

## Brownlocks and the Three Beds

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### **Boucles Brunes et les trois lits**

*Il était une fois une petite fille nommée Boucles Brunes qui désirait quelque chose. Elle ignorait ce que cette chose était, ni comment s'en saisir, mais elle la désirait ardemment. Un jour qu'elle errait dans les bois afin d'échapper aux moqueries de ses compagnes de classes, les petites filles sans couleur, elle aperçut une maison rose entourée d'une haute clôture de mots, une clôture de mots battus, une forteresse de fatigue. À l'intérieur de cette maison rose se trouvait une chose que Boucles Brunes voulait posséder. Après avoir vaincu la clôture de mots en avalant les voyelles, elle entra dans la maison rose qui abritait trois lits: un tout petit lit, de la grandeur d'un dé à coudre (le lit de la neutralité); un second lit, garni de coussins moelleux (le lit de l'illusion); et un large lit circulaire, sans ornement (le lit de l'indifférence). Dans ce lit d'indifférence dont elle s'éleva, Boucles Brunes trouva ce qu'elle cherchait: un trésor enfouit au coeur de sa poitrine, entouré d'une forteresse de mots.*

Brownlocks opened the greasy lunch bag on her lap. She was afraid to look into it. Knew she wouldn't need to see to identify. Her sense of smell was strong. Stronger than the smell of the salami oiling her hands as she held it to her mouth to take a bite.

"Ouuouuuuu," said the colourless girl next to her. "Oou ouu ick uck," sang a chorus of small fry all along the bench she was sitting on.

She could barely swallow the bit of sandwich in her throat. It seemed to gorge her lining as it made its way down to her intestines. She longed for two things: a carton of McCain's apple juice, like everyone else had in their lunch bag, and to disappear.

Brownlocks had had enough. Not salami sandwiches, for she rarely had those. Enough commentary from the colourless chorus. She left her lunch bag on the bench and started walking. In her head her mother warned: "Don't go walking in the woods alone or the Bears will eat you," but she kept walking and walking and walking. Her eyes wide and

wondrous upon the world. Occasionally she found herself sitting on a rock, wishing someone would come and find her. Wishing someone could feel and understand her need. There was no one that could come, of course, so after these stops she'd pick up and weave her way through the woods again.

She found herself thinking a lot about the colourless and how she never got along with any of them. If she pretended to be a beautiful bird, they'd say "You're not a bird, you're a pigeon!" If she wore her Yes coat (a jacket with Yes all over it) they'd come up to her in a group and say "NO" with a thrust of their pimply tongues. Or they'd step on her shoes for no good reason.

Brownlocks, who got her name because she was born of a long line of great-grandmothers and grandfathers and a mother and a father all of whom had brown hair and brown eyes, had learned to sniff out their kind. She kept to herself because she knew they could see right through her with their pink eyes. She, on the other hand, could always smell them coming, but could identify nothing beyond that.

Brownlocks felt she wanted something from the world but she didn't know what it was or how to get her hands on it. She did have PEE power, because of a bladder so large her mother made her wear a pair of snug panties to keep it from bulging out. She wet her panties at least once a week and liked the feeling. The puddle growing round her, enveloping all those near her, sweet and warm and yellow like a runny custard. She silenced the room with her emissions, her liquid protests changing the course of the day. She enjoyed these moments of approaching her power to seize the as yet undefinable thing(s).

Brownlocks thought and felt all these things and was again sorry no one had come to take her away. She stopped longing, though, when she spotted a pink house at the bottom of the hill she was climbing. A pink house enclosed by a tall fence made of words.

She had never seen words like these. There were thousands of them squeezed back-to-back and made to stand upright. They were words that had become stiff from standing up straight for too long and they had faded from being in the sun, wind, rain and snow. A fence of battered words, a fortress of fatigue.

The house the fence partially concealed was open and ripe, hiding nothing and it seemed to Brownlocks to be something she'd like to have. There were tall wide windows all around and she could see straight through the inside of the house to the enclosing wall out back.

Brownlocks walked up to the word wall, stretching her hand to touch it since it was through her body she felt the wall and not through her mind, which had never known these words.

HALT!DO NOT TOUCH.This is private.You don't belong here.  
Where did you come from?How did you get here?hurled the  
wall.You stink.Your hands are dirty.This is private property.DO  
NOT TOUCH.HALT!

Brownlocks stood silent listening to the chattering wall as it marched through a chorus of militaristic phrases and chants that each ended in "HALT!"

She really wanted something else. She wanted to get into the pink house. She was unhappy so she climbed to the point, higher than the fence, where she'd first sighted the house. She yanked up her skirt, pulled down her pair of panties and crouched. Fine threads of honey glided down the slope like a gentle waterfall, puddling at the base of the fence. The words began to vibrate. Brownlocks ran down to embrace the fence and licked a vowel to taste it. The vowel stuck to her mouth and she used her tongue to roll it inward. She liked this vowel, it was creamy, like a cheese sauce, and it spread all over the roof of her mouth, giving her pleasure. Brownlocks wanted more. She puffed out her lips and bent down to suck another vowel. This vowel was round and plump and reminded her of the bare buttocks of a baby.

The words went berserk, their letters somersaulting out of sequence, their backs flexing for the first time. The vowels in the wall were shaking and shrieking. The consonants, unable to hold formation in this chaos, began for the first time to rub shoulders with one another in ecstatic abandon. mmmmmmmnnnnmmmm vvvvrrrvvv bbbbfffff they bellowed and pppppppOppp! wwwwwOwwwww! wwwwweeeee eewww! as the occasional vowel sprung in their midst.

The wall shimmered and rippled, crashing in upon itself with wave after wave of sound, the music passing up into Brownlocks' nostrils and reverberating in her sinus cavity. She plucked a few of the letters and quickly popped them into her mouth. She stored them deep in her throat next to her voice box where they rattled like dry seeds and shells, almost like a warning, whenever she opened her mouth. Brownlocks sat on the grass and tickled her new treasure box. Opening and closing her mouth again and again she made wheezy rattles, growl rattles and ringing rattles and couldn't wait to be stepped on again so she could use them

against the colourless. She stood up happy and walked through to the pink house.

As she got closer, Brownlocks, who had no other name, could see that the house was filled to brimming with things: watches, dresses, lamps, blankets, dolls, shoes, carpets, ribbons, shirts, ledges, fly swatters, bottles, bangles, boxes, pencils, portraits, brooms, pans, socks, books, glue, toys, pots, shelves, cages and three bowls and three beds. She was flabbergasted (a violent thing) yet not thirsty or hungry. But her big brown eyes were devouring.

Brownlocks looked into the first bowl she came across, which was filled with the night sky, and was overcome. She pushed something aside and sat on a pile of rugs. She stretched out on the rugs stunned by the numbers of objects, all white, in this house. How could so much exist in the woods without her knowing about it? Why even the salami-haters wouldn't know what to do if they knew about this (failing to see the connection). Brownlocks closed her eyes and imaged herself as an unbuttoned shirt billowing on her mother's clothesline.

Brownlocks had a nightmare that she was the only pigeon in Bird School. Her teacher was a wise old owl. All her classmates were happily perched on their branches when Brownlocks arrived, late, and rushed to her designated spot. "Teacher," she cried, "this branch is too big. I feel like a beetle instead of a bird. How can I sing?" The wise owl responded, "The branch cannot be too big because the branches are one size fits all."

Brownlocks awoke when her eyes opened suddenly. She felt funny. Something she'd brought to this house seemed misplaced. In this pink house, she could not eat, shit or burp, dance, hum or squeak. She could not do any of the things she was used to doing. She noticed that she had been sleeping on a teeny tiny bed, a bed that seemed the size of a thimble. It was a bed that virtually no one could sleep in (the bed of neutrality).

Brownlocks looked into the next bowl, which was filled with the rising sun, and found herself asleep on the second bed (the bed of illusion). She had a nightmare where she was again the only pigeon in Bird School and when she found her seat, she cried, "Teacher, this branch is too small. I feel like a bear instead of a bird. How can I sing?" The old owl looked at her and said, "It's all in your head." She awoke feeling very sleepy but tired of sleeping.

On the plump cushions of this bed, Brownlocks looked around with clearer vision. She saw that the dazzling brightness she had mistaken for the sun was the light trapped in the white objects reflecting one another.

There was no sunlight in this house. The sun mysteriously did not shine through the windows even though the windows were as tall and wide as the house itself. She stepped outside to the garden and squinted at the sun. It fell down in slats around the house but never penetrated the glass. It was as though the house projected a magnetic field that repelled the angled rays of the sun. As though the house was a perfect autonomous rectangle sitting in a wood, indifferent to the cackles, crackles, angles and crooks all about it.

Being young and voracious, Brownlocks climbed a shaft of the sun to get a peek at the second floor of the house. What she saw gripped her. A large round bed stood in the middle of the room, stripped of any and all ornamentation (the bed of indifference). She knew that if she could only possess this wondrous bed of indifference that had captured her heart, she would have everything she had always desired. She would never again desire anything (a desirable thing). She had to find some way of getting what she wanted.

Brownlocks made a snap decision to explore the greener pastures that lay beyond the pink house, fervently hoping that they would help bring her closer to this bed of indifference. She skipped over the word wall and landed firmly on two feet on a clay-coloured road only to be knocked over by Brownman on a bicycle.

Now Brownlocks had no idea that Brownman was a highly preoccupied ghost and, therefore, a little absent-minded. Because of her nasty experience with the colourless, she often mistook chance for aim. Because being knocked over was so much like having her shoes stepped on, Brownlocks chased after the spokes of Brownman's bicycle with a threatening throat rattle.

Brownlocks ran as fast as her anger would let her but before she could go very far, she was suddenly trapped in the barbed net cast by Mr. Blister's big body.

Mr. Blister was like three giant white polar bears in one. He was as tall as the tallest tree in the wood and as wide as one too. He was fond of little girls but he also had a job to do so when Brownlocks had run screaming past him after Brownman, with no sense of smell because of her pursuit, he had to put a stop to it. Mr. Blister explained to Brownlocks after snatching her, as she squiggled and squirmed in his grasp, that she musn't chase after Brownman because Brownman was only the ghost of a migrant labourer who had died in a freak accident that should never have happened if only the proper procedures had been taken but thank

GOD he had insurance and good men who didn't scare easily hired from a foreign land to pick apples from the trees in his orchards which were everywhere because Mr. Blister was a concerned citizen who was doing his part to fight the silent but insidious LION OF LETHARGY that grazed in the woods hadn't Brownlocks heard about him? and was she looking for Trouble because that's certainly what she would find in Brownman.

Now Brownlocks wasn't sure if she liked ghosts very much but she definitely didn't like polar bears so, aiming for his eyes, she sprayed the entire contents of her engorged bladder on Mr. Blister and ran after the shiny spokes of Brownman's bicycle. Eventually she sat on a stump to catch her breath and to wonder if the migrant ghost was a bird that had flown into the woods by accident and become trapped in the awful embrace of Mr. Blister.

Brownlocks became very afraid that the woods were full of Blister Bears. She was so scared that she almost missed Brownman, the migrant ghost poised on the highest limb of the tree next to her. She saw him swoop and somersault in the air amidst hundreds of dancing apples. Brownlocks watched in awe, envying Brownman for being able to be above everything, above all the colourless choruses of the city and the clamouring fences of the forest.

As she watched, Brownman suddenly began to fall heavily toward the earth. He flailed silently and was about to crash to the ground when his foot caught at a thick branch. Hanging upside down he cut open the bark of the tree with his two hands and vanished into it.

Without thinking, Brownlocks burrowed headfirst into the ground. Her mother's voice in her head warned: "Don't dig too deep or you'll strike rock," but instead Brownlocks struck a thick mass of tangled roots that glittered white in the black earth. She wove her narrow and pliant body like an earthworm, gingerly, through the web, hunting for the migrant. Brownlocks' heart raged in desperation and time and time again she came up with nothingness.

Underground, her sorrow made her swell larger and larger until the tree lost its sureness in the soil and began to lurch. Heartfirst, big Brownlocks dove into the air and twirled the tree like a baton in her hands hoping to shake out the migrant. Again she came up with nothingness.

Aboveground, Brownlocks' sorrow made her shrink to the size of a seed so that she quickly lost what hold she had on the trunk. She began

to fall, weeping deeply and bitterly. But the flying tree, with its roots in the air, caught and cradled her, spinning the spent little Brownlocks to a fitful sleep.

Brownman then appeared to her dressed in the shiniest pink satin. He was on the tiny tricycle that along with her voice had been stolen from Brownlocks a long long time ago. With his hands arched above his head in a circle and wearing a wide smile on his face, Brownman rode straight toward her. When his lips were close to hers, Brownman's mouth fell open and out flew the most exquisite black bird with turquoise wings and tail. In silence, the bird swooped three times around her head and soared up and away toward the sun.

Brownlocks dreamt that she was a pigeon in Bird School. When she took her place she cried out, "Teacher, Teacher, my branch is just right! Now I can sing." And the wise old owl did not respond.

When her eyes opened Brownlocks discovered that she lay on the round bed. In the middle of her trunk was a black apple resting in the third bowl. Afraid to look and feel too long lest the apple disappear, she peeled open her chest with two hands. In one hand she held the fruit. With her free hand, Brownlocks tunnelled into her chest until she came to the word wall surrounding the pink house of her heart. Quietly she kissed the hummingword latch on the gate and carefully placed into the blindingly bright box that opened before her the migrant's heavy black apple.

Brownlocks opened her mouth and out tumbled the shell and stone words in her throat. Linking themselves, they wove an enormous blank canvas that extended far and wide into the sky. Fastened to her sail, Brownlocks rose from her bed of indifference and billowed.