

# Bones Loathe Marrow

Rainy Saturday night, and the tiny gallery is packed. I sit in the back row of chairs, eating cheese and crackers, waiting for Naming Names to start their show. A red-haired woman in a tight black dress beside me whispers conspiratorially. "The Calvinists are coming to town," she hisses. "They moved into that castle building in the Southeast." She pauses to gulp her wine. "We're planning a protest, though," she continues. "A demonstration against the anti-gay church—a kiss-in to show them whose town this is!"

"Wow," I say quietly, "I just... I hate that."

"I know!" she exclaims. "What makes them think that they can come here and spread their anti-gay religion?"

"No," I reply, "the protest. I don't support that."

The woman and I look at each other for a moment, great distance between us. Then, Emily brings her violin to her chin and the room goes dark. A projector whirs, shoots forth light onto the screen above the stage—the image of a woman dancing, billowing curtains, the sea. Racquel glides to the front of the gallery in a white jumpsuit, sits at the piano. "All I need are my bones, and my bones, and no skin to cover them," she croons. I close my eyes.

Anything that I hate strongly enough, I find myself bound to. In my experience it is constant



## remember to breathe

BY NICK MATTOS

and dependable, like death and taxes and red wine in plastic cups at gallery parties. If I hate someone it is inevitable that I will see them everywhere—their name a blue link in the comments of a Facebook post, their eyes across a crowded bar, their profile in the window of a bus chugging past me on Hawthorne Boulevard. If I disparage a group (and God knows I've talked my share of shit) it is worth betting that, within a decade, I'll briefly flirt with membership in it.

After many years of wondering why the hell this happened, I came to a hypothesis as to the cause: self-hatred. Somewhere in my past I developed an inner voice that sounds like me and, at my worst moments, reminds me that I am not good enough, that I am ugly and sinful and weird and crazy and in all ways *bad*. Coincidentally, the people and groups I have hated have tended to be those who, each in their own unique way, asserted that I am not redeemed, that I'm weird and crazy and sinful and isolated—exactly the messages that appear in my negative self-talk. In a very real way, I hate things when they sound too much like me.

"Bones loathe marrow," Racquel sings plaintively over the piano and violin. "Do bones

loathe marrow?"

Perhaps this is why the queers of Portland find themselves so stricken by the threat of a so-called "anti-gay church" establishing itself in our city. A politically conservative friend of mine also asserts that this is why the Right's doctrine that one should pull themselves up by their bootstraps so thoroughly riles up my fellow liberals. In such religious and political rhetoric, we hear the message that temporal and spiritual salvation are in fact accessible things, that they have been within our reach the whole time if only we exerted ourselves in pursuit of them. That we, too, could be prosperous in the present and secure in the future, if only we are willing to play by the rules they set forth. Mixed with the self-loathing part of ourselves, this message twists into a screed that it is not the system that fails, it's *us*—we ourselves that don't stack up to the promises. If only we weren't so bad at playing the game, so apt to fail, so *bad*, we could be redeemed with them, too.

"Go ahead and count our bones, baby, add them up—I'll become whole for you. What will you do for me?"

Despite my hypothesis, I am not yet very good

at catching myself in my hatred, still developing the ability to parse out the difference between what actually happened and the meaning I assigned to it. However, here in this gallery, I can see the difference between a church that takes a strict view on scripture coming to my town and the anxieties it provokes: *Will it change the city? Could it impinge upon my rights? What if I'm actually going to hell? Am I really this bad?* I can also see the difference between my fellow gays loudly crying out against the church and my anxieties: *Is this just liberal parochialism? Do gay people really need to fight this battle right now? Is anyone willing to coexist? Am I just too weird for gay culture?* I can even see the difference between disagreeing with the red-haired woman beside me, and hating her for thinking differently.

"And can't we decide when we're caught in the middle of, wrought, bought into the bitter of," Racquel belts beneath the projector screen.

I turn to the woman beside me. "I fully respect your right to voice what you think is right," I whisper to her, "even if it's different than what I think. There's enough space in this world for both of us." She grins back in agreement as Racquel hits the last note. In unison, the audience applauds, smiling. ☺

NICK MATTOS welcomes your thoughts at [nickmattos@justout.com](mailto:nickmattos@justout.com)

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