

HEY, BABY

Sabine Sautter-Léger

Outside, the October sun shone dimly, a light bulb through a dirty white sock. In his office, Jim read the email again, rubbed his palms slowly on his thighs.

A phantom had written him; an agency had tipped it off. It had found Rita, now him. The phantom was thirty-four years old. Jim's hands trembled. His tongue, when it came out to lick his lips, was dry.

He had forgotten Rita Dufour, practically. It was such a long time ago. Now the past was pressing on his gut and pushing up through his throat. *Hey, baby*. He vaguely remembered jokes in the high-school cafeteria French-fries line. Does she do four, do five, do six? Rita had gained weight and disappeared. He had stopped eating with the others, started reading math and physics books in the library, smuggling sandwiches between the stacks.

Jim dragged a wrist across his forehead, then let his arm fall like a deadweight alongside the chair. A pile of overdue books towered on his desk. He saw the office door was open a crack. His eyes carried the glow of the computer screen with his gaze, and the outline of the door appeared blotchy. He yearned to close the door. In the hallway an indistinct conversation dwindled to a finish; footsteps fell away into silence.

Beside his desk was an empty chair reserved for students coming to discuss term papers. Jim would sit there himself for a moment. But his body slid down his swivel chair to the floor. He felt the coldness of the tiles with his hands, through the seat of his pants. He didn't recognize the pants; probably his wife had picked them out. A mud spot made a curious shape on his left shoe. He

looked at the ceiling for relief, to avoid the unwiped aspect of the shoe: above, an interesting array of holes. One had the form of the stain on his shoe. 'This was noteworthy, was it not?' He felt there might be a greater pattern. He lay flat on his back to deliberate this, his arms spread out, almost in a gesture of welcome.

MUSICAL REVELATION

Raúl Brasca

Seated on the velvet piano stool, the teenager studies Massenet's 'Élégie'. He performs it over and over with cloying slowness; the notes languish like the boy himself, who looks away bored from the sheet music, his gaze wandering over the wall where it pauses on the canvas. There, a pair of pink flamingos sink their long legs into a deep blue pond. The teenager goes into the picture, lunges violently at the birds, and with two sharp blows breaks their legs. The sound of the broken bones resonates around the music room. The piano hammers freak out: a dizzy staccato of blue notes splashes onto the upholstery of the Louis XV couches. The strings stretch so much they creak painfully. Some break with a loud snap, a dissonant beating of feathers on water diminishing and dying. The boy returns to his place. Quivering with excitement, a dark feeling perturbs him. He has discovered a perverse music, agonising and equivocally sensual. He thinks it's superb.

Translated by Daniel Tunnard

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