

Of Sainted Dens

Perhaps it is the destiny of all monasteries to eventually be abandoned, that somehow the truest approximation of their purpose is to lie still in untilled fields. Barometric hums of weathered obsecration and overgrown cloisters the last vestigial echoes of rituals long performed and performed so long ago.

Longing.

Not the loss, only the memory of desire. Ask the tourists clambering over Angkor Wat what they think about the secular divine.

Or maybe save that particular question for the good people of Peterloo and you might hear tales of the Apollo Pavilion, of youth unfolding under languorous limbs and Victor Pasmore and dreams, and dreams of folly.

My own dreams, and the dreams of the children of Cardross, of Prestwick, of Ayr. Figures proceeding through thickets of sycamore, ash, lime and laurel to perform acts of devotion, hands clutching cans, votives without motives.

My own dreams, like the mauve summer evening Nina and I broke into the cracked poolhouse of a long-forgotten school. Like all good dreams, or at least the kind soothsayers might call reliable, this one seemed to have already come before the act. Déjà vu, me and you, remembering things we thought we knew.

Cod verse escapes the page, like the goldfish we found swimming in the cistern. I still think about it, perhaps in the way James Salter imagined Lucian Freud on a transatlantic flight, contemplating the fish deep under the sea below, oblivious to his plane flying overhead.

Here's a truck stop instead of St. Peter's.

Stipe, Michael knew the score. Heaven's gate might be right in front of you, make sure you don't miss it. An ex-girlfriend of mine once told me she always gave money to anyone who asked for it because you never knew if the person still dressed in the clothes of the last party they ever went to, the person with track marks and oozing sores and a cockeyed plan, well she used to say, you never know if that's the Buddha. I used to love both parts of that, and then I only loved the first part.

Before he was St Peter, Simeon Petros was *Κηφᾶς* or Kepha, stone hewn. The rock of the ages upon whose uncertain ledge would be built a castle of faith, at once invisible and indivisible. Perhaps it is the destiny of all prophets to eventually be abandoned.

Longing.

Not the loss, only the memory of desire. Catch a lover at the right altitude, or some other blessed junction. Ask the poster hanging on my wall.

Faith sets you up for the fall.

Alexis Pearse Flynn, 2021