

The Dance of the Hours

The Clientele

When we were children, we found a Knight in the back garden; just beyond a patch of scrub grass, and hidden by green laurel leaves. The first thing that struck us was how tiny he was, like a jockey or another child, and I realise now that his delicate frame could only have been nourished by mediaeval foods; turnips, blood sausage, perhaps songbirds roasted in a thin, toxic sauce of mercury. He looked pained, pinched-in, fanatical. He waited stock-still on his horse, seeming to absorb the light from around him; blanched like an underexposed photograph, with the blues and purples of Edwardian illustrations, faded through the years into an otherworldly, sun-infused palette of the distant past. He was separate from the light and the shadow of the garden, and he sat in an obvious posture of hesitation and -it seemed- slight disdain, without seeing or reacting to us. We were shocked, and milled around him with hushed respect. On other days we found him drenched, with rain drilling the laurel leaves, streaking long, dim lines down the sides of his face, before our mother called us in from the wet, and we left him to his meditation.

Stitched into the pommel of his saddle was his name, Roland. He never moved from the bottom of the garden, and we visited him less and less. The last time I saw him I was 8 years old, and a burning summer day had bleached the grasses and dried the moss on the lawn. He was there but not there, as usual, the wrong colour and shape for the oppressive light, the heat that made the new tent I had pitched an uninhabitable furnace. I thought his face had changed a little, as if he was exhausted by the long trek through the years, from laying King Arthur to rest by the sea on a fresh, chilly evening, to seeing the Pre-Raphaelites paint the same scene wrongly nine centuries later. But maybe it was me who was becoming tired. By September, I was ill; when I returned, he'd gone.