

She Is the Bottom of the Well, a Monster

or is it

I Am, within Her, the Bottom of the Well, a Monster

or is it

I Perceive, from within Her, the Bottom of the Well, a Monster

or is it

We Are, I within Her, at the Bottom of the Well, a Monster:

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It truly is just a moment that I lose consciousness from the impact, I believe. When I come to, I feel some kind of spray hitting me. At first, I think it is rain, but I am wrong. It is urine. The soldiers are all peeing on me where I lay within her. I look up to see them in silhouette far above me, taking turns coming to the edge of the round hole to pee. There is a terrible unreality to the sight, like a drug-induced hallucination. But it is real. I am really within her, and they are spraying me with real pee. They finish, someone shines a flashlight on me. I hear them laughing. And then they disappear from the edge. After that, everything sinks into a deep silence.

Little by little, though, and with great attention to detail, I begin to grasp my situation. The first thing I realize is that I have been extremely lucky. She is relatively soft and sandy. If She weren't, then the impact of falling such a distance would have broken every bone in my body. I take one long, deep breath and try to move.



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I try moving my fingers. They respond, although somewhat feebly. I try to raise myself to a sitting position on the earthen surface, but this I am unable to do. My body feels as if it has lost all sensation. My mind is fully conscious, but there is something wrong with the connection between my mind and my body. My mind decides to do something, but it is unable to convert the thought into muscular activity. I give up and, for a while, lay here quietly in the dark.

Enduring the pain, I reach out to touch the earthen floor around me. The floor seems flat. It is not very wide, maybe the width of my arms stretched or twice that. As I am groping the ground, my hand suddenly comes upon a hard, sharp object. In reflexive fear, I draw my hand back, but now slowly and carefully I reach out toward the thing. Again my fingers come in contact with the sharp object. I think it is a tree branch, but now I realize I am touching bones. Not human bones, but those of a small animal, which have been scattered at random, either by the passage of time or by my fall. There is nothing else within her here, just sand: fine and dry.

I remain here, still, in in the hole of her. It is all I can do. I can't even think, so profound are my feelings of loneliness and despair. I sit here doing nothing, thinking nothing. Unconsciously, however, I wait for that ray of light, that blinding flood of light that pours straight through her for one tiny fraction of the day. It must be a phenomenon that occurs very close to evening, when the light is closest to me and it strikes me at right angles. I wait for the coming of the light and for nothing else. There is nothing else I can wait for.

This is becoming a very long story, but what I want to convey to you is my feeling that real life has possibly ended for me deep within her in the desert. I feel as if, in the intense light that shines for a mere ten or fifteen seconds a day through her, I burn up the very core of my life, until there is nothing left. That is how mysterious that light is to me. I can't explain it very well, but as honestly and simply as I can state it, no matter what I encounter, no matter what I experience, I cease to feel anything in the bottom of my heart. Even in the face of monstrous units, even when I lose this piece of my neck, even in the hellish emptiness of that summer, a kind of numbness is all I feel. It may sound strange to say this, but none of that matters. Something inside me is already dead. Perhaps, as I feel at this time, I should die in that light, simply fade away. This is the time for me to die. But, as the doctors predict, I do not die here. Or perhaps I should say that I cannot die here.

I come back to life, without a piece of my neck and twelve precious weeks. By the time I arrive at the doctoral program, my parents and my sister are long since distant. They put my

Commented [ED1]: Here 'They' also brings to mind the image of soldiers connected through resonant similarity of their abstraction, the pronoun, a ghost of trauma.

Commented [ED2]: To know Someone You want to be connected to and to have the experience of being connected is the potentiator of loneliness.

Commented [ED3]: Is this Me metaphorizing the intense euphoria at the beginning of a relationship, Her presence, the seasons of a human, depression, or merely my own perspective projected?

sister to rest in the life of a mother and wife, which is where she wants to be. My father is in his hometown, and he, too, while more secluded than he prefers, is where he wants to be. Her dementia sends my mother to a care facility; she finally dances and smiles most every day. As I tell you earlier, the woman in whom I am secreted in December and January is now partnered with someone, and she is given to thoughts of love. In the cemetery, I find my own grave. There is nothing left for me. I feel truly empty, and know that I should not have come back here. I hardly remember what my life is like. I continue as an English professor and teach writing and literature in college, but I am not, in the true sense of the word, alive. I simply perform the mundane tasks that are handed to me, one after another. I do not have one real friend, no human ties with the students in my charge. I never love anyone. I no longer know what it means to love another person. I close my eyes and see the ground of sand and the walls and sometimes the light. I dream about it over and over. Again and again, I watch the light pass and the darkness. I hear her heart and breath. I also dream of myself slowly rotting away, alive, within her. Sometimes it seems to me that that is what is really happening and that my life here is the dream.

What costs me my life, what turns it into that empty shell, I believe, is something in the light I see through her—that intense light that penetrates straight into me through her for ten or twenty seconds. It comes without warning and disappears just as suddenly. But in that momentary flood of light, I see something—see something once and for all that I can never see again as long as I live. And seeing it, I am no longer the same person.

Squeezing out one last spurt of strength, I start down the ladder again. Just a little farther down, I tell myself. Just a little more. Don't worry, here is a bottom. And at the twenty-third rung, I reach it. My foot comes in contact with the earth floor of her.

The air while I am within her feels chilly. There is probably too much nervous excitement involved for me to think about air temperature when I first climb down. Now, though, my skin is reacting to the cold air. Rubbing my bare arms to warm them, I realize I should have brought something in the knapsack to put on over my T-shirt. It never crosses my mind that the temperature might be different while within her from the temperature at the surface.

Before dawn, within her, I dream. But it is not a dream. It is some kind of something that happens to take the form of a dream.

She clears her throat. The sound reverberates loudly within her.

I sit here watching my mind pursue these memories, until it brings to life an incident that occurs in the hospital. It is a stupid, pointless event, but the more time I fill with recreating its absurd details, the more annoyed I feel, until the annoyance turns to outright anger. The anger that seizes me is so intense that it blots out everything else: my fatigue, my hunger, my fears-causing me to tremble physically and my breath to come in gasps. My heart pounds audibly, and the anger pumps my bloodstream full of adrenaline. It is an argument that starts from a minor misunderstanding. **The nurse** assures me a monitor is sending a signal to the nurse's desk while the screen is off, and I manage to have my say that I want to see the readings, but we both realize how pointless the whole thing is, putting an end to the matter, turning on the screen. These things happen: you're busy, you're tired, and you let some careless remark slip out. I just forget about the whole thing. Down in the pitch blackness of her, though, far from reality, the memory comes back to life with searing vividness. I feel the heat of it against my skin, hear it sizzling my flesh. Why is my response been so harsh? Now I come up with all kinds of things I say to the nurse. I polish them, blunt them, and the more they resist blunting, the more I find ways to not say them.

What is she doing? Why isn't she coming? She doesn't show up here for a very long time. The thought strikes me that something terrible may be happening to her—a traffic accident, say. In which case, there is no longer anyone in the world who knows I am in here. And I really will die a slow death within her. I decide to look at things differently. She is not such a careless person. She is not about to let herself get run over so easily. She is probably within her room now, scanning the yard every once in a while, with her binoculars and imagining me down here inside her. She is doing this on purpose: letting a lot of time go by to give me a scare, to make me feel abandoned. That is my guess. And if she is purposely letting a lot of time go by, then her plan is succeeding admirably. I really am scared. I feel abandoned. Whenever the thought strikes me that I might very well just rot down here in the dark over a long period of time, I can hardly breathe with the fear that grips me. The more time that goes by, the more I weaken, until my hunger pangs become violent enough to kill me. Before that happens, though, I might lose the ability to move my body at will. Even if someone were to lower the rope ladder to me, I might not be able to climb it. All my hair and teeth might fall out.

It might not be a bad idea, I think, to climb down into her again and talk with myself, but then I think about the darkness of her and get a heavy feeling in my stomach.

Commented [ED4]: Is this a meekly veiled admission of the cruelty of my maligned humor? My attacks against my own poverty in the joke about her friend being cheap? My jab when She was breaking off our relationship at her shoes which reminded Me of the shoes my first girlfriend wore.

It is nine-thirty in the morning by the time I awake. Concerned about myself, I dress without bothering to wash my face and hurry down the alley to her house. The clouds hang low in the sky, and the humid morning air seems to threaten rain at any moment. The rope ladder is gone from her edge. Someone must have untied it from the base of the tree and carried it off somewhere. Both halves of her are set tightly in place, with a stone atop each half. Opening one side and peering down into her, I call my name. There is no answer. I try a few more times, waiting after each call. Thinking she might be asleep, I toss a few pebbles inside, but there no longer seems to be anybody within her. They had probably climbed out of her when morning came, untied the ladder, and taken it off. I set the cover in place and move away from her.

One possible explanation is that this is an allergic reaction. I might come in contact with something in her that causes an eruption of the skin, the way lacquer can do. But what could there be down there, within her, to give rise to such a thing? I examine every nook and cranny of her with my flashlight, finding nothing there but the dirt bottom and the concrete walls. Besides, did allergies or eruptions ever leave such clearly outlined marks?

I feel no physical abnormality aside from the mark. I take my temperature, but it is the same as always. Other than the fact that I feel little hunger, for someone who has not eaten in almost three days, and that I experience a slight nausea every now and then (which was probably a continuation of what I feel within her), my body is entirely normal.

I can't just go on hanging around forever in this deserted alley. I walk over to the front door and give it a push. I am right: it is not locked, and it opens easily to the inside. I stand in the doorway a moment, trying to get a sense of the place, but I can hardly make out anything in the gloomy interior. With the windows all closed, the place is filled with hot, stale air. The moldy smell here reminds me of the air when I am with her. My armpits are streaming in the heat. A drop of sweat runs down behind my ear. With hesitation, I step inside and quietly close the door behind me. By checking the name tags (if there are any) on the mailboxes or the shoe cabinet, I intend to see if anyone else is still living here, but before I can do so I realize that someone is there. Someone is watching me.

I am wearing virtually the same outfit I have on the day before-baseball jacket, hooded sweatshirt, blue jeans, and tennis shoes. I just grab whatever comes to hand before leaving the house. In this immaculate, orderly room, in the presence of this immaculate, handsome youth, my tennis shoes look especially dirty and worn out. No, they are dirty and worn out, the heels

practically gone, the color an indeterminate gray, the uppers full of holes. These shoes have been through a lot, soaking up everything in their path with fatal certainty. I wear them every day for the past year, climbing over the back wall countless times, stepping in dog shit now and then on trips down the alley, climbing down to her. No wonder they are dirty and worn out. Not since quitting my job has it occurred to me to think about what shoes I had on. Studying them so closely this way, I feel with new intensity just how alone I am, just how far the world has left me behind. It is time for me to buy a new pair of shoes, I tell myself. These are just too awful.

I climb down the steel ladder anchored in the side of her, and in the darkness at the bottom, I feel for the bat I always leave propped against the wall. The bat I bring home with me all but unconsciously from the house where I follow the man with the guitar case. The touch of the scarred old bat in the darkness of her fills me with a strange sense of peace. It helps me, too, to concentrate.

But as I dig at the soft earth within her with the rubber sole of my tennis shoe, scenes from the surface of the earth grow ever more distant. The sense of reality subsides bit by bit, and the closeness of her around me comes to envelop me. Down here, she is warm and silent, and the softness of her inner earth caresses my skin. The pain inside me fades like ripples on water. She accepts me, and I accept the her. I tighten my grip on the bat. I close my eyes, then open them again to cast my gaze upward.

Once again, I am myself inside my own body, sitting within her, my back against the wall, my hands gripping the baseball bat. The touch of her, the world, on “this side” returns to my hands slowly, the way an image comes into focus. I feel the slight dampness of sweat against my palms. My heart is pounding in my throat. My ears retain the living sound of that harsh, world stabbing knock, and I can still hear the slow turning of the doorknob in the darkness. Someone (or something) outside is opening the door, preparing silently to enter, but at that very instant, all images evaporate. She is as hard as ever, and I am flung back to her side.

Instinctively, my hand reaches out in the darkness, feeling for the bat. But it is no longer there. She has it now. The sound my heart starts making is almost unreal, as if the heart itself escapes from my chest and is beating beside my ear. I try to keep my breathing regular. I probably don't need the bat. If someone is here to hurt me, they won't be sitting around inside her. Still, my palms are itching with anticipation. My hands are seeking the touch of the bat. Mackerel comes from somewhere in the darkness and, as usual, start meowing and rubbing his

Commented [ED5]: Here this seems to allude to the previous thought on my criticism of her shoes. But I wonder whether this might reflect back further to the beginning of our relationship, to that moment when She said if She had shoes like mine She would wear them everyday, which prompted Me to purchase Her a pair for Christmas. Though, the shoes arrived late, and I have never seen Her wear them.

head against my leg. But he is not as hungry as always. I can tell from the sounds he makes. I reach out and turn on the kitchen light.

I climb down the ladder into her and pull the rope to close the lid. After taking two or three deep breaths, I grip the bat and gently lower myself to a sitting position in her darkness. The total darkness. Yes, that is the most important thing. This unsullied darkness holds the key. It is kind of like a TV cooking program. “Everybody got that now? The secret to this recipe is total darkness. Make sure you use the thickest kind you can buy.” And the strongest bat you can put your hands on, I add, smiling for a moment in the darkness.

Then there is the problem of the baseball bats. She knows that I keep a bat within her. Which means that the image of the bat can “eat its way” into her story the same way the words “I am a liar and cray” can. Even if this is true, however, there is still something about the bat that cannot be explained so simply: the man with the guitar case who attacks me with the bat in the entryway of the abandoned apartment house. This is the man who makes a show of burning the palm of his hand in a candle flame in a bar in Sapporo and who hits me with the bat, only to have me beat him with it. He is the one who surrenders the bat to me.

But now is no time for hesitation. It is probably my last chance. I wait every day within her for six months, and now, at last, the door opens before me. Besides, the well is going to be taken from me soon. If I fail now, all my time and effort will be for nothing.

Who could have hit her with a bat? The description of the assailant sounds exactly like me—the orange corduroy jacket and patterned knit hat, the sunglasses, the mark on the cheek, height, age—and the baseball bat. I keep my own bat within her for months, but it disappears. If that same bat is the one used to crush my skull, then someone must have taken it for that purpose.

When I come to, I am sitting in the darkness again. My back is against the wall, as always. I return to her.