

shola von reinhold



L O
T E

“Ingenious; irresistible; a dazzling first novel.”

Naomi Booth, author of *Sealed* and *The Lost Art of Sinking*

BUY

Praise for *LOTE*

Winner of the James Tait Black Prize 2021

Winner of the Republic of Consciousness Prize 2021

“*LOTE* is a decadent celebration of portraiture, queer history and Blackness, and a biting funny work of fiction. In this book, von Reinhold provides us with a mischievous new work of aesthetic theory, as well as a glorious and gorgeously imagined fictional world. Ingenious; irresistible; a dazzling first novel.”—NAOMI BOOTH, author of *Sealed* and *The Lost Art of Sinking*

“*LOTE* is one of the most compelling works in trans fiction I’ve read in a long time.”—MCKENZIE WARK, author of *Philosophy for Spinners: On the Low Theory of Kathy Acker*

“Shola von Reinhold’s *LOTE* recruits literary innovation into the project of examining social marginalisation, queerness, class, Black Modernisms and archival absences. A critically important and hugely original debut.”—ISABEL WAIDNER, author of *We Are Made of Diamond Stuff* and *Gaudy Bauble*

“Von Reinhold’s rich and glorious writing . . . reads as though—to put it in their own description of a room draped in candlelight—everything has been smeared with gold oil. . . . It’s more than just the bliss of representation: history here is *feeling*, not just narrative.”—SKYE ARUNDHATI THOMAS, *Frieze Magazine*

“Set amid an artist residency, this arresting debut effortlessly explores infatuation, reinvention, the erasure of black figures from history and gender identities in what marks von Reinhold as a unique new voice in literary fiction.”—LAYLA HAIDRANI, *AnOther Magazine*

“An inspirational, cutting, exquisitely written, multilevel excavation of forgotten Black lives and an Afro-queer celebration of art, aesthetics, literature, and society.”—PAUL MENDEZ, author of *Rainbow Milk*, speaking to *The Strategist*

“In choosing to conjure Black voices through historical revisionism, rather than, say, Afrofuturism or pure fiction, the novel produces a new archive—a radical reference tool populated by real and imagined historical figures, Anons who have been festooned, fleshed-out, and freed from the rude imposition of marginality, anonymity and defacement.”—IZABELLA SCOTT, *White Review*

“As a celebration of eccentric esprit, *LOTE* practises what it preaches by being stubbornly its own thing.”—HOUMAN BAREKAT, *The Guardian*

“The contemporary moment for Black life in the United States needs this decadent Black and queer meditation on beauty and aesthetics.”—MARQUIS BEY, author of *Black Trans Feminism*

“*LOTE* is a rapturous first novel, a queer black fantasy with angels leaping off every page.”—MOLARA WOOD, *Irish Times*

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COVER ART: (*Foreground*) Joerg Breu the Elder (ca. 1475/80–1537), *Splendor Solis—Venus and Her Children* (*Heat reveals the spirit hidden inside the earth*) (detail). From “Splendor Solis—7 Traktate vom Stein der Weisen” (“Splendor Solis—7 treatises of the Stone of Wisdom”), 1531–1532. Southern Germany. Gouache on parchment, 33.1 × 22.8 cm. Inv. 78 D 3, fol. 28 recto. Photo by Jörg P. Anders. Courtesy of bpk Bildagentur / Jörg P. Anders / Art Resource, NY. (*Background*) Mauro Cateb, *Abalone nacre*, 2011. Licensed under CC BY 3.0. SOURCE: Wikimedia Commons.

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olidarity to all those resisting
universal tedium, for all those
struggling against fascism, racism,
capitalism, or just sheer drabness.

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PART ONE

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D Miniature from the illuminated manuscript *Splendor Solis*, 1532–1535, representing “the peacock stage” of alchemy when the oily black contents of the alembic flare iridescent



Miniature from the illuminated manuscript *Universal P. & Augment*, by Adolphus Ignatius de Mussy



Miniature from the illuminated manuscript *Aurora Consurgens*, 1420s

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I

An incensed blond twink said, “Excuse me, miss! Where do you think you’re going? This is a members-only club.”

Knowing:

- i. People rarely allow for Blackness and caprice (be it in dress or deportment) to coexist without the designation of Madness.
- ii. People like to presume Madness over style whenever they have the chance.

I gathered that my eBay lab diamonds, silver leatherette and lead velvets had been mentally catalogued as a few of the traditional accoutrements of the Maniacal Black Person, who possesses no taste, only variations of a madness which comes down on her from on high.

He occupied a large built-in table of the kind at which a receptionist or concierge would customarily be stationed.

“I thought this was the new archive site? I’m volunteering.”

He was more annoyed than embarrassed at being caught out.

“Oh,” he said, smiling at a sheet of paper. “I’ve only been informed of two volunteers. You don’t seem to be down?”

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“Mathilda Adaramola.”

“I see: ‘*Mathilda*.’ Well, I wasn’t given surnames, I was just told ‘Agnes and Mathilda.’ You’re downstairs,” he looked at the name and then at my face as if I’d performed a conjuration.

On the first step down I paused,

“Why were you just pretending to be on the reception of a members’ club?”

He ignored me.

Downstairs, I saw the new site had at least once been a kind of Learned Society or specialist members’ library, still replete with its blackish wood panelling and Lincrusta. The actual library was situated in the basement but there were no books lingering on the shelves to indicate specialism.

“Hate it,” was the first thing Elizabeth/Joan said to me. And when I asked her what it had been specifically: “Oh, I don’t know. Horrid Old Gents’ Club, or something. Who cares. Anyway, it’s all ours for the next couple of weeks until the rest of the department move over.”

“Who was that on the door?”

“*God* yes, James.”

I told her about his bizarre little roleplay.

“Probably his undying power fantasy to be front of house at a members-only club—people nurse all sorts of passions and they’ll live them out whenever they have the chance.”

I had befriended Elizabeth/Joan a month ago. I’d been going almost daily to the National Portrait Gallery Archive for some time to look at photographs of Stephen Tennant and some of my other Transfixions. My interactions with her up until then had been minimal. She was rude in an absent-minded sort of way and irritated me in her ostensible membership of a subset of a type I had once become familiar with. All week I would notice, upon looking up

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mid-reverie from my desk, that someone was watching me from across the room. It was the kind of shameless gaze that suggests the gazer has forgotten you can see them back. One day near the end of that week, as I was leaving, she asked me what I was researching. Her eyes glazed instantaneously when I started speaking and I saw she was, of course, seeking an opportunity to talk about herself so I indulged her by asking what it was like working at the archive. Here she launched into a monologue: she was extremely bored here, she was experiencing some kind of malaise, in fact. Hated the actual cataloguing side so had asked to be put on the readers' room welcome desk with the hope of some kind of interaction. "But everyone that comes here . . ." and her eyes fell on the only other reader, an admittedly tedious looking man. "Nobody ever speaks to me; it's actually kind of cruel if you think about it." She looked at me once more as if really taking me in and asked again what I was researching, then where I lived, where I had studied, and so on. I fed her a mixture of facts and lies which sated her enough for her to launch into gossip about every member of staff in the archives, none of whom I knew, and then what gossip she had gleaned from some of the regular visitors. "Churchill . . ." she sighed a sigh of true exasperation, nodding towards the man across who was definitely eavesdropping by this point.

Then she moved onto personal life, proving my estimation not far off: private day school, "then undergrad at Edinburgh. New Sloane rather than Sloane or Old Sloane because parents are old-old middle class but new to London. Neo Art Sloane, I suppose. Nobody uses the term 'Sloane' anymore, but I do, because that's what I am."

She was the perfect candidate for a new Escape. Would provide a new microcosm to slip into. My brain was already working out how best to go about it, but as she went on, I detected a weird grain

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in the mix: it was an act, an excellent one. She was not of that class or type; this excited me.

Sadly, a few days into our acquaintance, I realised she was not acting at all. The grain was something else. Something that would not properly surface, I predicted, until another couple of decades, at which point she would undergo an epiphany like an E. M. Forster character abroad, and revolt against the faintly alternative, ultimately conventional existence in which she'd entangled herself. (An event symbolised by the languid but vengeful flinging out the window onto the rocks below of a white clay bowl full of dandelion salad from a villa in wherever it was in two decades from now that had become the inevitable zone for mildly artistic wealthy English people. The bowl would not be dashed, however, but caught by the incoming tide, before being swallowed.)

I was sure she'd told me her name during her monologue, but I did not take it in. Later I looked up the staff. There were three cataloguing assistants. A James, whom she'd just identified as the evil blond man upstairs, an Elizabeth, and a Joan. I had never been able to ascertain whether she was Elizabeth or Joan and it had now been too long to ask.

It was Elizabeth/Joan who phoned me one day at about two in the morning—"We've just received a tonne of photos, or something." I only took a moment to realise who it was. "Full of stuff you're interested in. Who was that one? Yes, Stephen Tennant and all that lot, stuff from the '20s-'30s-etcetera. I mean an actual tonne in weight of photos, or something. Desperately need people to help sort through it. Especially if they can recognise any of the sitters. Unseen images. Good for your biography. I'll text you the details." And then a pause: the unfamiliar process of awaiting a reply.

She must have looked me up on the database and taken my number down for later use. I wasn't sure how authorised she was to

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appoint unofficial volunteers for the archive at two in the morning. I was also acutely aware of the fact that I would be doing the bulk of her assigned job for her without pay. She did, however, arrange for travel and lunch expenses which came to about fifty pounds a week, a significant amount for someone recently sanctioned.

The photographs were an unsolicited donation.

“Some shitbag’s always leaving behind paintings and photos in their will, so we’ve got a constant flow coming in all the time. They think they’re doing us a favour and they also imagine it’s going to be hung in the main gallery next to Queen Elizabeth the First. Actually, we’ve got a strict donations and acquisitions policy. We can’t accept ninety-five percent of the dross we get; don’t know how that explains the dross we keep. Has to be significant to portraiture in some way. Someone famous or influential or, even rarer, ‘something significant to the history of portraiture itself.’ Not just some old shitbag’s memory box we didn’t ask for.” So I was informed by Elizabeth/Joan on the first morning of volunteering.

In this case, a relative had carried out instructions on behalf of their shitbag great uncle or aunt and sent everything at once in cardboard boxes. Fortunately, following instructions of the deceased, a list of some of the figures of significance was also sent, even if none of the thick fabric-bound albums or loose photographs were named and dated. I soon discovered that they had not “just received” this donation, which had come about ten years prior, but rather had just gotten around to looking at it.

There were generally no more than three of us to sort through the images at a time. Usually two since Elizabeth/Joan hated nothing more. The other volunteer was a woman in her early 80s called Agnes, who wore pink pearls and tartan every day, and got as much pleasure from the whole thing as I did. She had been some kind of historian and it was not lost on me that we were the only two

Black people working for the archives, and that we were working for free. I wasn't sure where Elizabeth/Joan had poached her from—perhaps she was another archive user like me, wrangled into free labour, or perhaps one of the official volunteers pilfered from the database. Every so often Agnes, otherwise hardnosed, would hold out a photo and operatically exclaim,

“Now *look* at this, you've *got* to see this, you have *really* got to see this,” and I would have to stop and come around to look. They were always intriguing pictures. Twice some quite scandalous ones that I would have been too embarrassed to show her. The group shot of skiers laughing in the snow would bring about the same delighted arpeggio as the lakeside tableau of erect Pans: a Beardsley drawing corporealised.

As Agnes and I sat at a table sifting through images, taking notes, suggesting dates, Elizabeth/Joan would float in and out of the room if there was nobody senior in the vicinity, which there generally wasn't because at the main site everyone else worked on the other side of the building. Sometimes she sat at her desk muttering to herself, sighing in irritation, calling me over to talk when she was bored or annoyed.

She also occasionally marched around the room's periphery, working herself up into silent rages, speaking under her breath about God knows what and making frantic hand gestures. When I first saw her rankled like this, I genuinely believed she was rehearsing for a play, but later realised she was tremendously coked-up.

Today she was in such a mood.

“Told you he's a little drip,” she picked up the subject of James two hours later as if there had been no break in our conversation. She was pacing the new room. “Thank fuck he's gone. You know he wasn't even supposed to be here till next week. Wanted to 'see the

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space,' and then said he had work to do. I don't see why he couldn't do whatever it is he has to do back where he usually does it."

Agnes, who had been particularly engrossed in a batch of photos, never appeared to notice Elizabeth/Joan's rages anyway. During this current outpour she stood up, probably to go for lunch, when Elizabeth/Joan spun to face her and snapped, "Oh sit back down you stupid fool," rather aggressively, at which point I found myself telling Elizabeth/Joan to sit down herself. She pivoted to face me, and I thought for a moment she was going to hit me, and she probably was, but then all the fury in her eyes died out. She went back to her desk. Agnes, having ignored all this, had gone to switch on the kettle and returned to her work as it boiled.

"I think I need to go for lunch," Elizabeth/Joan said, which I knew to be an apology. She went out for her second lunch that day.

Perhaps twenty minutes after she was gone, James the catalogue assistant, who had supposedly left hours ago, surprised us when he came down into the room with his eyebrows raised in the fashion of a particular brand of self-assured heterosexual.

"Where's Eliza?" he said.

"She just went out to get some paper," Agnes said.

"How long has she been gone?" he was clearly annoyed.

"Not long, Mr. Collins," Agnes said; she could be very strict. "Would you like us to leave a message?"

"No need."

"Well I'll be sure to tell her you were looking for her, Mr. Collins," Agnes said. James went back out, visibly red—rose red. Or actually, I thought, carnational.

About five minutes after this Agnes put down her pencil, got up and went out the room. I sat in silence, thinking about carnations and still processing the unexpected knowledge of Elizabeth/Joan's

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name. I tried to insert the unfamiliar *Eliza* into my head but clearly *Elizabeth/Joan* had situated itself forever.

“Mathilda,” called Agnes from upstairs. “Come up.”

She was waiting for me halfway up the ground floor staircase. “He’s gone, thank heavens. Come and have a look at this please.”

I had not been upstairs yet but was aware the first and second floors were going to be converted into office space for the photographic archive. She led me into a room which was named smugly in brass, *The Old Smoking Room*. Agnes was already behind the bar, which still had various remaining bottles of alcohol. She poured us both an expensive-looking clear brown liquid.

“It’s all going to be discarded anyway,” she said. “Health and safety.” She lit a cigarette with a defiant flourish and offered me one which I took. “I thought to myself: why not let’s Mathilda and I appreciate it, hmm?”

After a moment,

“She’s not a bad girl, I’m sure you can see that. Unfortunately, that other one: Mr. Collins. Smarmy creature. *Jobsworth*. James the Jobsworth!” She gave a little laugh. “Now I don’t know what you’re here for exactly, Mathilda, but I do know you enjoy the setup. That I can see. It would be wise to make sure he doesn’t get her into trouble. On my part, I have very important work to do and I *hope* you do too. Oh yes. You ought to.” I didn’t know what to make of this but felt it prudent not to stand there looking out of the loop.

Behind the bar, in a garish gilt frame was a large mirror. It was more suited to the Folies Bergère than an old English members’ club. We sipped our drinks and smoked our cigarettes as we wandered around the room—disdainful but loving it—looking through some of the residual objects ready to be thrown away, mostly plaques and newspapers.

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The huge bow windows were like an observation deck and a climactic grey light came through them.

We had been staring under lamps in the basement all day and the contrast made the natural light pleasantly melodramatic. I began to feel the specific ghost of loveliness which transposes the body by means of unexpected expensive brandy and sudden daylight and thought about how once when waiting for a bus to school I had overheard something from the radio of a parked car. An artist was being interviewed and the conversation was uninteresting, but it had eventually caught my attention because the artist was not listening properly:

“How much does lithography matter in contemporary culture?”

“Oh absolutely! Lithography is everything to me.” His responses did not quite match the questions, as if, rather than hearing interrogative phrases like, *how much*, or *why* he simply heard, *Lithography?* or *Childhood?*

In response to a question about prizes he told a story about getting some good news one day,

“Yes, that day I was working in the study and got the phone call and was in such a shock that I went to the living room and opened a bottle of cognac and watched trash all day! Daytime television and that sort of thing—this was the '90s you know . . .”

First, I thought there was something infinitely mesmerising about the idea of escaping from a day's work in the '90s. Then I thought that if I were ever in the position of the man on the radio, I would be drinking cognac all day and watching television. But then I wouldn't ever be able to feel the pleasure of escaping from a day's work. The dilemma caused me undue distress. I came down with a literal fever the next day and was sick for two weeks. I was diagnosed with the flu. I disagreed: on the one hand it was thinking

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about labour, about leisure, that rendered my body weak and feverous, even though the sense of unvarnished doom had seemed totally unwarranted, without cause at the time, separate from the dilemma of whether the pleasure of escaping work was greater than that of never having to. Even though I had realised how I never truly wanted to work in the future, realised the weight of how horrific work is.

On the other hand, it was the '90s. Not the period specifically, but the thought of being as I was—the same age and person—in the '90s, instead of then. A gear was sent spinning in my brain.

After a few minutes, the rigidity of the black and white photos would, if not depart, then liquify. A day's immersion left the same mental after-dazzle as a sun-glanced afternoon, lakeside.

These non-existent beams, hurled up from non-existent tree-fringed and flickering bodies of water, were the perfectly normal sensational offshoots of gazing at photos all day. They were access to, glimpses of, Arcadia: The Grand Ahistorical Mythical Paradise which is the ultimate project of all Arcadian Personality Types who crave a paradise knit out of visions of the past much like their more illustrious cousins, Utopians, do with the future. (It—paradise—is ultimately to be a collaboration.)

Utopian Personality Types, as a rule, find old things redolent of decay, and can just about put up with new things which are still not the future.

The classic counterpart traits of the Arcadian, like a fondness for old objects and buildings, and an inclination towards historicised figments, were, as far as I was concerned, much easier to inhabit for white people, who continued to cast and curate all the ready-made, ready-to-hand visions. Being born in a body that's apparently historically impermissible, however, only meant I was

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not as prone to those traps that lie in wait for Arcadians—the various and insidious forms of history-worship and past-lust. I would not get thrown off track: I could rove over the past and seek out that lost detail to contribute to the great constitution: exhume a dead beautiful feeling, discover a wisp of radical attitude pickled since antiquity, revive revolutionary but lustrous sensibilities long perished.

Not prone but certainly not impervious.

The photographs we had been sorting through had thus far consisted mainly of holiday shots. Some quite spectacular. Europe in the '20s and '30s. Old *pensiones* and hotels. Scenes of a modernist Alpine Queerdom.

The photographer, I thought, must have been the short dark-haired man who occasionally came in and out of shot, but it was hard to say, as there was also a gloriously imperious woman that might have been his wife (which did not seem to stop either of them partaking in the Alpine Queerdom).

These photos had so far yielded two images of Stephen Tennant. One was a mountain scene in Bavaria, the other on a bright, empty beach, hand in hand with a doting Siegfried Sassoon. I had to lie down on the floor. Neither Elizabeth/Joan nor Agnes commented, for which I was grateful.

Today we had finished taking notes and ordering the first box of many, now ready for the next department where it would be sorted through all over again to verify our identified sitters and dates whilst looking for any others. This would happen twice more before they were all digitised.

There was a definite elation slicing open the next box, which Agnes did ceremoniously, putting on tweed gloves and using her mother-of-pearl nail scissors since, along with most of the equipment, the Stanley knife hadn't arrived.

This series struck upon a different channel. Less bucolic sight-seeing and more cosmopolitan. Pictures of Parisian nightclubs, many where the photographer had obviously been intoxicated. Elbows and blurred faces of interwar bohemia. One of what must have been the *Revue Nègre* where, though it was impossible to see who was on stage, Agnes immediately identified Josephine Baker by a visible scrap of dress. Many showed the London club scene of the '20s. Places like the original *Café de Paris*, the *Gargoyle Club*, *Café Royal*, the *Blue Lantern*. It was amongst these we began finding photographs of a particular party.

The party was at a country house I recognised at once as Garsington, home of patron and hostess Ottoline Morrell. It was a particularly animated looking *soirée*. Different to the usual pictures of Garsington parties I'd seen with members of the Bloomsbury Group lying about sedately in deck chairs chatting, bitching, smoking. Some of those figures were there—I screamed at Agnes when I pulled a picture of Vanessa Bell out of a pile, and then screamed again at one with half of Virginia Woolf in conversation with a whole Duncan Grant.

There was a comparatively loucher crowd at this party than the Bloomsberries; swathes of apparently uninvited guests. Ottoline Morrell herself was in one snapshot, towering above the rest, a tall woman who accentuated her height with heel extensions, looking not only unfazed but delighted by what were probably party crashers; laughing amidst dark, frayed young creatures. Some of the guests were in costume and half-costume and it looked as if they had come to Garsington directly from at least three different parties: a mixture of artists and students and various denominations of the Bright Young People.

My eyes picked out amongst the piles some blue-edged pictures which I knew immediately to be photographs taken by Ottoline Morrell; she'd always had these mounted on grainy blue cards and

I'd seen many of her thousands of photographs held at the archives, but those before me had probably not been seen for decades.

They were pictures of the same party. Unlike the photographs we had been going through, Ottoline annotated all of hers with names on the paper border. In one was the dark-headed, wicked elf of a man with the marvellously arrogant woman and some other people. It was the first where I had seen the man and woman in the same shot. Written below was,

Hugh and Florence St. Clair,

and on the back,

To Florence, You said you should like a photograph, please send me one of your own. Ottoline.

Which meant they could have been married, but looking at them it was obvious they were siblings. I was about to call out to Agnes that I had found the name of the photographer but there was another blue-lined image. Also at Garsington. A room panelled much like the one I was in. A young man and two women in elaborate costume as Late Renaissance angels. Arched wings impressively constructed of wax and what must have been peacock feathers. All three posed in a befittingly exaggerated Mannerist style, as if each occupied the panel of a triptych. The two on either side flaunted heraldic robes, whilst the central woman wore emblazoned pieces of armour over a fine mesh of chainmail. She had on a coronet, around which her hair was brushed into a commanding nimbus.

Beyond photographs taken for colonial documentation, I wasn't sure if I'd ever seen a photograph of a Black person from this era, with hair this texture, that hadn't been ironed or lye-straightened. Certainly never in such a setting. An excruciation of coil and kink, for it made me ache with jealousy and bliss. In a chain-mailed hand

she clutched a champagne coupe like a holy grail. The other palm was angled just a bit away from the lens, fingers arranged in an obscure saintly message, but at the same time holding a cigarette. I was about to call out to Agnes again, but instead found my hand with the photo in it slipping under the table towards my coat pocket.

There was a second picture of the same trio. They'd changed position, all looking less mannerist but giving an excellent profile.

When I finally called Agnes over,

"Oh, that's your Mr. Tennant is it not?"

And yes, it was. I hadn't even noticed. The young man to the left was Rex Whistler, which I had already vaguely registered, but the other angel on the right, the second young woman, was of course Stephen Tennant.

"But who's the young lady in the middle, a singer?"

"No."

Even for Agnes it was the obvious suggestion: a Black woman at a bohemian party in England in the '20s was not unlikely a singer like Florence Mills, or Josephine Baker, who were sometimes invited to such events as entertainment and also sometimes as guests. But I thought not, without knowing why.

"What does the name say?"

Another thing I hadn't noticed.

Steenie, Hermia and Rex

Steenie was a nickname for Stephen. But on reading the name *Hermia*, another rose up in response: "Druitt." I was absolutely sure of it. Hermia Druitt. My mouth ached to say the name aloud.

"Hermia Druitt."

"I haven't heard of her. Should I have, Mathilda?"

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Because Elizabeth/Joan did not come back, which was to be expected, and because of the weather, which was unexpected, we

decided to have another brandy upstairs before leaving. The room held an odd fascination for us and we clearly loved to stand about in it, two awed but smug trespassers. Whenever I glanced at Agnes she had a sort of shining, triumphant light in her eyes and I thought I understood something of it—of being in this room, of having this space to ourselves. But eventually a cruelty I also understood came into her face and she buttoned up her coat and said,

“Make sure you pull the bottom door shut properly behind you; are you listening? Right, see you tomorrow.”

I watched as she passed below. Rain fizzed white on the ledge like soda water. Then the rain fell differently, glossing the streets and rooftops into a state of divine lamination.

I took a slim bottle of something green from behind the bar and ventured outside into a loch of granite and bobbing umbrellas. All the trains had stopped, and I would have to take three or four buses.

I limited myself to a maximum of three inspections of the photograph per bus. I felt it might dissolve in my possession, outside of the archive, but instead it became more substantial, if anything materialising not dissolving—sucking in atoms, becoming more of an object, more vivid. I became fearful that commuters would notice I had stolen something almost a century old, that it was glowing with the undeniable aura of valuable old things, of masterpieces and antiquities. But, of course, no one did notice. It was not valuable.

What was beyond doubt by the time I got back was that a new Transfixion had arrived in the form of Hermia Druitt, the woman in this photograph. This was confirmed by the sensations: flashes from Arcadia. Moonlight, of a kind, sighed up and down the tube of my spine, but above all, that indescribable note which accompanied all my Transfixions was present: humming beneath the high fine rush—probably not dissimilar to holy rapture—was an almost

violent familiarity. The feeling of not only recognising, but of having been recognised.

A new Transfixion.

In the month prior to my discovery of Hermia Druitt, I often found myself ‘recording’ my other Transfixions, working backwards to the first, who came to me at about fourteen, though I suspected they were happening before this in a more abstract manner. These records took the following form:

On silver card written in shell-coloured ink (barely legible)

Front:

Stephen Napier Tennant

(Image—photograph of Tennant in costume as Prince Charming, lying like the effigy on a tomb, hands in prayer and with a glossy silk cape spread out around him, by Cecil Beaton.)

SPAN: 21 April 1906—28 February 1987

MEMORABILIA: Queer English socialite most prominent during interwar era. Is frequently quoted as responding, when asked by his father what he wanted to be when he grew up, “. . . a Great Beauty, Sir!,” which became the case.

A human orchid who said he heard the flowers, his siblings, chant his name whilst walking on the Salisbury Plains as a boy.

“You needn’t wave and dye it like that, because you don’t need to at all. . . You know, a man doesn’t want to look pretty,” said Tallulah Bankhead when he met her in New York in 1931.

“Well, some men, I think, do want to look pretty. And nicer still, beautiful!” he replied.

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