

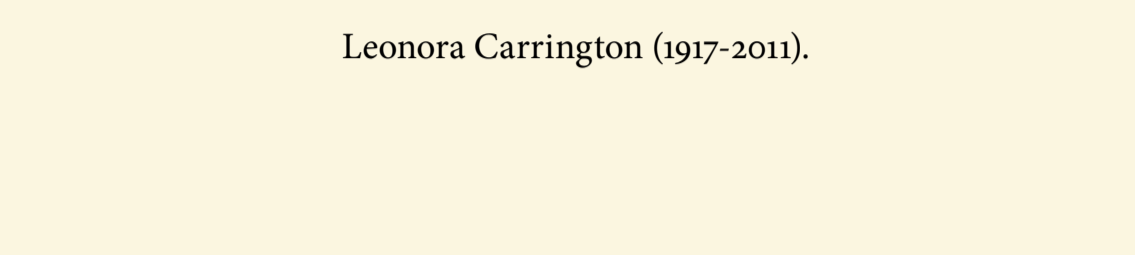
Leonora Carrington

# White Rabbits



Vertiges  
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Leonora Carrington (1917-2011).

## WHITE RABBITS

**T**HE TIME has come that I must tell the events which began in 40 Pest St. The houses which were reddish-black looked as if they had survived mysteriously from the fire of London. The house in front of my window, covered with an occasional wisp of creeper, was as blank and empty looking as any plague-ridden residence subsequently licked by flames and saliv'd with smoke. This is not the way that I had imagined New York.

It was so hot that I got palpitations when I ventured out into the streets—so I sat and considered the house opposite and occasionally bathed my sweating face.

The light was never very strong in Pest Street. There was always a reminiscence of smoke which made visibility troubled and hazy—still it was possible to study the house opposite carefully, even precisely; besides my eyes have always been excellent.

I spent several days watching for some sort of movement opposite but there was none and I finally took to undressing quite freely before my open window and doing breathing exercises optimistically in the thick Pest Street air. This must have blackened my lungs as dark as the houses. One afternoon I washed my hair and sat out on the diminutive stone crescent which served as a balcony to dry it. I hung my head between my knees and watched a blue-bottle suck the dry corpse of a spider between my feet. I looked up through my lank hair and saw something black in the sky, ominously quiet for an airplane. Parting my hair I was in time to see a large raven alight on the balcony of the house opposite. It sat on the balustrade and seemed to peer into the empty window, then poked its head under its wing apparently searching for lice. A few minutes later I was not unduly surprised to see the double windows open and admit a woman onto the balcony—she carried a large dish full of bones which she emptied onto the floor. With a short appreciative squawk, the raven hopped down and picked about amongst its unpleasant repast.

The woman, who had hemp-long black hair, wiped out the dish, using her hair for this purpose.

Then she looked straight at me and smiled in a friendly fashion. I smiled back and waved a towel. This seemed to encourage her for she tossed her head coquettishly and gave me a very elegant salute after the fashion of a queen.

“Do you happen to have any bad meat over there that you don't need?” she called.

“Any what?” I called back, wondering if my ears had deceived me.

“Any stinking meat? Decomposed flesh ... meat?”

“Not at the moment,” I replied, wondering if she was trying to be funny.

“Won't you have any towards the end of the week? If so, I would be very grateful if you would bring it over.”

Then she stepped back into the empty window and disappeared. The raven flew away. My curiosity about the house and its occupant prompted me to buy a large lump of meat the following day. I set it on the balcony on a bit of newspaper and awaited developments. In a comparatively short time the smell was so strong that I was obliged to pursue my daily activities with a paper clip on the end of my nose—occasionally, I descended into the street to breathe.

Towards Thursday evening I noticed that the meat was changing colour, so waving aside a flight of numerous bluebottles, I scooped it into my sponge bag and set out for the house opposite. I noticed, descending the stairs, that the landlady seemed to avoid me. It took me some time to find the front door of the house opposite. It turned out to be hidden under a cascade of smutty ivy, giving the impression that nobody had been either in or out of this house for years. The bell was of the old-fashioned kind that you pull, and, pulling it harder than I intended, it came right off in my hand. I gave the door an angry push and it caved inwards emitting a ghastly smell of putrid woodwork.

The woman herself came rustling down the stairs carrying a torch.

“How do you do? How do you do?” she murmured ceremoniously, and I was surprised to notice that she wore an ancient and beautiful dress of green silk. But as she approached me I saw that her skin was dead white and glittered as though speckled with thousands of minute stars.

“Isn't that kind of you?” she went on, taking my arm with her sparkling hand.

“Won't my poor little rabbits be pleased?”

We mounted the stairs and my companion walked so carefully that I thought she was frightened.

The top flight of stairs opened into a boudoir decorated with dark baroque furniture and red plush. The floor was littered with gnawed bones and animals' skulls.

“It is so seldom that we get a visit,” smiled the woman, “so they all scuttle off into their little corners.”

She uttered a low whistle, and, transfixed, I saw about a hundred snow-white rabbits emerge cautiously from every nook, their large pink eyes fixed unwinkingly upon the woman.

“Come, pretty ones—come, pretty ones,” she cooed, diving her hand into my sponge bag and pulling out a handful of rotting meat.

With a sensation of deep disgust I backed into a corner and saw her throwing the carrion amongst the rabbits which fought like wolves for it.

“One becomes very fond of them,” the woman went on, “they each have their little ways. You would be surprised how very individual rabbits are.”

The rabbits in question were tearing at the meat with their sharp buck teeth.

“We eat them, of course, occasionally. My husband makes a very tasty stew every Saturday night.”

Then a movement in the corner caught my attention and I realized that there was a third person in the room. As the woman's torch light touched his face I saw he had glittering skin like tinsel on a Christmas tree. He was dressed in a red gown and sat very rigidly with his profile turned towards us.

He seemed to be as unconscious of our presence as that of a large buck rabbit which sat masticating a chunk of meat on his knee.

The woman followed my gaze and chuckled, “That is my husband, the boys used to call him Lazarus.”

At the sound of this familiar name he turned his face towards us and I saw that he wore a bandage over his eyes.

“Ethel?” he enquired in a rather thin voice. “I won't have any visitors here. You know quite well that I have forbidden it strictly.”

“Now Laz, don't start carrying on.” Her voice was plaintive. “You can't grudge me a little bit of company. It's twenty-odd years since I've seen a new face. Besides she's brought meat for the rabbits.”

She turned and beckoned me to her side. “You want to stay with us, do you not, my dear?”

I was suddenly clutched by fear and I wanted to get out and away from those terrible silver people and the white carnivorous rabbits.

“I think I must be going. It is supper time.”

The man on the chair gave a shrill peal of laughter, terrifying the rabbit on his knee, which sprang to the floor and disappeared.

The woman thrust her face so near to mine that her sickly breath seemed to anaesthetize me. “Do you not want to stay and become like us?”

I stumbled and ran, choking with horror; some unholy curiosity made me look over my shoulder as I reached the front door and I saw her waving her hand over the bannister, and as she waved, her fingers fell off and dropped to the ground like shooting stars.

END

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