

## The Granary

One ebon Sunday long ago, she said she'd meet me at the granary, but she never showed her face that day and I sat there alone in the dark. Winds swept through rafters, but I sat silent, and I sat crouched, watching the black shades of brown spin treacherously in the hollow darkness, blinding night; scythes and hooks hung lone on the walls, and they rocked in the autumn wind like pendulums. The azure twilight of the storm bristled outside but, inside, it was cold as a stone in this byzantine skeleton of wooden beams and boards. I remember glaring at the knives on the worn tabletops; I remember looking down at the dust, dry but cloying, beneath my toes. I remember rising in the granary to see if she was hiding there, somewhere outside my sight.

But it was larger than I could ever have imagined, this construct made of mortar and pine. In the summer months, light would cut through the boards of the granary and we'd swim through the floating stars of dust in the sunlight; but things have grown different since then, and I don't know why. Now I recall branches joggling, knocking against the tall rooftop of the granary scaling above me, I remember the whistling of gales as they sliced through the empty floors high above me, places I would never visit after dark. To go up there, to scale the greatest height of the granary, one clawed up bare wooden staircases, spines that spanned the width of the granary, spiraling upward through the mazes of lumber and sacks of grain. At the top, there would be vacant floors, staring back at you. Only the wind sat there now.

But a cackling staircase led me down, beyond the scythes and dirt, where the air grew stank and infected. The great barn seeped deep into the ground like a tombstone, screaming into the dirt; here the labyrinth continued of planks and beams and floors that wended down into the Earth like an ant's hive. Tails of brown rope whipped through the air; it was so dark now. The ground above me rumbled with the fall, the trees above swayed and their roots clawed blindly through the Earth, as clumps of molding leaves pounded the mud with a force so raw. It would all pause for moments, but in time, as I slipped through the black night, a thick scraping resumed with a roar and then the rumbling of the dirt – naked walls of living dirt, black as arctic waves, surrounded me

here - began anew. I left the staircase but my feet gave out; the oxygen here had been ransacked by the cold poison of the air, the unforgiving raw stench of the wet earth in fall. I rose up from my ankles and before me found a doorway but with no door within, and I crossed through the darkness and my eyes peered towards heavens absent and hidden by wet steaming earth. There was a cadaver of a staircase that seeped lower still, and the steps grew shorter and taller and steeper. Someone had been indolent, or idle at the job; climbing down the steps, in search of her (and I knew I'd never find her now, she'd never climb down this far in her ribbed ivory dress) I found myself slipping and scaling down a wall now of steps that were so high, so placed and at such haphazard interval, that I had to navigate with my arms against the cold railings or I would crash down the gaping throat of this stairwell. But the railings vanished too in blackness. Around me, the beams, the foundations of the granary, were broken. But it kept going down, it kept going.

But no one kept grain here.

It was a horrific architectural abyss upon which this granary stood. Tall nails on boards here were bent and out of shape, and few if any were hammered in. Square angles were broken and distorted; darkness blinded me not through the rectangles of the construct but triangles of broken rafters, rotting crosspieces; pentagons of misshapen shapes in the darkness.

It was a failure.

As I descended lower, the lumber screamed from out the muddy walls like fingernails, no longer bound or joined or placed in any order or purpose. Only this jumble of wood, leaning against itself piece by piece, strands of dead bronze wooden grass, upheld the granary towering above me. As I crept lower, down stairs that had no beginning, no railing and no promise for me now, I stumbled. The darkness had foiled me, leaning upon me silently in every which way. But silently; only the dirt grumbled this low, its earthly echoes thundering like crescent waves, those of an autumn storm so many empty floors above me. But the darkness was too bitter, and I sat huddled, I sat crouching. I couldn't go lower, through these twisting passageways. Vertical corridors of broken rotting timber went on, down even lower into the well of darkness cascading downward beneath me like a coffin in the earth. But I sat suspended on a plank of wood

in the center of all of it, rocking on my heels, glaring forth from out the spine of the grand granary. I couldn't find her; perhaps I had failed.

The dark ashes streaming around me carried visions all their own, and as I huddled down in the unforgiving chasm I remembered streams of guilt, I remembered the bitter frosted cold that flaked off the walls of this silo. Somewhere the light had died, and now the darkness flashed around me, twisting like the Styx; and I was blind and only my breath haunted the chill of the marsh air. Something had struck me down here and now I could not crawl on; the staircase I had taken melted into the rotting skeleton of the granary like flesh into dirt, and I shivered. And I closed my eyes, and dragged on the stank air like a cigar.

Through a cracked window pane, the granary stands now under a starless sapphire sky, in the dead of winter. A silver tombstone on mummified grasses under a snowy moon. And it's always out my window, now.

It never breathes nor cries.

This granary

Never dies.

- KMT