

## *The Flesh-Murmurers*

by Daniel Borzutzky

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The trees went away and the poles went away and the stop signs went away and the birds went away and the squirrels went away and the ants went away and the rabbits went away and the mice went away and the rats went away and soon the sidewalk was missing and the asphalt was nowhere and the yellow and white lines drawn on the asphalt disappeared and the cars went away and the fences and telephone poles and the blood and flowers and hamburgers and carbonated beverages and movie theatres and fried chickens from Kentucky and waffle joints and dead people and snakes and scissors and tongues and patches of rosemary and basil and mint and the horizon and the bubbles and the snow and the rain and the rest of the weather was gone and within a matter of days, or was it months, there were no longer any houses on the block except mine and so I sat all day in the window of my bedroom watching the neighborhood fill up with water, watching the bodies float up to the surface of the water, watching the bodies communicate to each other in dirty songs and voices that only other floating, sunken, dead bodies can understand.

Murmurs coming from the bodies' throats and bricks filling their mouths and feces filling their mouths and maple trees filling their mouths and their mouths growing thick with sweet sludge and bodies buried in their mouths and everything that used to be on the street now in their mouths and in their mouths the bodies bump into each other and splash around trying to extract various objects out of their mouths like small stones and coins and diamonds and trying to avoid the explosions that populate the water.

Dirt over dirt, body over body, mouth over mouth—I stood at the window and watched the breath of the dead and hoped that the dead breathed through their noses but all the bodies exhaled were clumps of limestone, blocks of coal, asphalt, brick, marble, tile, siding, tree bark, pebbles, glass, books, and even other bodies.

Other bodies pushed out of the noses of the dead bodies and in the background the river disappeared and I came to be buried beneath it said one flesh-murmurer to another, and the bank collapsed and the world that was made of mud collapsed and the river swallowed itself and found inside itself other rivers and other flesh-murmurers and other bodies it did not know it had swallowed but some say it was the bridges that fell first and then the vehicles sank to the bottom and the dams imploded and there was a flesh-murmurer in a window painting all this for another flesh-murmurer who said let me see your best images of mutilation, pity, and horror.

Let us see your most demonic images so we can understand things about ourselves that only strangers locked in violent lands can explain to us, and I went to school one morning and found no other bodies said one flesh-murmurer to another, there were only long black braids of hair at each desk in each classroom and yes there were turtles who found refuge in swimming pools and they did not like the chlorine and I know from their murmurs that they were despairing little refugees but they adapted and murmured so softly, their voices were nearly inaudible and their bodies were nearly invisible and there was an image of a virgin above the pool that was really a church and on the diving board stood an enormous statue of Mary and a wooden replica of Jesus on the cross.

Worms filled Jesus's bloody hole and so did Pepsi-Cola and crumbling bodies and the dirt and bones that escaped from the mouths of those who were evacuated from this endless vacuum of light.

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