ATLAS & QUILL
Independent Publisher of Literary Fiction

Subject: Becca Arbor
Regarding: Wasteland
Territory: World English

AUTHOR INTERVIEW — PRESS KIT

The Woman Behind the Pseudonym

BECCA ARBOR DOESN'T WANT YOU TO KNOW WHO SHE IS. SHE'D RATHER YOU MEET BRENDAN CHILDS FIRST.

She won't do video calls. She won't confirm a city, though she'll admit, almost carelessly, that it isn't Los Angeles. This conversation took place over a series of emails across ten days — some answers arriving within the hour, one taking four days and coming back three sentences shorter than the question. What follows has been lightly edited for length. Nothing has been softened.

Let's start with the obvious. Why hide?

Because the moment you know who I am, you stop reading Brendan and start reading me. You start hunting for the autobiography in it. Which one is Zoe. Which one is Bateman. I'd rather you sit with the discomfort of not being able to do that. It's better for the book. It might not be better for me.

People are going to assume the worst — or the most interesting, depending on who you ask. That you've lived some version of this.

They can assume what they like. I'll say this once: I know this world from the inside, not as a tourist and not as a victim. That's the whole disclosure you're getting. Everything else is Brendan's.

Brendan Childs is, by any reasonable measure, a monster. Was there a moment writing him where you had to stop and check yourself?

No. That's probably the more disturbing answer, isn't it. I never once thought “this is too far,” because Brendan doesn't think that either, and I needed to stay inside his logic, not mine. The moments that unsettled me weren't the violence. It was how *reasonable* it felt to him. How little ceremony there was. You write enough of that and you start understanding the appeal of a life with no ceremony in it either.

The book refuses to punish him. No comeuppance, no moral reckoning — he's simply told to leave. Was that ever going to end differently?

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People keep asking me to explain that as a choice, like there was a draft where Brendan gets arrested and I pulled it out at the last minute for shock value. There wasn't. Consequence, in his world, doesn't look like a courtroom. It looks like being quietly moved somewhere else, still rich, still beautiful, still completely unaccountable. That's the actual punishment for people like him — nothing happens. I wanted readers to sit in that. Not to be told it's wrong. To feel how wrong it is that nothing happens.

You've said before that you're not asking readers to approve of him. But you're asking us to spend a hundred and seventy-some pages inside his head, wanting things alongside him. That's a different kind of complicity.

It is. That's the book. If you finish it and you're comfortable, I didn't do my job. I'm not interested in a serial killer novel where the killer is safely, legibly evil from page one — that lets everyone off the hook too early. Brendan is charming before he's anything else. He's funny. He notices things beautifully. That's not an accident and it's not a trick. That's what it actually looks like, most of the time, before anyone finds out.

Let's talk about the title. "Wasteland" — is that Los Angeles, or is that Brendan?

Both, and I'd resist picking one, because the whole book is arguing they're the same thing. He didn't create that world. That world made him and then handed him a knife.

Is there anyone in your own life who's read the manuscript and recognized something they shouldn't have?

[No response to this question.]

Fair. Last one — Motherland is coming. Without giving anything away, does Brendan get worse, or does the world around him finally catch up?

I'll tell you the honest answer, which is that I don't think about it as "worse." Worse implies a ceiling. What I'm interested in for Book Two is what happens when someone with no ceiling finally runs into a wall he didn't build himself. That's all I'll give you.

Wasteland is published by Atlas & Quill and is available now through Amazon and independent booksellers via Ingram. Motherland, the second novel in the Wasteland trilogy, is forthcoming.

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