

## **SYZYGY**

by Fiona Alison Duncan

A radiant was drawing symbols on their right palm with their left index finger, following a script, Eugenie supposed, from the book balanced between their thighs. The radiant's gaze was locked on the green inked pages; mouthing along, no words Eugenie recognized. To the radiant's left were two elderly twins in matching brown suits, both wide and short, who every so often would laugh at the same time. The first time, Eugenie thought they, like her, were responding to the music in here: angelic covers of B-list hits. As their intermittent giggles persisted, Eugenie grew paranoid. Were they telepathing under their slicked back black white rooted hair? This was the least of her worries, though. Across from the twins, sitting in Eugenie's blind spot, was a young woman Eugenie could've sworn she once knew.

This young woman shouldn't have been young still, but she had a way of drawing miracles to her. When Eugenie had first met her at a 'shoes-off' house party, Silver Linings, or S.L., as she called herself then, was yelling, 'Go a little bit closer!' from the front door down a cluttered hallway. She then proceeded to explain, using the party of shoes as her case study, the theory of 'mimetic desire' to Eugenie, which turned out to be exactly what Eugenie needed to hear to complete a work she'd been struggling with.

'Most people—sociopaths, real artists, and autists exempt—desire through example,' Silver Linings had started lecturing first through a mirror she was primping in, then seated on the ground, her sinuous stockinged legs batting sneakers around. 'Like I like silver *not* because it intrinsically means something profound to me but because Julie liked it and the whole history of silver, you know. But for some reason we're so ashamed of our connectivity, our brains negate the

people who mediate our desire. So Julie and I fought over silver, thinking there wasn't enough for us both, and forgetting we *each* liked it because someone we loved it. Do you understand? That's why everyone wears practically the same shoes now, while resenting that others are wearing them too, and they all secretly hate ourselves for it, not understanding why they are miserable. We search for the next shoe, blind to the truth of what compels us. Desire used to be triangular: the lover, the beloved, and the mediator (the negated). But now, in our mirror-world, desire's like fractal or something. I don't know what fractals are actually, but it *sounds* like it fits. What's your name?'

Eugenie had already turned her head twice to check her blind spot. Another turn would be too obvious. Desiring a better view, Eugenie stood to inspect the waiting room reading materials then, pretending to find something of interest (a crinkled architecture journal), she sat back down beside the radiant—across from the young woman.

After Silver Linings, she had called herself *Celerity*, which everyone always misheard as *celebrity*. 'Similar,' Celerity would say. 'My name means speed.'

They were close for three dense weeks. A short romance as unusual for Eugenie, whose relationships were few and loyal, as it was common for Celerity, who believed 'in privileging no *one* over another since we all come from the same source.' She must have changed thousands of lives.

If it were her, she demonstrated no recognition of Eugenie today. Decades had passed and Eugenie's tawny skin had cracked like porcelain.

One of the two twins was called to the counter. He delivered a confirmation code: 'A-E-I-O-U-Y.' And was told to wait once more. As he moved to sit back down, he hopped over his twin's leg that was extended to trip him, and they both laughed again.

Meanwhile, Eugenie was trying to will the young woman into eye contact but the thought didn't transfer. The same medley of feelings that dominated Eugenie's life when they were together was clouding around her. Impossible to parse, like all keys struck at once. Eugenie couldn't do anything but feel whatever it was back then.

She remembers Celerity putting a Japanese muslin bag over her head to keep her clothes from getting makeup on them. She remembers the phrase *weighted on you*. And her large shoulder blades like skin wings. Eugenie thought they talked incessantly in rapid repartee but all she can remember are Celerity's stories and theories, like how human lifestyles were facing the same extinction rates as animal species and due to the same forces, or why it's easier to be an evil than a good genius.

The last day they spent together, Celerity tried to unload a number of garments on Eugenie. They weren't Eugenie's style. Celerity explained that she had borrowed the dresses, skirts, and cardigans two years ago from an off-and-on friend, someone she would see 'for twenty-four hours every few years. For years.' Celerity had promised she would return the belongings promptly but forgot and 'knowing this friend, a real stickler for de- tail, she's pissed.'

'I've done this before,' Celerity said. 'Not with this friend, another—okay maybe two more. The trick is to give the clothes to someone who needs them more. It clears the karma, and if they resurface in your friend's life on a sweet, meek, or poor person, they can't get mad.'

Though Eugenie declined the 'gift,' she discovered the hand-me-downs in her dresser the next day after Silver Linings or Celerity had left (it would turn out to be) for good. Eugenie wore those clothes in the privacy of her studio until they stopped smelling like her friend, then she donated them.

Eugenie coughed violently and the whole waiting room looked up.

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