

((Weaving))

by athens7 (third person, Times New Roman 11)

and mazaher (Jack, Courier New 10, and Patrick, Verdana 10, first person)

May 1st -- June 13th, 2012

::

1. It was there that I saw you

by athens7

::

The breeze hits him squarely in the face, insinuating viciously in his nostrils and under his collar, making shivers run smoothly along his spine.

He undoes the buttons of his jacket and, hands in pockets, stands defiantly against the January air, basking in the coldness of the last snowflakes caressing his face.

He starts walking across the courtyard, wondering what convoluted punishment the esteemed Headmaster Waters will come up with this time for skipping his class, again.

It's a thought he banishes quickly, though. It'd be a pity to waste the short time he has now at his disposal with worrying about the inevitable.

So he can't help feeling annoyance when he hears voices coming from around the corner leading to the far end of the courtyard. Really, can't a poor tormented soul ever hope to spend some well-deserved time alone without being bothered by negligent students?

He despairs for the future of his generation.

His annoyance becomes quiet rage though, when he realizes that what he is listening to is a brawl, or better still, a beating, if one wants to get into semantics. And about these things, he certainly wants to.

He rounds the corner and contemplates briefly how sour is the taste of being right about wrong things.

"Trust you to always be the one instigating this kind of messy, shameful works, Westley" he intones loudly, strolling provocatively towards the three little shits and the poor sod bent down on the ground while being reduced to a pulp.

The boy in question turns abruptly at the sound of his voice, alarmed, but he relaxes immediately when he recognizes the new arrival.

"Waszowski! Aren't you busy exploring brothels searching for your mother?"

"Oh, my dear Westley... Your predictability is so reassuring. Thank you for giving me constants in this waste land so devoid of meaning that we call life."

By now they are standing right in front of each other, a few inches and their mutual disdain the only things keeping them from lashing at each other.

"Oh, but you see, Waszowski... You are so fun because in your case these so-called insults are actually statements of fact! "

At this point, Jack comes to the conclusion that verbal exchanges are highly overrated, and that physicality is so much more satisfyingly eloquent.

The heavy air around them resonates with the loud smack of Jack's brow colliding with Westley's nose.

He barely has the time to reassert his equilibrium, and then the other two are on him, throwing him against the coarse gravel, set on hitting as many portions of his body they can reach, but without employing any proper method, so the actual damage is rather marginal, all things considered. Not that he's complaining about that last detail, mind you.

“I think that’s enough, my dear friends. After all, we don’t want to risk being found in such a compromising situation” Westley says after a while; that is, after finally managing to bring the copious amount of blood flowing from his nose under control.

“But rest assured that this is not the end of it, you bastard” he continues, giving Jack the first well-placed kick he has received all day. “I will teach you how to remember where you belong, you son of a whore”.

“ ‘*Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me*’¹” Jack recites with a sneer, his split lower lip throbbing, and yes, it may be dreadfully sanctimonious on his part, but what are quotes for, if not needles for mocking?

Westley barely restrains himself from hitting him again, but spits him in the eye just the same.

And just like that, they go away.

Jack sighs, drags himself to his feet; he turns, only to be reminded of how he got involved in this mess in the first place.

The boy is still crouched on the ground, staring at him with the bluest eyes Jack has ever seen, his expression a strange mixture of annoyance and incredulity and maybe even just a dash of deference.

Jack offers him to help stand. The boy-with-the-eyes-of-sapphire lies down, looking at him as if challenging him to do something about it.

Jack sighs and sits beside him, elbows resting on his knees.

“Are you planning to spend all day like that?” he says.

“ ‘*The lady doth protest too much, methinks*’²”, the boy unexpectedly replies. His tone is low and limpid, vibrating between them like a piano chord being teased.

“ ‘*Beggar that I am, I am even poor in thanks*’³” Jack counters readily, and oh, this feels so good: what’s this sudden electricity crackling in his veins, this delicious friction rubbing against his skin?

It tastes like the first drops of rain, like salt and ozone and all the elemental things in the world.

He can feel something shift here, just under the surface of their conscious minds, pieces interlocking to form a puzzle whose shape is still unknown to them. It is there, and yet it is still to come.

But the boy doesn’t seem intentioned on elaborating further, so the moment fades away quietly, and Jack can feel a stab of disappointment, as painful as it is sudden and inexplicable. It’s not the first time it happened to him: he may be engaged in whatever trivial activity of his choosing, thinking about nothing, and then suddenly it hits him, a wave of sadness that tastes like universal grief, like a star just died, or he lost a long-forgotten friend, and he can’t swallow and his eyes get damp and then it’s over.

But this time it’s the first time he feels he can actually *do* something about it.

So he searches frantically in his jacket, takes the last two cigarettes he finds there (oh, it’ll be hell to negotiate with Baynes this time).

“At least let me offer you something” he says, trying to project as much carelessness as he is capable of.

Please please please.

The boy-with-the-eyes-of-sapphire accepts, but makes no move to take the cigarette.

Jack slips it between the other’s thin, defined lips, can’t help but stare at them in fascination, mesmerized by their movement as they wrap around the tip, by the hiss of tobacco kindling at the spark of the match, by the collected, almost restrained way he inhales.

And still, the boy doesn’t get up; instead, he crosses his legs while his hands go support his head, as if it’s been his intention all along to end up sprawling on frozen snow, puffing clouds of smoke against the sky.

Jack is reminded of a cat he encountered some days ago: he was red and had green eyes, and Jack had run into him just after he had failed to jump on a wall and fallen ungraciously to the ground, due to the slightest miscalculation of the momentum he needed to accomplish his mission.

¹ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Hamlet*, act III, scene II, 328.

² *Ibidem*, 230.

³ *Ibidem*, act II, scene II, 272.

Their eyes had locked for a few seconds.

“No need to feel embarrassed, mate” Jack had told him, trying to dispel the tension. “Can happen to anyone.”

The cat had flattened his right ear, clearly conveying 'I am not anyone', and then he had proceeded to lick his nose clean, apparently losing all interest in going beyond that wretched wall.

Jack can't help finding the two situations eerily similar.

So he lies beside the boy-with-the-eyes-of-sapphire, mirroring his position.

“*‘Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel?’*” he declaims after a while.

“*‘By th' Mass, and 'tis like a camel, indeed.’*”

“*‘Methinks it is like a weasel.’*”

“*‘It is backed like a weasel.’*”

“*‘Or like a whale.’*”

“*‘Very like a whale.’*”⁴

Then the absurdity of the whole situation hits them, and they start laughing.

“My name's Jack, by the way. Jack Waszowski” he says after a last giggle, extending his hand. The boy with-the-eyes-of-sapphire looks at it suspiciously for a moment; he seems to come to some monumental resolution of sorts, and finally takes it.

Jack grips it and stands abruptly, using the pull to bring the other on his feet as well.

The boy with-the-eyes-of-sapphire looks outraged, as if he can't believe Jack's audacity.

“Oh, yes of course, the bastard of Russian origins”, he hisses, taking a step back, but something flashing in his eyes makes Jack see the casually cruel taunt for what it is, inconsiderate words spoken by an annoyed child trying to divert his pain from himself to the outer world.

“The one and only” Jack smiles amiably. “Here in Portora, at least”.

“Sorry”, mumbles the boy-with-the-eyes-of-sapphire, scuffling his foot, and Jack wants to tell him that one would never expect a porcupine to apologize for injuring a predator with its quills, but somehow he feels it's not exactly the right thing to say at the moment, and where did a thought like that come from, anyway?

“I'm Patrick Moriarty” the boy says, fixing him with a glare as powerful and compelling as the tide, and Jack knows that this is a test, and that he is going to pass it.

“How do you do, sir!” he exclaims, taking Patrick's hand in both of his, and shaking vigorously.

And Patrick... blushes. Just like that, violent pink spreading across his high, stark cheekbones to the tips of his ears.

Jack's grin turns into a full-toothed smile, one of the biggest of his life, he's sure, and one of the most manic as well, he's afraid.

“After you, good sir” he says, stepping aside and waving towards the dormitory with a dramatic flourish.

Patrick looks at him, as if he doesn't trust having someone walking behind him; then his tight fists relax by a fraction, his jaw unclenches, his lips become fuller, a hard line of unforgiving steel turning into a soft, unbearably sweet curve of timid willingness.

Jack sees it all only because he is looking; he understands that he has just been granted something that no other has ever witnessed before.

Patrick moves, and he follows.

The Headmaster finds them as soon as they set foot in the dormitory wing.

::

⁴ *Ibidem*, act III, scene II, 339-344.

2. Forged in fire

by mazaher

::

Jack

Something strange happened today, and I'm not sure what.

So commonplace, older students giving a beating to a younger one. So easy for me to break the script-- and what if it comes at the price of a punch or two.

I have thick skin, inside and out.

Have to.

It's unbelievable, what is tolerated in these establishment, purported to aim at forging the ruling class of tomorrow. It explains much of Britain's choices in international politics as well as internal affairs.

But today... Today was different. *Moriarty* is different.

We've been both caned, of course.

In theory, I'm old enough to be exempted from corporal punishment. The principle doesn't hold in the face of my repeated transgressions.

This time old Waters gave his best: three times six without a jacket.

Distinctly above average, even for the rascal that I am.

Distinctly sharper than Westley's kick.

It doesn't matter, just a bit more of black and blue on my back. If I won't sleep this night, I'll catch up tomorrow. Time after time, much to the chagrin of the college Board, I find the task of ...being myself becoming easier.

Young *Moriarty* was next. As a third year boy, he doesn't enjoy age privileges.

He knew he was in for a beating, and he was shaking subtly when he stood, thin and straight, those incredible eyes wide open and staring at Waters'.

"We know there was a brawl," Waters said.

Good deduction, old clothespeg, the boy was visibly the worse for wear.

"Tell us who began it, and we will withhold punishment this one time."

(Like Julius Caesar, Waters ever only speaks in the third person singular.)

The boy remained silent.

"Won't you? Then we're afraid you'll have to be punished according to the rules."

At this point, tradition and etiquette demand that the defendant either keep silent, or --if he's what is usually termed "a squeaker"-- he break down and start spilling the beans.

What *Moriarty* did, was unheard of in the annals.

"Go ahead," was his answer.

Waters was fuming, all the more so as I was there as witness.

"Turn around," he growled. "Jacket and shirt off, sir. Lean on the desk."

With one last look of challenge, Patrick obeyed.

His fingers went white around the edge of the desk as the blows fell. One, two, three, four, five, six... and then seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve. A double dose. Waters gave his worst, and blood stained the shirt when Patrick was allowed to put back his clothes. But he remained silent. His eyes were bright with defiance, not tears, when finally we were sent our way.

"Good night, *sir*," he said before following me out of the door, and his voice didn't shake.

Who is this boy?

I mean, I know who he is, as everybody does. I know about his dubious father, his recluse mother, I heard the gossip. I don't care a damn about that. I am the last who could look down on him for his family misfortunes anyway. I want to know him, not his family and what they whisper about it. I want to know where the steel comes from-- and the grace.

::

Patrick

God. It hurts.

I'm in pain all over, Waters' twelve of the best on top of what the others...

But I only got twelve.

Waszowski got eighteen, his shirt torn in two places, and still he was smiling when he stood up, after.

I'm wondering why he did what he did. Why he saved me.

(How I hate the idea. But this is what it was. They'd have broken some bone soon.)

Perhaps he's just a troublemaker, and I, nothing but the next bit of cannon fodder in his own personal war against the Board and his concurring feud with the Spartiates.

I've heard about him.

He's hard to miss.

Older students usually make a show of not even being aware of the younger ones, unless...

But he does. I caught him looking at me just as often as he caught me. Our eyes meeting for a moment-- a silence, something sparking, leaving behind a thin ozone smell before we turned away.

Waszowski, the Russian bastard.

Well, he's not much of a bastard, I can bear witness to that.

And I don't think he used me. I don't feel used.

I feel...

Like he made room for me.

Like he was fine with me being whatever the hell I am, sprawled there in the snow out of sheer spite at being rescued.

I hate being me, and all that it entails.

I've been trying so hard to be someone else.

But for twenty minutes he made me question my endeavour, as side by side we smoked his cigarettes and exchanged quotes from *Hamlet*.

I hope he didn't hear me sniffle, later, in the corridor. Yet he casually reached into his breast pocket, silently passed me his handkerchief. It smells faintly of vervain.

It is a sacred herb of protection.

Well, he did protect me. As much as he could.

I hold in my fist the square of smooth thin linen, inhale the scent, and wait for tomorrow to come.

::