

## **Blessed be, 1, winter**

by athens7

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Jack and Patrick in their old age, many years after the photograph taken in April, 1897.  
As usual, Jack in Courier New and Patrick in Verdana.  
The pasture is mazaher's.

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**Jack**

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*Note: lyrics from MY BLOODY VALENTINE, To Here Knows When, in Loveless, 1989.*

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*Oh, I come back to  
the one who calls my name out*

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I wake up with a start, panic punching me in the stomach.  
It isn't even dawn yet.  
I slowly manage to bring my heartbeat back to normal, finding a guidance in the  
lament of a distant barn-owl, and all the while wondering uneasily what  
happened.  
Then the recent events come back to me, a vicious blow hitting me squarely in  
the chest, and I let a small sigh escape me.  
I turn, more out of habit than a need to know, and find the space beside me  
empty and untouched.  
He doesn't even bother to pretend any more.  
I lie back again, and attempt to regain sleep. I do not think I'll be  
successful.

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I have but the vaguest remembrance of the days immediately following my stroke,  
when I had to lay all the time in bed, speechless and motionless.  
Every time I attempt to think about it, I find a maelstrom of remote sensations,  
a soothing, limpid voice lulling me in an unknown language from one layer of  
dreams to the next, fragments of events that most probably never happened, but  
are merely residual hallucinations.  
I possess only two definite, untainted memories.  
One is of the scent of spring rain.  
The other is of when I opened my eyes for the first time after falling into that  
enforced lethargy.  
I suspect it happened quite abruptly. One moment I was lying dormant, the next I  
was twisting in the sheets, groaning weakly.  
No sooner I had awoken, that Patrick was at my bedside, leaning over me.  
He put his hands on the pillow, so that they were framing my head, and merely  
stared at me, with pupils blown wide and breathing almost imperceptibly erratic.  
We stayed like that for a long time, I seem to recall, neither moving or  
thinking, just existing in that small shared space of eternity, as it so often  
happens between us.  
Then he closed his eyes, and kissed my forehead, and I almost cried because of  
the shaking intensity of everything I could feel from that point of contact.  
For a moment, I was no longer able to discern my emotions from his, my  
perception reduced to a jumble of disordered inputs and sensory overload.

Then it ended, and everything started to fall apart.

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He watches me, constantly, but he never touches me.

He talks only when strictly necessary.

When I leave to walk down the village, or around our property, as part of the prescription I gave myself for my own convalescence, he never accompanies me.

Lonely I follow the tracks of mice in the snow, until the feeling of homelessness threatens to choke me.

So I raise my eyes, let myself be mesmerized by the skeletal branches of the cherry trees surging upwards, seeking devotedly the opalescent sky; and I attempt to envision their tough, black roots, delving in the ground, sinking deeper and deeper, assembling intricate, invisible pathways that hold the secret code of the universe itself.

Somehow, the thought lends me strenght.

At night, when the fire crackles reassuringly in the mantel and I write at my desk, he sits in the armchair for a while, trying to project an aura of impassivity and failing miserably, his cloaked eyes never leaving my left hand squeezing the small rubber ball I use to strenghten my debilitated coordination. After more or less an hour that feels like a century, he stands abruptly, and leaves me alone.

I am afraid I can't hold on much longer.

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Tension must be released, somehow.

For all that he is a creature naturally inclined to art, and philosophy, and abstraction in general, in this Patrick has always shown to prefer the most basic means.

It is New Year's morning, and I am in our bedroom, just beginning to dress for the day.

My mind starts to wander - an alarmingly frequent phenomenon, during these last few days -, while my fingers play idly with the silver, horse-bit-shaped cuff links he gave me last Christmas.

He turned 65 yesterday.

I sigh, turn towards the wardrobe to retrieve a clean waistcoat, and almost shriek when I find Patrick staring at me, his face two inches apart from mine.

"For God's sa--- I thought I had managed to make you refrain from sneaking up on people like that!" I mumble unthinkingly, speaking probably more words than I have in the entire past week.

He just looks at me, and then, all of a sudden, slips a hand in my still-unbuttoned trousers, curls it around my hardening member.

I gasp, reach blindly behind me to grasp the drawer, knock the bowl with the pot-pourri over.

Apparently, my frankly embarrassing responsiveness to his touch was left unchanged by the stroke.

"Tell me" he hisses fiercely, a whisper more powerful and demanding than a marching army.

"Yes" I answer, and we kiss, almost to the point of bruising, and it feels like the first breath after coma.

I manage to last a minute under his care (a minute and eleven seconds, if I want to be benevolent with myself); as soon as I finish, my knees give out, forcing me to sit on the bed, while I try to catch my breath.

Patrick remains on his feet, stares silently at his hand coated in my essence, then proceeds to lick it leisurely, perfectly clean, keeping his eyes shut in the most enigmatic and heartbreaking reverence I have ever witnessed on a man's face.

"There" I say weakly, reaching for his belt. "Let me ---"

He takes a step back. My hand falls heavily in my lap, and I have never felt more useless and (rejected) in my life.

"I --- " he starts.

"Please don't" I snap, turning away. "You are dismissed, thank you."

At these words, he shivers; the tremor reverberates through my body like an electric jolt.

After he leaves, I kneel on the floor, but the tears won't come.

As my mind wanders directionless, I can't help thinking that the broken fragments of the china bowl seem to compose an encrypted allegory of our end.

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Somehow, I am not surprised that he enters the room the exact moment I am shutting my luggage.

"What are you doing?" he asks, his voice as cold and impersonal as when he first offered me his name in a courtyard under a frosted sky, so many years ago. The steel bands around my heart clench tighter at the involuntary similitude.

"A very simple deduction to make, I fancy."

"It isn't to me", he snarls through gritted teeth.

"I am leaving, Patrick. I am staying in Cornwall for one week or two. But do not be upset. It is just a temporary solution", I say, all in one breath, because otherwise I'd get stuck after the first sentence and never go on with it. I try to sidestep him, leave the room, but he closes the door with a heavy thud, leaning against it with his arms crossed.

"You are doing nothing of the kind."

It is then that something breaks within me, like a thin rope stretched too hard, for too long.

"I'm doing it for you, you git!" I shout, slamming the bag back on the bed.

"How could that ever be?!" he replies, as much loudly.

"You even have the gall to ask me? Since my... my incident, you barely stand my sight! So I'm doing you a favour, and sparing you the effort to send me away."

"You got it completely wrong, as per your usual!"

"Patrick" I sigh, passing a hand over my face. "Considering your recent behaviour, what should I think? What would you have me to do? I ask you to spell it for me, just for once".

He reaches out, in a flash of movement and colour, seizing me by the shoulders, so tightly that for a moment I can feel my bones grind.

"Please", he whispers strangledly, burning me with his eyes, so low that I almost miss it. "Please, don't leave me. Not now, not ever."

For some few, horrendous moments, the gigantic proportions of our misunderstanding render me incapable of all movement.

Then my energies come back to me in a rush of shame and desire to make it right. I put the bag down, open it, throw out everything inside, scattering my clothes all around the room.

Once satisfied with the result, I turn back to him, find myself enveloped in a warm, mad blanket of Patrick Moriarty.

"Will you forgive my foolish bout of theatrics?" I ask in a voice far too small for my dignity.

"I'd be inclined to think that I fully deserved it, and that I should be the one apologising" he mutters, the sound muffled against my shoulder.

"Nothing lasts forever, my love" I whisper, threading my hand through his hair, much longer than it used to be in London, and only now beginning to silver.

"I don't want to hear it".

I don't reply.

"If you ever go before me, there is only a tub of blood waiting for me" he says, quiet and certain and steady like death itself.

"You have my permission."

His breath catches.

"But only if you concede me yours in return", I finish.

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## Patrick

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turn  
your head  
come back again  
to here knows when

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I do not think I'm overstating when I say that, upon hearing those words, my heart stops. And then the sheer entity of what I asked him and what he granted me in return strikes me with the heartbreaking force of an unexpected tidal wave, and I fall in love with him all over again.

"Yes" I promise, and it's like a thread of lead has been extracted from my stomach through my throat, and the sensation is dreadful and exhilarating all at the same time.

"Yes" he echoes, and I kiss him, push him backwards until he falls on the bed, and I climb over him, ripping all those hideous layers of fabric away and covering every inch of newly-revealed skin with my lips and my hands, desperate to commit every detail to memory, again and again and again.

He writhes under me, trying to gain leverage, but I can't let him. I must earn his forgiveness. I start from his beautiful, so-very-expressive face, skimming my lips along the bold line of his jaw, over his marked chin, and then lower, following his long, pale neck to the hollow at the centre of his collarbone, where the twin scars streak the skin like a holy seal.

I reach his chest, bury my nose in the black, sparse hair I find there, smelling home, and sandalwood, and the cold echo of the steppe, and how could this ever be enough?

I'd choose an eternity of this, two fallen angels alone in the waste land where the fire always blazes and every kiss is the first, and it would not. Be. Enough. It wouldn't come even close to it.

So down I go, outlining a one-way path across the flat planes of his quivering stomach and groin, take him in my mouth until his tip touches my palate.

I taste him for a long time, while his hands keep tracing invisible, everlasting trails on my scalp.

Then I release him, the solid weight of him still vivid on my tongue, I reach for the vaseline in the bedside cabinet, and come back to him, my slick fingers sliding leisurely, effortlessly inside his tight passage, while my other hand resumes where my mouth had interrupted.

He manages to stay quiet for a few minutes, my dearest, impeccable Stoic, but when I decide to apply *that* peculiar twist that has yielded so many fascinating results in all these years, he can't but surrender: he cries out, thrusting his hips upwards and grabbing fistfuls of light blue sheet.

"Oh, oh, God, I can't, I'm almost ---" he stutters.

I release his swollen cock, take hold of his balls, not hard enough to hurt but clear enough to warn.

*Not yet.*

He swallows, inhales deeply.

"Go on, then. Show me" he nods, closing his eyes and spreading his legs.

And already I am penetrating him, deep and slow, not stopping until I reach his core, touch his most inner places; until his heat is all I can feel, and I am no longer able to tell where his skin ends and my own begins.

I am the sword, and he is my sheath, we are lead and counter melody; without his lucidity, his composure, I am just a mass of exposed flesh and unbalanced weaknesses, a creep who wastes all his energy on pushing back the outside world, until he succumbs to his own paranoia.

"Patrick, Patrick" he moans, bringing me back from my flight of poetry.

He does love to call my name.

Back in our old (young) days, he used it as a means to ground me, to keep me afloat; an appeal, an entreaty, a protective spell he turned against the totemic shadows chasing after me.

These days, it feels like absolution, acceptance, recognition. And I can't but answer with all my being.

"I'm so close, Patrick, I ---" he embraces me, hides his face against the point where my neck becomes my shoulder, not because he feels shame, of course, but because he so rarely allows his own needs to overcome his passionate rationality.

He is a man of science, down to the bone.

"Yes, Jack, Jack," I respond, taking his face in my hands, turning his name in a ritualistic chant. "Jack, Jack, let me see you".

He obeys, as always, looking straight through my soul.

"You make me feel blessed", he exhales, and comes.

And just for once, it is I who follow.

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Our hearts are still beating.

It's dark, but in the shared eternity of our bed, we see everything we need to.

It's late, but neither of us really cares.

"Winter is here, my love. But not for us, not this time" he says, his murmured words a mercy for both of us.

I nod silently against his cheek.

It's a lie, or a prevarication at the very least, but for this moment, for this evening, I let myself be deceived.

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"Happy Imbolc, by the way" I tell him the following morning, as soon as he opens his eyes. He laughs, and I understand that, in absence of eternity, these moments are more than worthy surrogates.

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