

Chandler Brossard

Kevin Prufer

When I was twenty years old
and desperate and broke,
I worked part-time in a used bookstore
in Middletown, CT.
I hated my job, hated the cramped store,
hated the paperbacks
that came there as if to die

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and more than anything,
I wanted to write something lasting,

a novel I scrawled in notebooks
called "Black Wing"
about a dark-haired girl,
prized during the day for her beauty and intellect,
who by night
killed off poseurs, the ill-read, the clumsy-of-mind,
the bombastic, thick-fingered, and mean.

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Somehow, through incompetence or charity,
the young woman who owned the store
never quite fired me

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though one morning, I found an old man
at my place at the cash register.

and thick,
 Vicks VapoRub and snuff
and mint—

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How the knife comes down, I thought,
typing away that night
 while one of my roommates
burned his fingers on a joint
 and the other
practiced his guitar—
 the knife comes down
in the flesh of the critic,
 in the sycophant, the vulgar,
and the room grew colder
because no one paid our bills—

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 and I wanted Chandler Brossard
to say something wise
 but he was just an old man.
And when I finally told him about “Black Wing”
the plot seemed suddenly
 contrived,
ugly truth pursuing beauty, beauty
making our foibles
 clear, the dark-haired girl
who posed the horrible bodies
 for the one-legged detective to discover—

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By then, I’d read one of Brossard’s novels
and found it full of squalor,
 familiar—

