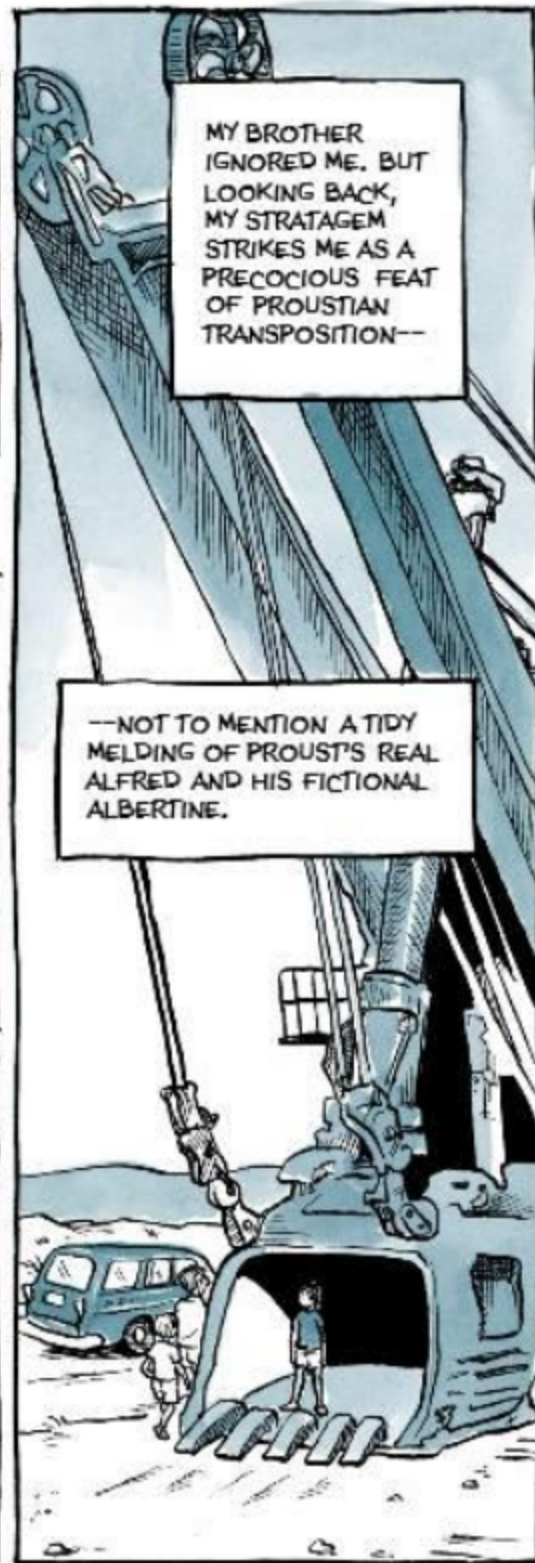
THAT AFTERNOON, WE DROVE OUT TO THE STRIP MINE.



INSIDE I WAS ASTONISHED BY WHAT STRUCK ME AS A BIZARRE COINCIDENCE.



AS THE MAN SHOWED US AROUND, IT SEEMED IMPERATIVE THAT HE NOT KNOW I WAS A GIRL.



THAT FIRST VOLUME LED QUICKLY TO OTHERS.



THIS BOOK REFERRED TO OTHER BOOKS, WHICH I SOUGHT OUT IN THE LIBRARY.



I FOUND A FOUR-FOOT TROVE IN THE STACKS WHICH I QUICKLY RAVISHED.



A FEW DAYS LATER I SCREWED UP MY COURAGE AND BOUGHT ONE.



ONE DAY IT OCCURRED TO ME THAT I COULD ACTUALLY LOOK UP HOMOSEXUALITY IN THE CARD CATALOG.



AND SOON I WAS TROLLING EVEN THE PUBLIC LIBRARY, HEEDLESS OF THE RISKS.



I WENT TO A MEETING OF SOMETHING CALLED THE "GAY UNION," WHICH I OBSERVED IN PETRIFIED SILENCE.

BUT MY MERE PRESENCE, I FELT, HAD AMOUNTED TO A PUBLIC DECLARATION. I LEFT EXHILARATED.



IT WAS IN THAT TREMULOUS STATE THAT I DETERMINED TO TELL MY PARENTS. KEEPING IT FROM THEM HAD STARTED TO SEEM LUDICROUS ANYWAY.





SHE WAS USING HER SEWING ROOM ABOVE THE KITCHEN AS A STUDY.

I DECIDED THERE WAS NO HURRY TO TELL HER. SHE'D GIVEN ME A BOX OF SANITARY NAPKINS THE YEAR BEFORE.



CONCEIVABLY, I COULD PUT OFF THE NEWS UNTIL IT WAS TIME TO RESTOCK.



AND THERE WAS ALWAYS THE CHANCE THAT BY IGNORING IT, IT WOULD GO AWAY. ALTHOUGH THIS STRATEGY WAS NOT WORKING WITH MY BREASTS.



IT WAS JUST A SLIGHT, BROWNISH SECRETION. IT CERTAINLY DIDN'T REQUIRE ONE OF THE MAMMOTH NAPKINS, OR THE PORNOGRAPHIC BELT. A WAD OF TOILET PAPER SUFFICED.



IT WENT AWAY AFTER A FEW DAYS AND PASSED UNMENTIONED IN MY DIARY.

ABOUT THAT TIME, ON A WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON, MY BEST FRIEND BETH'S FATHER AND STEPMOTHER SHOWED UP.



MY MOTHER WAS TAKEN ABACK BY THEIR GRAND GESTURE, BUT AGREED TO LET US GO.



I RESPONDED TO MY MOTHER'S LETTER POINT BY POINT.



SHE FILLED ME IN A FEW DAYS LATER.



THIS ABRUPT AND WHOLESALE REVISION OF MY HISTORY—A HISTORY WHICH, I MIGHT ADD, HAD ALREADY BEEN REVISED ONCE IN THE PRECEDING MONTHS—LEFT ME STUPEFIED.



BUT NOT QUITE STUPEFIED ENOUGH—A CONDITION WHICH I REMEDIED UPON HANGING UP THE PHONE.

SOON, HOWEVER, I DISCOVERED AN EVEN MORE POTENT ANESTHETIC.



THE NOTION THAT MY SORDID PERSONAL LIFE HAD SOME SORT OF LARGER IMPORT WAS STRANGE, BUT SEDUCTIVE.



AND BY MIDTERM I HAD BEEN SEDUCED COMPLETELY.



JOAN WAS A POET AND A "MARIARCHIST." I SPENT VERY LITTLE OF THE REMAINING SEMESTER OUTSIDE HER BED.



I LOST MY BEARINGS. THE DICTIONARY HAD BECOME EROTIC.

SOME OF OUR FAVORITE CHILDHOOD STORIES WERE REVEALED AS PROPAGANDA..



MAYBE SO. WITHOUT THE HOMERIC CLUES, IT WOULD CERTAINLY BE UNREADABLE.



IF I WAS BEWITCHED, IT WAS NOT AN UNPLEASANT SENSATION.

COLETTE COULD WRITE BETTER THAN ANYONE ABOUT PHYSICAL THINGS; THEY INCLUDE THE FEEL OF A PEACH IN ONE'S HAND. A MAN COULD ONLY WRITE IN THIS WAY ABOUT A WOMAN'S BREAST.



I REFERRED BACK TO COLETTE HERSELF, BASKING IN HER SENSUALISM AS PERHAPS THE SEA-RAVAGED ODYSSEUS HAD IN THE MINISTRATIONS OF NAUSICAA.



BUT THEN, I HAD LITTLE PATIENCE FOR JOYCE'S DIVAGATIONS WHEN MY OWN ODYSSEY WAS CALLING SO SEDUCTIVELY.



ONE SIREN LED TO ANOTHER IN AN INTERTEXTUAL PROGRESSION.

...IN THAT SPIRIT OF MARVELOUS MEGALOMANIA I CAME OUT OFFICIALLY JULY 1ST (1970) IN THE VOICE IN A PIECE TITLED AMBIVALENTLY FROM A LINE BY COLETTE "OF THIS PURE BUT IRREGULAR PASSION."



BUT COLETTE ALSO HAD HER DECIDELY ANAPHRODISIAC MOMENTS.



IN ONE BREATH SHE DESCRIBES A SEVENTEEN-YEAR-OLD BUTCHER BOY...

decked out in a dress of black Chantilly lace over pale blue silk, his face sulky beneath a wide lace hat, as uncouth as a country wench in need of a husband, his cheeks plump and fresh as nectarines

AND IN THE NEXT, WITH THE SAME VOLUPTUOUS DETAIL, SHE REPORTS HIS SUICIDE.

He shattered with a revolver bullet his pretty, pouting mouth, his low forehead beneath kinky hair, his anxious and timid little bright blue eyes.

I FELL FURTHER AND FURTHER BEHIND IN ULYSSES.

BUT I ATTENDED CLASS RELIGIOUSLY.



NOW, I'M SURE THE CATHOLICS IN THE CLASS WILL RECOGNIZE THE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE OF THE ITHACA CHAPTER.



"WHAT, REDUCED TO THEIR SIMPLEST RECIPROCAL FORM, WERE BLOOM'S THOUGHTS ABOUT STEPHEN'S THOUGHTS ABOUT BLOOM AND BLOOM'S THOUGHTS ABOUT STEPHEN'S THOUGHTS ABOUT BLOOM'S THOUGHTS ABOUT STEPHEN?"



"HE THOUGHT THAT HE THOUGHT THAT HE WAS A JEW WHEREAS HE KNEW THAT HE KNEW THAT HE KNEW THAT HE WAS NOT."

