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The Birth of Mormo



The quiet are the first to be forgotten. Maybe you have never heard of Mormo, but that is the way of him. The children in Greece are not aware they're ancient by now. What they know is only that—that Mormo is a quiet god, and they should never speak his name near any reflection. Nor on the beach, or in abandoned buildings. Any of the places his mother has left a door open.

If you are wise, you must know that denying the wolf—refusing to speak of it—cannot protect you from its teeth. But a wolf is real, and Mormo is only a dream. Or he was. And never speaking of a dream, but only cupping it in your hand like a moth that needs, eventually, to eat will leave you mothless. Until another lands within your reach. And that is what will happen to Mormo once you are finished listening.

In the Greece that is still young, the children know: if you wake before father, be very quiet or Mormo will come down the ladder of darkness and light. His mother will let him, and you will see what bad children get. You shouldn't pull your brother's hair: he is smaller than you and his hair is soft as flour—what if it never grows back? Mormo can hear the littlest screams from everywhere. And you shouldn't let your feet hang over the bed as you sleep. The coal cat will get them, and the coal cat is just another name for Mormo.

That is how that set of dreams went. The children of Greece dreaming. And nations are built of dreams and you might not believe that these children grew up to become soldiers and lovers but one way of speaking a dream is by watering it over and over like this, which is why Greece lives on in a bomb and you have never heard of Mormo.



mormo—the smoke angel,
the king of the dandelions and the jabberwock of autumn,
the littlest liege, leads
on. the stars hold swelter and wheat
and she is in a field bejeweled
with gadflies but it is also the coldest kitchen
evening's floor, and there is no heat
coming from the oven, and the road here is naked
and abstract. she is worried mama will be mad if she doesn't close
the oven door now that she is leaving the room, and she says mama
made me promise never to stay
out past sunset but mormo's mouth
only yawns black. and suddenly she knows
in that strange way we know to know (when we are there
in that place of everything that is and everything that certainly is not).
her mother is dead. really dead. not the way that the trees
that are growing upside down are upside down, as a matter of fact
but only here,
but really, truly, everywhere. she is under them in the place where gone
things
dream of sleep, and mormo's face is like the road,
and she knows as she knows that she knows
that here, over the broken carriage where each
of them are bending low to perform the slow ceremony
of picking through the wreckage for a scrap of metal,
a cocoa bean of an earring or a fishbarb of light
that mormo doesn't care for her at all,
didn't lead her as she had thought,
but is here to see his own mother,
here in the plum intestines of the night.



Children are stupid and even the children of the gods. But who could blame him, Mormo thought. He thought and he told himself, his hand deep in his pocket in search of a marble or a button. He was to be a scare

the way that strangers scared. By staying in the far-away. He was to stay on his mother's roads. Hecate held the in-between—the impossible to define places—and so Mormo was in one sense spoiled, living in a house bigger and emptier than all of Earth and Olympus combined.

He could be: the gloam of a skin, the catch of a language, the dervish of a prayer but he could not eat a pinkie toe. Which he had done. Maybe he meant only to hold it in his mouth, the toe, but first his teeth and then his throat had their ideas about what a thoughtless child's toe ought to do and now it was gone from both of them. The child, and Mormo. Why should they be afraid of me if I am never to be any danger Mormo thought, but the place of fear was not in danger but in the imaginary, and he had made it real, which meant someone would go searching, searching until they found him with his jelly-bean-red mouth.

But how could they find him, he, Mormo, who did not even exist?

Instead, they would find the gloam and catch and dervish—they would pull a real man from his real home, and then his real wife and they would leave the daughter to have daughters herself who would remember, somehow, the terrible emptiness that night had made. That is what would happen, and when there are real sources of danger like that outlander and his wife, who has need of Mormo?

In a way I have made them siblings, Mormo thought. The outlander girl and the child whose taste was still in his mouth. They will never know it, but they are related by blood.

His mother wasn't home. He went out into the dusk and found there a pile of fallen leaves the size of which you could never imagine, and he laid himself under it and went to sleep, there in a smaller space, where also you cannot imagine.