

Brianna Sorne

Sutton

Draft 3

It is 1951. The ongoing months were unforgiving and he noticed this when a certain coloration of the sky blanketed the mountains. This was only recognized that the winter ahead would be relentless. There was a never ending conversation between the mountains and the sky. The sky said to the mountains and the mountains nodded and nodded, tall and superior. He nodded too, as he looked over and around. Stepping onto the porch that had grown weak with wear and age, particles and dirt sifting towards the earth, he pulled on his boots and stretched. As he walked the extent of the land, he sought out his destination closest to the mountains; threads of his craft, so radiant they were, through the cloaked wasteland. He walked the lines, eyeing the growth, contemplating the very prowess for which he lived; his herbaceous mosaic. At the far end of the line he grasped up arugula leaves, blunt and blundering and walked back towards the small cabin. Something like the sun struggled up, heatless and hollow through the thickened sky and he came upon the porch amongst the frozen miasma that laced the town and beyond. The coffee was on the stove and his pot with the meat and broth was steaming already. He rinsed and broke up the leaves and threw them in as well. When it surged some more, he threw in the corn and then he walked over towards the stove and put his hand to its belly. Stone cold. The basket next to the stove had little coal left. He looked down the iron gullet and poured what was left down the chute and crumpled a newspaper and lit it and threw it down as well. Initial spark but quickly ceased. He tried again. Fleeting heat and tortured ash. Then nothing. The frigid air was becoming unbearable. Squat down with his hands on his knees he looked up to see movement through the window. The city rat was walking up the path with his awkward skittish strut. He could already hear the boy's ramblings.

Sutton, you alive in there?

He walked to the door and opened it, leaning against the doorway, arms crossed.

Hello Francis

Aw, hell could it get any colder? I've been looking for yeh all day

Well, here I am. Who told you?

Some crazy old bastard up on Market Street

He walked past and into the cabin.

Shitfire, it's cold as hell in here. You try startin a fire?

Didn't occur. Have at it

He squat down and went to work.

When yeh coming into town again?

When I need something I guess

Well, the boys are askin about yeh. Should come teh Johnbo's fer drinks. Too damn cold.

His efforts of lighting a fire failed. Hunched over and concentrating he dropped match after match in which sizzled and smoked.

I'll do that. Where are you staying?

Oh I have a nice slick setup down yonder on the other side of town. Yeh should come by. It's this sly little shack under the south bridge. What's wrong with your coal? Shit.

You be careful with that. It's easy to get caught up in all the fools by that bridge.

Aw I'll be fine

Have some coffee

Sutton sat down on his bed and the city rat across the room, gulping fast what was his. Soon it grew quiet and all but the whistling of the wind through the cracks of the cabin was still.

He held his cup between his legs and traced the rim with his thumb and looked out the window; a small portal to the decay of the land. Grayer still and weighed with the grief and solitude of the little town in its frail horizon. Francis put his cup down.

Hey Sut, yeh think I could take up some of yer greens?

Yes, that'd be alright. Get one of those crates over there

Sutton rose up, turned off the stove and walked out to his crops, Francis trailing behind him.

What can I take?

What do you want?

I don't know what half these are

Alright then. Give me your crate

Francis handed the crate to Sutton and he walked down the lines grasping a few beets, onions, a cabbage, carrots, Francis watching the rhythm to his practice; purging each root from its vessel with such ease, his hands leathered from the earth and the work.

Much obliged Sut, I'll see yeh around

Sutton nodded.

Yeh should come see my setup soon. He walked on, awkwardly holding his crate, dirt trickling through its holes with each step forward and before he disappeared from sight, he turned and raised a hand into the air. Sutton raised his in reply and returned to his cabin.

At night he dreamed of those come and gone. Images of the derelict bastard son of a father whose father was a ghost and whose father's father was a ghost. And the mountains, the bodies of kings with wisdom to last for centuries whose existence can only be matched by God himself. Oh father where have we gone? His hands that wished to touch and the cold that pushed against his very foundation, whistling through his core and drifting him through a gray, bleak world.

He woke to a steady tapping coming from outside and he already knew what it was before he opened his eyes. Once it ceased and he heard the culprit get into the car and drive away, he eased himself out of his bed and walked to his door and onto the porch. He ripped the piece down from beside the doorframe and went back inside. Laying it on his small table, he stared at it. An exhale, finished coffee and he walked through his cabin and onto the porch and around behind to the shack. He approached his partner awaiting him. After brushing him down, he jolted the saddle blanket into the air and let it fall on his back and positioned the saddle. The horse's eye slowly rolled to peer at him and he peered back; punctuated, steady whiffs of air through its large nostrils, the grinding of a grain between its teeth. He tightened the cinch strap and he loosened flank strap, fixing the skirt and pulling on the stirrup, wrapping the belts around the underline. He led it outside to the wagon and clipped its rods to the belts

Alright chief

The horse pulled forward, the wagon lazily following. As they walked, Sutton threw crate after crate into the small bed and continued to walk along side his companion until they got to the lines.

Whoa

The horse halted. He unloaded two of the crates and walked in between a line of onions and beets. Setting the crates on the earth, he grasped the roots and loaded them inside; hunched and shivering in the cold, a faint declaration in this deaden landscape. Once finished, he returned to the wagon and repeated the movements for potatoes, cabbage, carrots, chicory and then he was riding his horse slowly towards town, towing his efforts. When the market was in clear vision, he said whoa. The horse halted. He stepped down and put his hand to his companion's forehead for a moment and took a breath. The horse pushed into his hand and agreed. He then continued to walk along side, leading. Arrival at market street. The dirt of the masses one with the swine and

the cattle. Vendors lined the streets calling and cackling. Beggars walking aimlessly. A mantle of barren perversity. Sutton walked forward and came to his first vendor. A surly and podgy woman.

What yeh got?

Crate of onions

Onions. How much heh?

Two dollars

Ah fuckin two fuckin dollars. Snot nosed shit

Sutton stared at her.

Give me, heres 2, givem' to me

Sutton turned and reached for the crate and handed them to her and turned to go on as she mumbled profanities. He continued his routine as the day progressed, a walk through the perspicuous filth, sodden with grief only felt by one of divide who wishes and who wishes.

A carrot stolen from his bundle when the sun was highest in the sky, circling upward and watching the sad scene like a mother who's lost her child.

An ancient woman, crumpled and lost in soiled clothing with one eye socket robbed, was watching him as we walked. From her place on a set of boxes she smiled a toothless smile and licked her lips and snatched his wrist and pulled him towards her. Stench of rancid whiskey and pyramids of the lost.

Wat yeh gunnuh do boy?

Sutton stared at her dark socket. The horse's ears twitched with alarm.

Do yeh see whut I see?

What do you see?

I see yeh dead. Yeh be dead boy

His eyes continued up to her head, filled with dirt and grease and what was left of her stringy white hair.

A fleeting moment. A tightened grip. Licking her lips

Would let go of em yeh crazy bitch

Johnboy pushed her back and she released his wrist, tumbling over boxes smiling that garish smile.

Yeh alright there Sut? I tell yeh, yeh caint go nowhere anymore

Sutton adjusted himself

How are you John?

Oh I ben real good. Me n the boys have ben freezing our asses off but we got our setup nice n good now

That's good

Yeh should come over fer drinks

Sutton started again with the horse and wagon.

Tomboy got shut out again. Aint gunnuh be back fer awhile

How long?

No less n 6 months

Well, maybe he'll at least get some good sleep out of it

The succeeding sight Sutton saw jolted through him and pierced any warmth that was left. His eyes unwavering; locked and widened. He stopped.

Stupid son of a bitch he is. Long hair said he never seen nuthin like it and Jimbo had teh shut the whole place down even though he wasuh bout as drunk as I was.

Alright Sutton yeh stay warm now. Come see me

Sutton stood, stagnant and watched the being that did not belong converse and deal at the far end where the bank and the courthouse met. All of the worlds crashed together and his mind circled, swarmed and reeled for all that once was and for what is. The damned ghost has drifted forth. And what is to become? To the lands beyond and back there are no answers there. Yes, I am his. As he waited, the slightest movement told him the man may have seen him there. A statue with the horses strap in his hand, a lamented desire. And then he was gone and Sutton stood among the filth once more and blinked. At the final place he sought to do business, he tied his horse to one of the stakes in the ground and walked inside. Three men sat slouched in chairs, lazily fiddling with wood or picking their nails. None stirred to look up when he stood in the entrance. He carefully eyed the dark room for a moment, waiting. When he took in a breath to speak, the one farther from him peered up, a half smile crawling across his face. His next words were very slow.

And what do yeh want?

I have business with him. Is he here?

He don't wanna talk to yeh. He done playin yer game

I'm not playing anything

Well, why yeh here den? Yeh didn't come teh beg fer more time

Sutton looked up and smiled

When will he be back?

Yeh fuckin def? I told yeh boy, he don't wannuh talk no more

The one closest spit in a can on the floor and .

He watched the particles in the air slowly sift in the beam of light shining in through one of the small windows.

I have most of what he needs. You tell him that

The farthest one laughed and shook his head.

Git on lil lamb

Sutton ran his hand up and down along the door frame.

Once at the edge of the town, he halted the horse, climbed and mounted and turned to look back on the sorry horizon. The lost; rubbing his eyes. He footed the horse and they began again back to his cabin with the empty wagon and the little money he earned. The sun would set within the next hour and the cold was growing faster still. And then, as he rode off, he saw a tiniest glint of a something.

Whoa

The horse stopped.

He swung down and knelt with his hands on his knees a moment, staring at it. The outer lying desolation pressed inward. He let one hand slide off his knee and he picked it up, stood and brushed off the dirt. The horse and he stared at each other a moment as he traced and thumbed it in his hands. He smiled

Let's go home

When he arrived at his cabin, he brought the horse around to the shed and stripped off all of the gear, leaving a blanket on him and insulating with more hay. Once on his porch, he picked up the bag of coal left by the coal coachman and walked inside. A fire lit and coffee made, he scooped his find out of his pocket and set it on the table and sat down.

Could the drowned man's burden be dead with the tiniest piece?

He slept with the dreams of triumph and contravene, riving at his work and seeing the old decrepit demon that could not and would not be silenced. An effort lost to the cold and his father



punctured and horrific. And as he slept, a smoke filled his core and breath became inept and then he was awake, smoke filling his cabin. Eyes burning and disillusioned he crawled to his door. On his feet and the door falling in, more smoke poured, violent reds ahead and stumbling, he walked off his porch to the three intruders on their horses. Each man darkened with ash and smoke stricken fleeing his land, cackling, spitting.

My God

All through his fields, violent flames saturated every crop or effort. Smoke rolling thickly to the sky, an added decay. The chance for survival lost to the hands of the condemned. A drowned man's burden. On his knees, hands in the dirt he cursed what couldn't be and sank into the smoke. Looking out to what caught his eye, he saw his companion, radiant in the distance, supercilious color blurred in the smoke, running true beyond the flames. If this was dead, he would not stay. He walked into his cabin, pulled on his boots and dropped the small find into his pocket.

As he passed the failing land he brought his eyes to the mountains and soon when the fiery waste was behind him, his companion joined, welcoming his palm to its forehead.

They walked towards the mountains.

Beyond was the newly reckoned prospect of a tired man's hope.

Such things would pass and he who survived would ascend and he would rise.

And he would rise.