

THE FIELD

We went into the field to study monsters in their environment. We thought it would be like a holiday or a game. Instead it became a journey that lasted an indeterminate length of time, which, outwardly, took the shape of five years.

Dawn breaking on the other side. On their side. Pewter. Jagged.

One day I called my brother on the phone. He didn't pick up, so I left a message saying we should tell our lives through monsters, as the ancient Egyptians told the year through the myth of Osiris. A mirror becomes architecture when you pass to the other side: this is what we had understood as children. I wanted to find that depth again, to plumb a vertical field. "Our world is another," I managed to say before my brother's phone cut me off. Late that night he texted me back: "Sounds dope." I was encouraged by this, as *dope* suggests both a hallucinatory, pleasurable experience and crucial information, as in *give me the straight dope*. It didn't occur to me then that it also means a fool.

By this time we were both, in our own ways, failures. Only through work could we create a *zone of incandescence*. And so we were happy to set off, each with our boots, our bags. We would travel separately, but on the same ground.

Questions I carried: How to move forward while preserving lightness? How deformed can something get and still be a story?

A silver country, pocked here and there with rust. Shattered, its glow becomes extremely tricky, volatile. Misleading.

On the eve of departure I made a preliminary search on the Internet and printed the results to read on the train. "Carvay," I typed. "Snimron. Muramanae." Most monsters, I read, have a horror of the camera, but will allow their portraits to be drawn by hand. "Fanderlee," I typed, murmuring the word. According to a recent poll about the Age of Monsters, half the world's testable population believes it has definitely ended, while the other half believes it has just begun.

I packed a bag. It was mostly pens, and there were pens in my pockets and hair. I didn't know what writing utensils were used in the monstrous regions, and I was afraid of arriving unprepared. At the station, my heart beat high and sharp. A wind blew, not from the sky, but from the pavement. A subdued howling leaked from the doorway of a café. I walked along the length of the train until I found my car, which was marked with a diagram representing a human or starfish. Inside, it appeared to have been abandoned for a long time. Dry leaves blew about on the floor, although it was spring.

I curled up in a window seat with my head on the dirty pane and opened my notebook. "If I can just crack on through," I wrote, "I should get somewhere." I felt the need to write faster, to make space for what was to come. I've always had this idea of writing as an instrument.

The train clanked. A moment of fear. Not the last.

Now we're setting off, I thought. The strangeness of that "we."

The little station gave way to a plain of dust. Beyond, in the mountains, dawn was breaking like the outline of a ruin.

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Figure 2: The Green Lady

THE GREEN LADY

She emerged from the sea at Rostai, crowned with foam. I had been camping on the beach. The water fragmented about her tendrilled head. I scrambled for my notebook, knocking over my little cooking pot, spilling my dinner, burning my hand on the coals.

Trembling, I scribbled her words, which blurred at once on the humid paper. “In our country, phosphorescence is eaten from little shells. Our castles are of coral; our herds are whales. It is the perfect place for you, except that you could not breathe.”

How she surged into view from underneath. Like a symptom. *Monstrum*: a portent. A divine omen.

“In the gloom your vision would become impaired. The pressure would mount slowly yet inexorably. You would have to open your mouth.”

The darkness of her voice. Her color pulsing slightly, velvet. *For they sit in a green field and warble him to death.*

All my life this dreadful fear of drowning, yet for a moment I did want. I had not risen from my knees.

“Our cold boulevards. Our immense ballrooms of ice. In the frozen depths, a streak of fire. Your major vessels would narrow; your heart would be flooded with blood. All four chambers would be forced to expand. Your heartbeat would slow. I would crown you with a diadem of spines.”

In the sixteenth century, the Anabaptist theologian Balthasar Hubmaier used a play on words to attack the reverence for the sacramental wafer. In his pun, the monstrance holding the wafer became the monster that rises from the sea in Revelation 13. *O monstra, monstra, monstratis nobis monstruosa monstra!* “O monster, monster, you have revealed to us the unnatural monster!” The sin was the worship of the creature in place of the Creator. The error was a passion for the image.

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The Green Lady left me retching. I'd forgotten to hold my breath.

The monster itself is a revelation.

Balthasar Hubmaier was convicted of heresy and burned at the stake. His wife, a stone around her neck, was drowned in the Danube.