

Something smells like rotten poison on fire: An ode to Bull Shannon

SO THIS SONGBIRD COMES FLYING over to me and sits on my shoulder and is chewing on some stick or fuzz or wrapper or whatever and says, “Whatcha doin’?” like the knife is invisible or something.

So I say, “What do you think I’m doing, bird?”

And the songbird says, “What for?”

And I’m pulling the knife and making a turn and pulling it and making a turn and pulling and making a turn until I can lift a flap of skin. I didn’t cut all the way down, there’s still a real thin layer separating me outside from me inside. I can see the veins and blood pulsating like a stop motion traffic camera. It’s blue and green, not at all familial.

I tell songbird, “I wanna see my great grandma” and I take the knife and turn the tip to my arm and push in.

Songbird says, “Whatcha doin’?” like my blood is invisible or something.

When it sputters out my skin it's red, but not in the way I expected. Not like fire engine red. Not like the movies. It is different. It is dark.

"There she is," I say to songbird and I point to the ground where the blood has made a stain the outline of land under water.

"Whatcha doin'?" songbird says, like this whole mess is invisible. Like he can't see me raising my arm to my mouth to taste and can't see the look on my face, the sour and wrong feel of my own blood on my own tongue.

"Why is that?" I ask songbird. "My own me tastes like poison."

"In the movies," says songbird, "they make blood out of corn syrup and flour. And it tastes like candy."

"Whatcha doin'?" says songbird when I take the knife in my other hand, like the splitting skin is invisible or something.

"You know, songbird," I say "This would all make more sense if you were blind and really had to ask, rather than just being the nag that you are."

I would prefer it if this songbird were a fruit bat, blinded by the sun and forced to ask my activities because of the sound I'm making. Something like if I were holding an orange in my hand and squeezing it to make it break and squish apart.

"Whatcha doin'?" says fruit bat.

"I'm making something sweet," I say. I fill the orange with corn syrup and flour and red food dye. I stitch up the rind to make skin. Fruit bat

pulls fur from his stomach and we glue it to the orange and I draw a face with eyelashes and lips.

“Look at what I’ve made!” I say, knowing that fruit bat can’t see shit. I like the way this orange is still mostly broken, the way her skin pushes out and opens in between the stitches. I like knowing that all I need to do is squeeze my hand and she’ll break apart and I’ll be able to look at the stain on the ground and say, “I made that.”

“We made that together,” says fruit bat, wanting some of the credit.

“No,” I say. “This is mine and mine alone.”

“That’s not how it works,” says fruit bat.

“Sure it is,” I say. “This is my story.”