

Pageant

I'll tell you about Eve Else — breathtaking, exhausted. In an armchair, holding her backside for many years now. Music hall organs. Pretty England. Punching Judy. Finger a cigarette. A rock falls from the shelf above. Part of a scene that mimics Stonehenge. A small graze. Legs widespread, and a very specifically adorned body. Turn that body from burden to beauty! She's never been in a fight, but at school she would always start them and run away. The mascara wands never replaced into their columns of oily black water. Overflowing bath. Stomping and cascading through the room on stiletto heels. A considered creation, a war with the mirror. Eve Else, you look gorgeous!

I'd like to roll in the clover; with you over and over; on the white cliffs of Dover; and then I'd let you push me over. Accumulating outside the window, past the television aerials, above the sea, are fast moving thin lines of cloud. The sun shocks through and illuminates, followed by a gloom, a looping eclipse. Below this ridiculous, precious little sky are the silent waves and the teenagers in the sand. All try to ignore the weather, while Eve Else lingers in her flat and stands in little spots, sits in little areas, like now in this chair, squeezing bits of her face, moving strands of hair millimetres across her forehead and back. Adjusts a fold in the fabric of her strappy top — the one that looks like a bowl of goldfish have been steam-rolled in their water and shingle home and the resulting coagulated scene smeared onto shear polyester. A fold in the right place makes her waist seem even smaller (if that's possible). She lingers doing close to nothing like this everyday — waking later and later as the summer traipses on, and manages only these small realisations (*revelations!*) about her appearance. But it is demanded by the townspeople that she join them — everyone is waiting for her. How fervently they *need to see* Eve Else. Once seen, the hours truly begin their ticking, the weather is ignored, they have their spectacle — distracted *finally* — and doesn't she look immacu-

late, and every pore considered! She does what she does for them. Because she must. But Eve Else cannot ignore the weather, because even the tenderest briny breeze will ruin the collection of hair placed just so above her eyebrow (which accentuates the heart-shape of her face), that waist-fold will unfold (!), her skirt waistband will surrender to gravity and reveal skin (not yet). And so here is the drink, the lovely drop, here is the glass with a flurry of kisses caressing the rim. A top up, a sensuous gulp, and the weather can alter her all it likes. Her body will somehow find a way of re-figuring so that it all makes a beautiful scene once again — but not without the drink, it is the final varnish on the painting.

Half-on stocking... no, no stockings, not tonight, a spray of Shalimar behind the knee instead.

Shalimar at night on hot skin. Fucking Fantastic and Just About Old Enough to Do Whatever She Wants

Two weeks ago, in a semi-detached, Eve found her man. He said on their first meeting — I bought a rope, I intended on hanging myself, but the weather turned nice. How quaint, that a man's entire life can shift from oblivion to living on the turn of the Albion weather. What hold this tight little Isle has over us! Little things chased by gales, deformed grey suits, heel comforters at the back of pumps, blister plasters, some Bazuka on a verruca. Albion, my love, that's what I call him, my dearest Mr. Semi-Detached. I confuse this Isle with my love. You see, my love, the cliffs from which we roll off and under the Channel are the same as the pocked skin of his shoulders. Electrical static curling through the opened window, I curl in. And, this is my Albion chair, the deranged seagulls eyeing. Fickle and brittle and falling off and into. How I like it.

Out the window, a mass of adolescents begin singing a tune, skin prickling with puberty. And I know, Miss Else, tonight, everyone wants you. Scratching the surface. Upholstery bled out, became

rosy in the sun. Lashing mascara, polish on the toenails, a flashbulb flare on the beach, peaching the retina, apply lipstick along the rim of the wine glass again. Flashbulb (wait!). Re-apply. Ready to be ransacked. And then. *You make me feel mighty real!*

The theatrical allure of dining in public! That'll shift Eve Else into the street tonight. She'll dine on the seafront, small portion of chips that she won't finish and she won't pay for, she plans to harass and tease the seagulls with scraps. They've got it right, the seagulls, chips do taste better from another's portion. Okay. One last mirror viewing. Eve Else knows she is sensational, that every head will turn (perhaps it is every woman's duty to command eyes, to give people something *to do*). Something aesthetically disastrous here, though. Something obscuring the spotlight, a chink in the skin. Let's ignore that. No fool, she provides walking pornography. This flat the star's dressing room. She exits, sighs. Name in lights over the pier, in the sky. Sun isn't behaving — both too far and too close. On this Albion shore, it can feel as though I can run right up to that star. Far out, man! Traffic sounds, eyes twitching and watering from too much sleep. Long, hollow Tuesdays, lukewarm Wednesdays, days, days. *But I'm so fucking sexy, I was born sexy and I'll die sexy.*

In the sea, shaking the buttocks that's been sitting and sleeping for too long at the men that have been standing around in the shallows for too long, skin puckered, on the beers, good lad, a pair of sunnies and a burnt forehead and relaxing into their bodies so that their stomach distends further and further as the hours move on. Real bodies revealed, they look at us, small burps and pops emitting from between their fur-trimmed lips, red from salt wind. Whelks in vinegar discarded around toes. Tropical print, three lions and sticky swimming trunks. Eyes like television. I suppose something will happen, the way they keep staring, the way that one keeps staring. *Look at pretty me in the pretty waters of the pretty English shores.* No. Not for money. But you know, we're always working. The birds are being loud today. Television eyes wades over, stumbling. Holding a chicken

drumstick, a 21st Century Cerne Abbas Giant. Says nothing, so Eve Else, thinking of her Mr. Semi-Detached, begins in order to end. I met a bloke with a fake bollock the other evening. He had a great pink scar that ran right from his navel, through his pubic hair and straight down to his scrotum. He'd been circumcised as well. Had trouble with his foreskin. He was a teenager when it was done and the doctor did a terrible job so his pecker curved off to the right when he had an erection. It was fascinating, just looking at it through his fly. All that mutilation contained in such a small area. What a sight. Massacre. The fake bollock was hard as a conker, and it stayed permanently in one place, as though it was cold all the time. The natural one hung there like normal. But it was so sensitive he wouldn't let me touch it. As though it had absorbed all the sensation from the diseased bollock and pleasure and pain were united and intensified. He would screw up his little mouth and nose whenever I touched it, like I was sticking a flame under it. Ugly bloke. Television eyes sways. If I saw that every time I looked down it'd unhinge my mind. He leaves, slithering like a fish on polished marble.

Sitting outside the bar, Eve Else imagines a collapsing, sips on a cigarette. That falling rock she imagines throwing through the walls of her flat. Breaking down everything in it, destroying all the things that make her Eve Else. No, not some reckless smash — it should be an act as perfect as the world it dismantles. What a curious thing that would be. To be left with nothing. Succumbing. A warmth rises in her abdomen and laces her spine. How to pull it all apart? How trippy, what a trip! To destroy it all, all those outfits and glittered trinkets, shred them. Carefully take down each possession from the shelves, from out the cupboards, and, with some protective goggles and a boiler suit, un-make them, pull at a thread, snap the glued edges, tear the books, the postcards, the light-bulbs to dust, methodically, deliberately deconstruct. Death of a character. A shimmering absence. To make myself so small in order to make myself vast. Completely encompassing, entirely able to

receive all the outside inside. Forgo the party. Death of a party. And the living room is a sort of preparation for the morgue anyway. But there are things a woman —

Sun continues its descent. A hysteria fizzles. The vaping teenage girls become shrill. Their voices echo more firmly within this mile curve of the bay. Boys on skateboards ride harder. Shoulder-length hair turning orange in the low sun, billowing beneath beanies. Wheels become heavier, the friction more intense against the promenade. Everyone is drunk, it seems. Quite suddenly. A drunken switch has been flicked. Sunset equals Romance. Yet the sun has been drugged senseless on a hospital bed. Sands. I can connect nothing with nothing. Get it? The patient, eyes glassy, watches the frenzy of hospital staff, other patients, visitors that surround. The music from the fish and chip shop becomes heavier. In competition with the bars that line the promenade. More lights emit from their insides, purples, pinks. A steady, bass-y, shaking of the ground. Cars slow, some headlights begin to turn on. Gulls become calmer. Their voices quieten, or become lost in the human noise. Settle in small groups, on the sea walls, watch the people just as the sun does, eyes flickering, unsure but completely aware. Perhaps shocked by what they see of us all. Scandalised. A crisis is forming, a building up, something is forcing its way through, the evening forces itself onto the town. Slithers over the sea and ripples along the bay, lingers underneath women's skirts. The evening ends its flirtation, begins its consummation. One of the vaping girls is showing her two friends a video. *5 Irresistible Ways to Flirt With Men (! use #4 carefully!). When you take a sip of your drink, it engages your lips so it draws attention to them. But, at the same time, if you look away, it has the added benefit of giving him a moment to take you in without you staring right back... When he looks at you in a certain sexy way, (maybe he smiles with it) I want you to say to him, "You can't look at me like that."*

I think of the false eyelashes that accumulate on the grubby pink carpet of Eve's bedsit. How they stick to the soles of your feet. When she runs out of fresh ones, she'll try and find a pair that she's ripped off from another night. But they are often mismatched. She'll sometimes trim the ends with nail scissors to try and even them out. I think of her looking at men. Burning conjunctivitis. Somehow she avoids it. Surrounding us are oyster-shells. Dusty, used up. The nail-varnish insides licked clean of the meat. Wooden chip forks, piss-yellow polystyrene food containers. Ketchup and mayonnaise smeared in the corners, particles of chip and batter, grease and saliva. And the seaweed stench licking at the nostrils. Lay back and think of Stonehenge. Mmmmmm!