

Winter 2013

Hairy Old Man

Rebecca Lilly

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Recommended Citation

Lilly, Rebecca. "Hairy Old Man." *The Iowa Review* 43.3 (2013): 113-114. Web.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.7345>

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HAIRY OLD MAN

1.

My shadow's love of drama keeps me up at night.
His understudy lives in a black box, and together
we suffer my insomnia. Sun curdles him like
sour milk, but he slinks off before he's a puddle.

When I'm angered, he sculpts me a ghostwriter's
bust out of clouds no bigger than a man's hand.
Sequined buttons of his coat glisten like the
snake scales in Eden.

2.

He knocks at my cottage every evening with his
homespun mock-tragicomedies, his tales of for-
est alchemy. Tongue lolling, he snarls when the
moon is out. His mouth is a storm front breath-
ing out clouds.

"In *your* philosophy," he sidles in the door, whisk-
ing his tail against my knees, "I'm the ghostwrit-
er's bust!" "Not exactly," I frown. He's a hairy old
man with rotted teeth (a wolf in old tweed) who
offers, from his coat pocket, paper cuttings, then
asks what I see.

"A clip artist's cottage industry!"

Flowers for the color-blind, he calls them, sunned
by the moon into blossom.

"Eat your heart out!" he smiles.

On the darkest days, my shadow prances in the garden, laughing and cavorting with my heart-breaks.

3.

Days pass as his breath fouls, his back legs lame. His incisors fall out, and I tell him, "You're no magician as you fancy yourself, but a wolf man with B-movie tantrums!"

His gnarled hands rattle the period pieces on my mantle and the ghostwriter's bust. "You'll never guess my alias!" he taunts, loping about with his nose up, wheezing, keeling over.

I drag him out by his paws. His nostrils flare, like Chiron in Aries, eyes closed from the undertow of arteries. His heart failures are a nuisance these days. My shadow never dies, he only faints!