Benedictions

by versaphile

Summary

Malcolm was selfish and vain and prideful and greedy, and despite his god's forgiveness he knows he must atone. He must prove his love true. He must worship with his heart, with his mind, with his body.

Malcolm and his god-- They start again.

It's different this time, different in so many ways. God is no longer a nameless old woman, bound and enslaved. She burned along with everything Malcolm and his brothers built together. She is ash, long gone and washed away by wind and rain and swept into the sea.

But Malcolm has learned. The old woman was not God, and Thomas is not God either. Both were and are mere vessels for the divine.

No, not mere anything. Malcolm regrets so much, but most of all he regrets treating his god's divine vessels with cruelty. He was selfish and vain and prideful and greedy, and despite his god's forgiveness he knows he must atone. He must prove his love true. He must worship with his heart, with his mind, with his body.

Thomas worships with him. They shelter in the tunnels at night, huddled together for warmth, and by day they build their church: a humble shelter, really, made not from planks or logs but living trees woven together in an arching roof, first as saplings and then growing, growing into sturdy young trees, trunks bent in worship to the god that made them.

Thomas teaches him. The old ways, Thomas calls them, made new for a new age. The one true god returned to humanity after long exile, after too long cast aside by human greed and ignorance.
All life is holy, and all things are alive. Even the soil, the rocks, the air, the ashes from the fire. They must be blessed and treated with respect. Without the blessings, without respect, the soil and rocks and air and ash will foul as they did before, destroying what they should sustain.

Stone does not burn, nor bricks. Malcolm and Thomas salvage both, carrying armfuls in trip after trip, until their bodies tremble with exhaustion. Thomas blesses the stone and bricks, and then they use them to make the church walls, a fire pit, a shelter to keep the firewood dry, and a sacrificial altar.

God sustains them. Water springs from the earth, clean and pure. Food comes to them, birds and hares approaching without fear, wishing only to serve their god. Malcolm sacrifices each under Thomas' guidance, saves the blood and offers it to Thomas to be blessed. They drink it together, mouths and teeth red, and with each sip Malcolm feels himself being purified, cleansed of the corrupting poison that pervaded the soil, the water, the air, and every living thing.

They clean the sacrifices together, roast and eat them together. Malcolm always dreamed of a society of equals, but even at the start of Erisden, he did not live out that dream. Despite everything, he still carried within him all his horrors. He sought to escape slavery, and instead became the slaver. He was a fool.

One morning, Thomas unwraps the cloth from his shredded hand, and the ugly wounds are gone. His hand is whole, with all its fingers clean and pink and unscarred. He cries with joy and praise and Malcolm holds him.

They start a new book together. With nothing but the clothes on their backs and the bounty of nature, they make rough paper, gather berries for ink, make quills from birds. They sit together and God speaks through Thomas, and Malcolm listens, writes, lets their God fill his mind and heart, every word a blessing to be received.

At night, they lie together in their living church, sheltered in its blessed stones, with warmth from a blessed fire. Malcolm has begun to feel as though he is as full of God as Thomas, that he too is God's mouth and eyes and hands and feet. But the divinity within him is dwarfed by the holy power in Thomas, as magnetic and captivating to Malcolm as it is to the plants, the animals. Malcolm would lay himself on the sacrificial altar if Thomas asked for it. He would feed himself to God as he's done so many times before, but never stop.

God does not want Malcolm's death. But it is hungry, always hungry.

They keep a knife by their bed, clean and sharp. They are both naked under the warmth of their blanket. They press their bodies together, touching, teasing, feeling the divine power under each other's skin. Every night, the mouth of God chooses a spot on Malcolm's body, kissing and blessing it, and Malcolm opens it so that Thomas may nurse from his wound. Malcolm feels like a most loving mother, feeding her child from her breast, from her very flesh and life. The faint scars collect on him, telling the passage of time. Thomas thinks they are beautiful, and kisses them, strokes them, cries over them.

Malcolm feels less like a mother when Thomas kisses down his body, when Thomas wraps his hand, the new skin slowly callousing, around their frotting cocks. He feels nothing like a mother when he lies Thomas down on their bed and worships his scars, the symbols of his passage into true faith; when he slicks the crease of Thomas' arse with warmed fat and ruts him; when he feeds God's divine vessel the gift of his seed and then is fed divine seed in return.

"My beloved," Thomas murmurs, stroking Malcolm's wild hair, his rough cheek, and Malcolm cannot say if the words are from God or from Thomas. It matters not; Malcolm loves them both.
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