

H o s a n n a

C h r i s E s p i n o s a

In my dreams the Brooklyn Bridge is always burning. A hellfire of steel and limestone ruminating in the midnight waters below, the air reeking of oak barrels. The Roebling lighthouse sears, but does not make a sound. In different dreams the Brooklyn Bridge topples and tumbles like a Dandelion in a summer's breath. The cables ripple and nip, letting out echoing 'twangs' and D-tuned octaves that agitate the skyscraper skyline. Mortars and planks of old swollen wood swan dive to the dark drink below. And even in other dreams the bridge snaps like a piano string. All of Manhattan moans like a dropped cello. In the dreams after the bridge finally all falls in, hissing cinder and trusses and burning brick, I always see her standing on the other strand. Her hands always tucked tightly into her black pea-coat pockets, collar up, eyes swollen with sadness for the whiskey waters engulfing the sinking iron and towers. In every dream I am always on my knees settling into the sands of the opposite bank. Sometimes I warm my hands on the fire, or hum along to the wailing caissons, or dip my toes into the wet rum-colored mud. Every time I settle into the swell she takes a disappointed step backwards in retreat.

That is how I imagine it most mornings but vodka tends to distort the truth, I have heard, bourbon, by chance, can steal memories. One thing that is absolutely certain: one night New York City took her.

It wasn't by the darkness of midnight. It wasn't in the faint pink and tender orange of twilight. It was after work on a Thursday. I wasn't home with her when the city snuck in (at least that's how I always pictured it, a six foot tall, broad-shouldered, dripping New York tenderly turning the front door knob and tip-toeing into the living room, feet like icicles and head like an engine block, slowly creeping towards her like a ballet dancer in *Black Swan* until it's right behind her as she washed dishes) and stole her. That city with its iconic bridges and subways, taxis and terrorism and tourists, stoops and window-sill-yellers and leaners, on-lookers judging

and reprimanding, light posts and alleyways forever known as the 'devil's doorstep.' That city filled with poverty and poetry and unimaginable wealth and grids and blocks-of-forever separating everyone from a movements distance to the most incredible pain or happiness, whichever they would come to know right then.

In the days following the pillage, I found love letters she and the city traded for months while I was asleep or away or passed out. The months after New York stole her I found transcriptions and texts, sonnets and nudes from her to it, it to her, everything was nothing but love and affection, solemn dreams and promises.

If I could now talk to the city, if I could plead or beg for it to return her; I would. I would trade New York the world for her. Gold or silver, ten thousand souls or all the angels in the Kingdom, just to have my shaky hands back in hers. If the city bartered or gambled, I would double down or haggle. If it slept, I would creep in at dawn and steal her back as she showered. I would run with her under my arm across the country, naked and confused, madly in love and not leaving a fingerprint of regret. I would sell all my stock, I would trade any penthouse, and if she asked me to give up that thing she said I loved more than her, I would weigh my heart and my love in a bronze casted scale. Every time I sleep I am piling tequila and gin bottles as a kindled alter to the city to deliver her. Almost every time I drift off I am building a funeral pyre to her on the other side of the smudged river to burn a tower of calcium and granite for her safe return.

Some nights though, I close my eyes and she forgives me. Some nights I dream that she takes my stubbled cheeks in her hands and butterfly kisses my forehead and my world is enveloped in a heavenly peace. Other nights I stay up and constantly pour one for her and sip from that poison cup as if it were an Irish funeral. I leave it on the countertop to flicker and flutter like a Blessed Virgin Mary candle and remind me. Some mornings I wake and scream 'enough is enough' into the empty living room. I run out of money and I beg my father, some days. Others, it's my brother. If you ever hold me down and place a rag over my mouth and pour liters of water into my gasping choking breaths, I would drown. If you caught me off

guard and begged for me to stop, educated me on how I am just killing myself and my eyes are encircled in black rings like an old tree and my posture has collapsed and that you haven't seen me for days and the days in which you do see me in the parks or passed out on the balconies, you would tell me how it tears at your heart like a rat against the concrete wall as it drowns in the sewer from a heavy rain. You could say my bones are dying, note that my insides are dying, snicker whispers about how I am dying and I would stand perfectly still, too enabled or unable to take any next step.

If I close my eyes I do not wade into the rushing sluice, but float above it. In that obfuscated umbra, when I look down, usually when I am half or one thousand staggering steps away from her, I cower with uncertainty about which shore I love more, and if I should just let the city have her, and me my fountain.