

Ashley Cotsman

Dr. Gingrich

AP Language/American Lit

25 September 2018

A Hellish Shade of Emerald Green

In the twenty-one ordinary years that I had lived in the average town of Mayville, I, Lucy Amos, had not once stopped my day to enter the peculiar antique shop situated on the corner of Holbrook Street. Despite my deeply-rooted and lifelong fascination with the past, the melancholy ambiance that radiated off of the red brick shop had never been particularly attractive. It is, too, uncertain whether the gray-tinted windows deterring bright sunlight from the building, the crumbling, yet strategically stacked assortment of bricks that composed the perimeter of the shop, or simply a combination of the numerous aversions had lead me to subconsciously avoid a voyage into the store.

Simply put, exploring the odd shop had never been within a realm of interest for me, so I had, for twenty-one years, walked the sidewalks of Holbrook Street without paying it any great deal of attention. The glare of the sun reflected from off its windows always lurked in my peripheral vision on the path to college, the library, restaurants, stores, cafes, and midnight trips to Waffle House; yet it had not once jumped out with enough energy to spark an interest within me. It solely stood quietly, without complaint or quarrel. Watching, waiting, observing.

Yet, there was an abrupt variation in this pattern on one chilly February afternoon. Clouds cluttered the bright sky, casting a grayish shadow over the town of Mayville and its entirety. The icy air was cold and unfriendly; it found its way into my pant legs and up into the back of my jacket, sending a cold chill through my spine and causing each individual hair on my

body to stand upright. The slight wind smelled of uncertainty and greyness as it dilly-dallied throughout the streets, and the drowsiness of the day seemed to make the exhausted clouds droop down more and more until they rested comfortably on the sidewalks of Mayville, dispersing into a thick, unclear, and indefinite fog.

As I leisurely strode amongst the stone sidewalks of Holbrook Street, I yawned and stretched my arms, arbitrarily happening to glance up at the building. Abnormally, it caught my attention.

Maybe it was the peculiar humidity of uncertainty that seemed to cling about the atmosphere of the shop. Or the eerie desolation that instilled a deep nervousness inside my consciousness, sending a chill up my back and deep into my foundational bones. It might have been the chilly wind that was seemingly emitted from its towering walls that made my stomach turn, caused my mouth to twist into an apprehensive frown, and sent goosebumps sprouting all over the surface of my skin. Whatever it was, some inexplicable force from deep inside of that shop's foundations drew me in; it called for me silently, attracted me as if a magnet were embedded deeply into my core. For the first time in twenty-one ordinary years, I strayed off of my normal path home from the library, stopping abruptly at the front of the Mayville Antique Shop.

~

Its brick walls towered in front of me, reaching at the skies and towards the gloomy clouds that drooped lower than usual with the weight of the world. The red bricks that had once teemed with an abundant liveliness were worn down and faded into a grayish orange, and it was thus apparent that centuries of harshness had stripped the building's outside of its youth. Dark green moss and fungus had made itself prominent in the cracks and crevices of the bricks, giving

the building a distasteful greenish hue and making it appear particularly worn down and ruined. Absent was any sign of life or inhabitation, yet triumphantly hung a mangled sign reading “OPEN” on the outside of the door. It swayed slightly in the melody of the chilly February wind.

As I entered the antique shop, the heavy wooden door shut behind me, sending forth a slight breeze that brushed through the atmosphere of the room. The interior was small and cramped, the abundance of shelves, stock-filled with rows of antiques, contributing substantially to the room’s stuffiness. The room was dim and gray, and although its parameters were apparent in the surrounding walls, the rows of antiques seemed to go on and on for eternity without any ending.

An old lady with graying hair and weathered skin crouched at a counter near the front of the shop. Although she faced opposite from me, it was apparent that she worked busily at her desk. Perhaps she was busy labeling new antiques or fiddling with a register. She didn’t seem to take much interest in my entrance into the shop.

“Have at it, kid- we close up at six today. Yell if you need anything.” she muttered, neglecting to look up from her desk.

I wondered how she’d seen me without turning from her work, but quickly dismissed the thought and glanced at the watch on my left wrist. 5:37. I had about twenty minutes to roam the shop and examine its contents.

I scanned the room around me; a blur of pictures, frames, books, and miscellaneous other artifacts were crammed into rows of shelves. As I walked alongside them, I inhaled the thick, dingy air, which was sour and earthy of must and dust. The negligence of cleaning and upkeep

was quite apparent; a thick dust had accumulated on all of the shelves, encasing the antiques in a layer of age and encompassing them in the depression of their sad states.

Alongside the shelves that held miscellaneous antiques were rows of what seemed like hundreds of printed pictures and the frames that held them. I strutted down these particular rows, a slight nervousness creeping up my spine. The countless faces glared up at me, an undeniably substantial factor in establishing the room's eeriness. They smelled of a thousand days, and a thousand nights. The frames told of a thousand journeys, and of a thousand stories.

Nervousness quickly bubbled up in the blood pumping through my veins, and I briskly departed from the isle. It felt as if the faces from the haunting photographs watched my every move as I made my way through the shop.

As I scanned the shelves of antiques, my eyes became quickly fixated on a slight reflection of light that came from behind a mess of various objects. I walked towards it, clearing away a mess of items and unearthing from the shelf a small jewelry box about the size of a magazine.

I blew away the thick filth that had covered the box's surface, sending around us a thick cloud of dust that floated gently down, down until it laid restfully on the dirty floor. Both the box's exterior and interior were comprised of a soft velvet of a deep red color. At its front, near where it latched, was a green emerald from which the original attracting sparkle had originated. It twinkled tauntingly in the slight light that leaked into the shop through the windows. I felt myself getting lost in its simple complexity, and it felt as though the peculiar box filled a pit deep from within my core. From deep inside me lurked an odd familiarity, however, that both perplexed and intrigued me.

It was this puzzling familiarity that drove me to buy the box. As I turned it in my hands in search of a price sticker, I felt a cease in the comfortable warmth that had blared on my back.

A shadow of gray was cast onto both me and the shelf that laid in front of myself.

Instantaneously, without the bright sunlight that had shone on me, the surrounding air felt substantially cooler. A shiver crawled up my back.

“Interesting choice you seem to have made.” called out a voice from behind me.

I turned, locking eyes with the old lady who’d been working at the desk when I had walked into the shop. This was the first time I had seen the entirety of her face.

I was instantly captivated by her eyes, which were a perplexing shade of emerald green. They sparkled, danced in the little light that had made its way into the room. I felt myself getting momentarily lost in their deep, mysterious chambers that seemed to be filled with observance and peculiarity.

Realizing that I hadn’t yet responded to her, I looked back down at the jewelry box and mumbled, “I found it captivating. Like nothing I’ve ever seen before.”

She smiled, responding, “I assume you plan on taking it home?”

“Yeah, if that’s alright. I couldn’t find a price sticker on it, though.” Reaching in my pocket for my wallet, I added, “How much do you want for it?”

“That won’t be necessary,” the old lady answered. “You can keep it for free. A gift.”

I was rather unsure of what compelled her to gift me the box without my paying, yet I contentedly accepted her offer. She spoke to me whilst fumbling with the box, soon wrapping it for safe transport.

“I’ve found,” she explained, “that some artifacts in this shop tend to *call* for peculiar individuals.”

I winced my eyes as to show my slight confusion. Her strange explanation didn't seem to have any certain meaning.

“What exactly do you mean by... peculiar?” I probed.

“You'll understand soon enough.” she whispered, placing the newly wrapped jewelry box into my open arms. “Thank you for visiting, my dear. I hope that it calls you to return soon.”

Just like that, I was hurried back out of the shop and onto the streets of Mayville, catching a final glimpse of the woman's eyes right before she shut the door behind me. They glowed with a brilliant green that was utterly familiar yet so filled with inexplicable desperation.

The air had grown slightly colder, and the fog had condensed considerably since my entrance into the shop. The gloomy atmosphere still clung about the building, and its decomposing bricks seemed to crumble more and more with every chilly burst of wind that brushed through Holbrook Street. I made my way briskly back home, eager both to explore the odd jewelry box and to get out of the chilly winter's grip.

~

At home, I sat cross legged on the soft, mesh carpet floor of my room, feeling slightly defeated after having spent an hour dissecting the intriguing jewelry box. Sprawled out in front of me, the box with its green gemstone twinkled as if to taunt me in the sunlight that was now dimming as the sun ducked just below the horizon.

I had turned the box inside out and upside down searching through it, my desperation growing and bubbling up inside of me as the minutes passed without luck of finding anything. I needed something materialistic that I could hold between my fingers to explain my inexplicable attraction to the box that plagued me. But, to my dismay, there was nothing to be found inside. It was just a plain, velvet jewelry box. Empty and average as could be.

Dissatisfied with my lack of findings, I slid the box onto the dresser that sat opposite of my bed, clicked off my bedroom lights, and stomped down the hallway to prepare dinner before settling in bed for the night.

I lived alone in a cozy one-story apartment just a five-minute walk from downtown Mayville, so most nights were dull and dreary save the occasional visit from a friend or my parents. This night was no exception, so I planned to eat dinner alone on my porch and watch the sun set in the distance. Despite the grimness of winter, I always made it a priority to eat outside so I could watch the sun crawl down behind the horizon. Besides, the chilly breeze made me feel alive.

The clouds that had once crowded the sky had cleared up in time for the sunset, yet the thick, grey fog had ceased to lift and still sat restfully, sticking to the streets and yards and sidewalks. If anything, it had grown thicker, clogging the pores of Mayville and making the dreary evening drag on for uncomfortably long. The air smelled of filth and earthy dust, and the gloomy atmosphere was muddling and perplexing. I opted to eat inside that evening.

~

Well after the sun had set, I laid in my dim bedroom, reading a book against the soft light of my bedside lamp. Despite the serene and laid-back atmosphere of the room, I was finding it particularly difficult to concentrate on my reading. My legs fidgeted nervously, and my eyes, time and time again, slowly drifted away from the book despite my attempts to focus.

It soon came to my attention that the presence of something eerie accompanied me in my own bedroom. I forfeited from attempting to read, placing my book back in its place on the shelf, switching my bedside lamp off, and planting myself on my bed defeatedly. As I let my

eyes lazily browse the surrounding room, my vision locked on the shine of the jewelry box sitting on the shelf across from me.

It sat valiantly on its spot on the shelf. The enchanting green emerald displayed proudly on its front twinkled deviously. It taunted me; watched me with an abnormal observance and patience.

I wanted, so badly, to explore its deep green chambers and its shadowy compartments. The box called me with a voice that was tremendously stronger than before, yet what instilled the greatest nervousness in me was that its peculiar voice seemed to grow stronger by the hour.

As I felt myself succumb to the sweetness of sleep, the greenish glare coming from the box faded into complete and utter darkness.

~

It was the type of nightmare that throws you from up and out of your bed. One so deeply haunting that you pull yourself from deep state of slumber, waking to be surrounded solely by lurching darkness and the dancing shadows on the walls of your room. Heart pounding and mind racing, you're soon to realize that it was only a dream, yet this recognition doesn't stop the tremendous fear that makes you pull your bedsheets up and over your face as you try without luck to drift back into the sweet sleep that you were ripped so mercilessly from.

I sat up in bed, noticeably moist with warm sweat, my mind spinning as I shakenly attempted to comprehend my surroundings through the panic that had set in. Absent from the room was any hint of light, and it was this darkness that gave it the illusion of endlessness. I inhaled and exhaled rapidly, soon growing lightheaded with this hyperventilation and falling back onto my pillow before rolling onto my side, crawling off of the bed, and sliding onto the floor.

The dream had been fuzzy and unclear, solely a blur of darkness and the pale face of a young girl. Her skin, hair, frowning lips were white as snow, her entirety holding an absence of color save her eyes. They were a deep hue of enchanting green, resembling two emeralds glowing brightly through the thick darkness that encompassed her. And as the foggy darkness grew thicker and thicker, her porcelain features, most prominently her pain-filled smile, had disintegrated into the darkness, yet her green emerald eyes shone gloriously through. “God *damn* you!” I shrieked. The words seemed to bounce and linger between the dark walls of the room that encompassed me.

I crawled across the room blindly, so desperate to reach the enchanted jewelry box that I neglected to turn on any sort of light source. With every ounce of strength in my body, I dragged myself onto its shelf opposite of my bed and wrapped my fingers around its velvety exterior, pulling it from its valiant place and into my shaky grasp.

The box was heavy with a story of the past. I felt it one last time, taking in its peculiar tale before manically slamming it onto the ground with a newfound force. Its once sturdy walls cracked apart instantaneously as it hit the floor, releasing a wicked thud that echoed throughout the dark emptiness of my room. Silence now filled the space’s hollowness, and I took a minute to admire the serenity before switching a lamp on.

Something peculiar immediately caught my attention. Near the decimated jewelry box laid a small paper printout that seemed to have surfaced from a secret compartment within the box when I threw it on the ground. I tiptoed across the room and picked it up.

Pictured was a small girl appearing to be around the age of five or six, who wore on her face an expression of deep, profound pain. Her hair, lips, and skin were a lifeless white as pale

as snow. The only color portrayed in the picture came from her eyes, which were an enchanting shade of emerald green. She was all too familiar.

~

My feet padded softly against the sidewalks, cool from the unforgiving winter breeze that brushed ruthlessly through Holbrook Street. The thick fog still hadn't let up, and it draped, quite stubbornly now, over the buildings, roads, and sidewalks. Blackness stretched for eternity across the night sky, and although the scarce speckling of stars attempted to bring forth hints of light, shadowy darkness ruthlessly overcame it.

I had poked back at the taunting box, and in return it had provided me with a materialistic answer in the form of a photograph, which was now pressed between my trembling fingers.

I was soon standing in front of the Mayville Antique Shop. Its crumbling walls towered in front of me with a newfound intimidation, partially exaggerated by the nightfall and thickening fog that hadn't been there earlier. The nightfall gave new life to the dark moss and fungus that appeared to creep up the cracks in the bricks. It seemed to swarm with wicked life, a property unlike any I had ever observed before.

I grabbed the door's heavy metal doorknob and pulled. It was unlocked, a tremendously odd way to leave a shop at night. Entering the building, I no longer thought, but was entirely possessed by a desperate need to find the old lady who had gifted me the box. The hefty door closed behind me, and I felt its familiar breeze hit the back of my legs and send a piercing chill up my spine and into my bones.

The inside of the shop was nearly pitch black, but dim slightly enough for me to detect a major change in the shop's arrangement. No longer did shelves of antiques fill the room; it was empty. Sterile. Vacant. Hollow.

Darkness seemed to fill the room endlessly, reaching every eerie crack and corner. I inhaled. The room smelled earthy and hostile. Almost as soon as I'd entered the store, I felt within me an overwhelming urge to flee.

As I, now coming to my senses and regretting my decision to return to the shop, turned back towards the exit from which I had entered, a certain green hue caught my attention. Cast upon the wooden door that I faced was a faint greenish light. The source from which it came was right behind my back.

I closed my eyes, took a slow breath, and turned towards the presence behind me. Now in front of me floated a few feet off of the ground a small girl with lifeless white skin and glowing green eyes. The bright, emerald light emitted from her eyes penetrated the thick darkness that filled the room. Her feet dangled below her, and a bright green aura surrounded her existence.

"I hope you found my gift fulfilling. I knew you would appreciate it as soon as you walked into the shop this afternoon." she whispered. Her haunting words echoed throughout the room.

My entire body was paralyzed with fear. Although my mind raced, I was frozen with the inability to speak or move. The little girl floated closer to me, emerald eyes glowing brighter and brighter by the second. And as they grew brighter, the evil green that filled them progressed into shades deeper and deeper. Soon, the brightness of her eyes grew and grew, merging from two separate emeralds into a single glowing ball of wicked green. It expanded more and more, filling the room until each corner was fully illuminated by the demonic mass, and the shop soon became filled by the hellish emerald green.

I, too, floated up with the girl, and as I lost control of my own body, my head was soon thrown back and my eyes rolled backwards into darkness. A surge of numbness creeped up my

back and cracked throughout my bones. After my body finally succumbed to the force, my mind, too, went numb and black.

~

As the morning sun began to peek over the horizon, its rays illuminated Holbrook Street with clarity and light. It was now visible that the thick fog had finally lifted and returned to its place in the atmosphere. The wintery breeze had returned again to brush through the streets and sidewalks, its leisurely gusts still crumbling the outer bricks of the old buildings lining them.

In the corner of the peculiar antique shop, a little girl with porcelain skin and glowing, emerald eyes sat cross-legged; in her lap, she fumbled with a mangled jewelry box. The two were conspiring something absolutely wicked.