

THE SIGNIFICANT OTHERNESS

What made me the person that I was? What got me started? I liked to watch others. I didn't have a life of my own. I could get turned on by things that they did. I could get off by things that they did to themselves. They became my pleasure.

My role was an imposition. I used it to my advantage. I didn't see myself as a threat. I simply did what seemed necessary. Others tried to blame me for ruining their lives. I didn't want to hurt anyone. I just needed to make sure that no one hurt themselves.

I encouraged people to give themselves completely to me. I would live off of their gift. But I could give nothing in return. It wasn't a flaw. It was simply my role.

She had entered my field of vision. She was young. That did not matter. She wanted me to do it for her. I was willing to offer her my assistance.

She was rather inexperienced. She was afraid of getting hurt. But her suffering was the basis of her pleasure. If others had used her in the past, that was not my business. I was not here to rescue her.

She wanted to learn how to feel more pleasure. There was something taboo in my offer. I was not afraid to violate the bounds of decency. I wanted to live dangerously. I didn't want to exist in books. I wanted the real thing. If that was foolhardy, so be it!

I reminded her of past indiscretions. I took advantage of her weakness. But I was not a part of her past. So I could not be held accountable for things that I did not do.

She loved me for who I was; she hated me for who I was not. It was that simple. It tore her apart. But she needed to feel that way. I had my reasons. I couldn't share everything with her. There were things that I knew that would have destroyed her. I fed her in small doses. She resented my parsimony. I couldn't bless her any more.

She couldn't stay the way that she was. She found no protection in her modesty. The lesson was cruel. Once she gave in to her desires, there was no return. But she could barely survive while she was so exposed.

It was hardly my intent to hide the truth from her. But I did not want to renew the brutality that had overcome her. I did what I could to sustain myself. Our connection was too selfish to guarantee any sort of mutual respect. We both stole what we could from the other.

Afterwards, she felt drained. And I could not dwell on what had happened. She had given me what was needed. And she had no idea where to draw the limit so she was never able to fulfill her own needs. That was not my problem.

I had observed her for a long while before I did what had to be done. If I was sacrificing her for my pleasure, I regretted that end. I could not have done anything more.,

She put herself out there. I took what she offered. When I asked for more, she gave it freely.

She became familiar to me. I never wanted to pretend that I had somehow absconded with her soul. But I got to know her very well. This allowed her to become familiar with herself. If this became difficult for her, I was willing to help. She would often attempt to hide from herself. Her lessons were so onerous that they seemed to plague. I did what I could to help her along. I never told her what to do. But I was a very firm guide. I would not waver in my requests. There were times that she enjoyed having such a clear direction to her life.

Nevertheless, she was afraid of losing herself completely.

She frightened me when she tried to deny our connection. I knew her too well to allow her to escape from me.

I studied mathematics in college. I also had a job teaching math part time. I was good. I spent all my spare time watching my neighbor. I could figure out what she would be doing at any time of the day. I had made a graph on my computer. I could even account for all her idiosyncracies. If she decided to go to the mall, I could figure it out in advance. I knew everything about her.

With my computer program, I could predict when she would be alone in her room. She was a silly girl. She'd leave her curtains open. I could watch her dressing. She would never see me. I got to know her intimately. I knew her every curve. Her image had been burned on my brain. If I was watching her, and I closed my eyes, I could create an image inside my head that was completely continuous with what she was actually doing. She lived inside me.

I would sit for hours watching her. I would watch her read. I would watch her get ready for her shower. I would watch her cut her nails. I would watch her eat. I knew everything about her.

She wanted to bring boys up to her room. She never did. But I would watch her get naked with herself. I saw things about her that no one knew about. She would be totally ashamed if she found out. But she shared with me without any sense of embarrassment. When she was alone in her room, she was never modest. I knew that she was a dirty girl.

I started to look at her by accident. She came out of the shower one day. And I kept staring at her breasts. She let me watch her. That gave me the impression that what I was doing was OK. I wouldn't stop there. I liked to watch her. She never took any precautions. She just let me.

If I looked at her long enough, I could almost imagine touching her. She would thrill to my touch. It would bring her body alive. She would beg me to touch her. She might be afraid to touch herself. But if I was doing to touch, there was no shame. She could blame me for being a pervert. This weird guy did these things to me. He made me do these things that I didn't want to do. But she loved every minute of it.

My touch would get her so excited. I could sense that was aroused. I was so overwhelmed. I could smell the soap that she used in the shower. I loved the scent of her shampoo. That freshness of wet skin turned me on. It made me crazy. I wanted to rush to her side.

Sometimes, I would get even more daring. She loved danger. I tried to be as chaste as possible. But it would be hard to control myself. And she liked it nasty. If she wanted to spread her legs and let me look inside of her, it only made me more insane. This was how she liked it even if she would deny it afterwards. That was why she was so scary. She suggested things that would even scandalize me. She wouldn't even give it a second thought. She'd be off gratifying herself. And she always needed someone to blame. That was why she was an exhibitionist.

She would lick those big lips of hers. Then she would rub her fingers around and get them nice and wet. She would even blow me kisses. I knew that I was doing the right thing.

To everyone else, she pretended to be a prim and proper girl. But I knew her true nature. All she cared about was getting off. There was nothing else that mattered. I made sure that I

would be there to witness those nasty episodes of hers. Without my attendance, she would never be able to reach the heights of pleasure. I never interfered with what was going on. What she did was totally of her making. But she knew that I would approve.

Behind those doors, she was a monster. Her mother pretended that she had raised an upstanding girl. Little did she know.

Despite her youth, she prided herself on her ability to answer my arguments.

I claimed, "These are only my fantasies. I've never actually acted out any of these desires."

"Your fantasies are so bizarre that their formulation itself is a way of acting them out."

"There is a separation between the idea and the thing."

"Your ideas require some kind of representation so that you can even make sense of what you are talking about. Like a picture. Just to create the picture requires a model: the tortured person."

I countered her, "You can have the idea of suffering without making another person suffer."

"But you are basing your viewpoint on actual contact with suffering. Ultimately, you are defending torture."

"I am simply saying that suffering may be part of the learning experience."

"For you, it's not just a part. Suffering is the only experience that you consider to be valid."

I fought back, "But the only reason that you feel so negatively towards my point of view is because you can't get over your own personal trauma. In the end, both our arguments are the same."

"There is a difference. You embrace the suffering. Then you claim that it is only there for dramatic effect."

"There is a difference between entertainment and reality."

"Entertainment is simply the first step to the imposition of your reality."

"I'm not defending whipping people. But someone may learn something about himself having suffered a whipping."

"Despite your pretense, you're not really that concerned with learning in the abstract. You are more obsessed with imposing your will."

"I can watch you get dressed in your window. That doesn't mean that I'm going to crawl in there and assault you."

"But I don't want you watching me. That's offensive enough to me."

"Is there anything wrong with fantasizing seeing you naked?"

"Not in and of itself. But that isn't where it stops for you. You need to create a story to go along with your feeling. And in that story, it's you who is sitting outside my window looking in."

"I find you attractive."

"I don't want to be seen in that way."

"Would it be wrong to let me watch if that was what you wanted?"

"You are assuming that there is a pre-existing agreement. But you really have no interest in obtaining my consent. You just want to watch. And if you can convince your listener that it's

fun to watch, then the real argument about consent gets ignored.”

“But you look great in a tight dress.”

“You’re making me suffer!”

“Is the dress too tight?”

“Not at all. It’s not about the dress.”

“Is it about my fantasy?”

“It’s not about the distinction between fantasy or reality. You want the right to look in to my window without my permission. And you’ll use any excuse to justify your actions. And when you get caught, you claim that it’s all fantasy.”

“We all like to play games!”

“I don’t want to play your games.”

“You don’t realize the fun.”

“I am not having any fun!”

“You’re not playing fair. This is all good-natured. I get turned on watching you. And you get turned on by the fact that you can turn me on.”

“I’m not playing along!”

“It makes you feel special. You have all these doubt about yourself. And you get over your feelings of confusion when someone complements you.”

“The sword can also cut both ways. You make one nasty remark about me, and I am devastated for the rest of the day.”

“You’re ruining the joke by giving away the punchline too early.”

“Either way, it’s never funny.”

“Ritual creates its own truth. You put on a costume, you get on stage, and you make the audience laugh.”

“Or you’re mocked by a frustrated playwright, and you’re supposed to endure the mockery in silence because it’s all for the good of the art.”

“It’s not to be taken that cruelly.”

“How do you ever know how it is supposed to be taken?”

“You have to know your audience.”

“You are trying to pay off the audience with flattery. It’s easy to pander to them. Get the girls to show a little skin! And when one of them complains, you say it’s because of her bad childhood.”

“That probably is the reason after all.”

“But if it was, you would just say that she’s taking things too seriously. You have them coming and going.”

“Once you’re actually in the shit, then it’s all different. You don’t worry about your philosophical origins.”

“No, you just learn how to float like you’re doing.”

“Thanks for the complement.”

I was having a lot of trouble excusing my past offenses. And my complements weren’t really paying off with her.

“I don’t like to be watched.”

“You spend half the day sitting in front of a mirror. Now you’re telling me that you don’t

like to be watched.”

“I’m watching the mirror so that I can subtract that image from the world.”

“How is that?”

“Now you see it, now you don’t.”

“So you don’t mind me taking a peek now and then.”

“Tell me what are you seeing. You want to see my naked breasts, or you want to stare at my ass in a pair of tight jeans.”

“Sounds like you understand what I am about.”

“That is all that you are about.”

“There’s this creep who lives next door who is looking in my window.”

“Have you caught him?”

“I’m sure that I saw him peeking in.”

“Have you told your mother?”

“I haven’t told anyone.”

“You need to call the police.”

“I don’t want them asking me all kinds of questions. I feel as if I led him on.”

“You’ve never been in his house, have you?”

“No, never.”

“You seem hesitant. Are you sure?”

“I can’t be a hundred per cent certain about anything.”

“I think that he is relying on your uncertainty.”

“You mean he thinks that I won’t tell.”

“Are you going to tell someone?”

“I’ve told you.”

“What about the police?”

“If I was totally certain, then I would tell the police.”

“Why do you at all feel uncertain?”

“I’m not sure that it’s him.”

“First, you were uncertain if you had been to his house. Now you’re uncertain if it’s him. He’s working to make you feel uncomfortable about yourself.”

“I do feel bad about myself. I have no idea what is happening to me.”

“That is what he does. He preys on a girl’s weakness. So she doesn’t dare report him.”

“I’m ready to tell all.”

“But you really have nothing to tell. Without certainty, your testimony can be broken down in no time.”

“I don’t know what to do.”

“You have to review in your mind what happened.”

“I don’t like to think about it.”

“He makes you afraid to confront him.”

“I’m not sure what to say.”

“That is how he works. He tries to whittle away at your self-confidence.”

“How do you know this so well?”

“I have seen him in action.”

“Do you think that we can stop him.”

“Truth is the best enemy against him. If others know what he is about, he can’t work his magic on them.”

“We are fighting against something magical.”

“That is how some people view it.”

“What are you saying?”

“That it’s beyond the self. That is why he is so hard to defeat. He’s not just about one idea or one thing.”

“He sounds like a vampire.”

“That is almost his nature.”

“Can he walk through walls?”

“He can do anything that we allow him to do.”

I watched her walk by my place with her dog. It gave me an idea. I would steal her dog.

“Did you see those signs up about my dog?”

“I haven’t seen him.”

“I’m sure that my neighbor has him.”

“Did you see him take her?”

“No, but I am sure.”

“Have you heard a dog barking.”

“I think that he killed her.”

“That is hideous.”

“He is a monster. He gives me nightmares.”

“What is his name?”

“My neighbor? I don’t know his name. No one does. But he’s crazy. He’s mean to little children. He took my dog.”

I was lucky that she suspected her neighbor. She had no idea who I was.

“I saw your ad for a lost dog. I found him.”

“I hear her barking in the background. Can I stop by and get Evie.”

“Sure, you can. Let me give you the address.”

I was lucky that Evie didn’t bite me. I plied her with peanut butter treats.

“Evie a lovely dog.”

“She sure is.”

“Thanks for finding her. Here’s the hundred dollars that I promised you.”

“How can I be sure that you’re the rightful owner?”

“You dialed my number.”

“Right. How old are you?”

“I’m eighteen.”

“Do you like to get high?”

“I’m not that kind of girl.”

“Everyone like to get high.”

“I don’t like drugs and drinking. I just like Evie. Don’t I, girl?”

“Drugs make you mellow out. You seem nervous.”

“I don’t want to be mean. But I don’t even know who you are.”

“My name is Brian.”

“Well, Brian, I still know who you are. You just seem weird to me. I have to go.”

“But if I really was strange, don’t you think that I would have done something to you ahead?”

“I really need to go. Let’s go, Evie.”

I felt as if I had wasted my time with the dog. I had a hundred dollars to show for my troubles. That was nothing.

“Hold on a second. I’m a nice guy. I can get you a Coke.”

“That’s fine.”

“You look like you’re hot. You could use a drink.”

“I’ve got money. I can get a drink for myself.”

“Don’t go yet. There’s something that I need to tell you. You look really pretty.”

“Thanks, now please unlock the door so that I can leave.”

“I didn’t get you to come all this way, so that you could duck on me like this.”

“Where do I know you from?”

“You don’t know me. I found your dog, and that is that.”

“I should have called the police after you called me.”

“But you didn’t.”

“I’ve got your number on caller ID.”

“And where’s your phone? In your purse.”

She had no way out. And I wasn’t ready to unlock the door.

“Is this how you meet girls? What is wrong with you?”

“I’ve tried to be friendly. I’ve tried to be a nice guy. But people are afraid of me.”

“You’re a fucking weirdo.”

“You don’t have to get rude with me.”

“You’re the rude one. You stole my dog. Now you’re locking me in your house.”

“You can leave if you want.”

“I want to leave.”

“No, you can’t leave until you apologize for being so mean.”

“Now, you’re lying to me.”

“Apologize.”

“I’m not going to apologize. You’re crazy. Let me out of here. I’m going to call the police.”

“Call them. Your phone isn’t going to work in here.”

“OK, I don’t want to get mad. But I came here to get my dog. I paid you the reward. Now let me leave!”

“You have to promise not to call the police.”

“You haven’t done anything wrong.”

“I haven’t done anything wrong yet. But I have no idea what you are going to tell police.”

“I’m not going to tell the police anything. You are going to open the door like a nice man. I am going to take my dog and leave.”

“You can’t make me let you out.”

“I told my mother that I was coming down here.”

“No, you didn’t. You’re not that kind of girl. You think that you’re independent. A grown up. You don’t have to tell your mother anything.”

“I am grown up. And I don’t get high. And I told my mother that I was coming here to get my dog.”

“Prove it to me. Show me where it said on your phone that you dialed your mother’s number after you dialed mine.”

“I don’t have to dial my mother’s number. I live with her. If you’ve been watching me, creep, you should know that!”

“You’re making this up as you go along.”

“I don’t know where you think you live. But everyone knows who you are. And if anybody thinks that you did something to me, they will find you, and they will hurt you.”

“No one knows you’re here. If you scream, no one will hear you. No one cares about you. Your mother hates you.”

“No, she doesn’t. She will find me.”

“Grow up, girl. You’re here alone with me.”

“I’m sorry that I was mean to you. Now let me take my dog and go.”

I unlocked the door.

“You give me just enough to tempt me, but not enough to let me escape.”

“Does that make us good for each other?”

“We are terrible for each other. But we have learned to stay together.

“You are the one who is complaining about me.”

“I never wanted to do any of this in the first place.”

“Why have you obliged me?”

“You were insistent.”

“Is that all that it took?”

“I wasn’t sure what was going to happen next.”

“Are you sure now?”

“I am more uncertain. And just as afraid.”

“You could do something to get rid of me. You could just leave.”

“You would only come after me.”

“You can never put enough distance between us.”

“You keep telling me that I like what we are doing.”

“Do you like it?”

“I feel that I have never known any different.”

“If you did know something different, what would you do?”

“I would rebel.”

“Go ahead. Take a chance.”

“It is too late for me to take any chances. You are already wise to what I am doing.”

“Surprise me.”

“I have already tried. I am going around on treadmill.”

“It’s that predictable.”

“It’s worse. Each time that I go around, I suffer even more.”

“But you enjoy it.”

“If I did, I would say that I pleasure myself.”

“You don’t pleasure yourself.”

“I have lost my ability to feel good about myself.”

“You feel good feeling bad.”

“I don’t want to sound so shallow. There’s more to my life. But you won’t let me venture far enough to figure that out.”

“What is there to figure out?”

“Why I like what is destroying me?”

“You’re a masochist!”

“I’m not so easily amused.”

“But you like your pain.”

“No, I don’t. That is all that you will let me feel. So I have to make the best of a bad situation.”

“And that is good.”

“That is what it is. I do what I have to make me feel good.”

“You’re such a cynic.”

“You won’t let me feel anything else.”

She continued to argue against me. If she could defeat my argument, then I no longer would be able to exercise any control over her. She has finally dispelled the ghosts from her past.

“Imagine if we had been intimate.”

“What are you telling me? You repulse me. You would have had to force me to do your bidding.”

“I don’t feel comfortable with the idea of force.”

“That’s because you’re not the one who’s being forced. But if it’s something that you really want, you wouldn’t hesitate to do the forcing.”

“I can’t imagine that I would do something like that.”

“That doesn’t mean that you didn’t do it. It just means that you’ve done your best to revise that memory.

“And you haven’t done the same?”

She felt uncomfortable with my question. We were getting too close to the actual events.

“If you had forced me, I wouldn’t tell myself that it was all right simply so that I could deal with the hurt.”

“Are you saying that people do that?”

“All the time. They tell themselves that it’s all part of life.”

“And it wasn’t part of life.”

“Not in my view. There are some things that happen that are simply intolerable.”

“Like that fact that we were together.”

“It’s not a fact. It never happened.”

“But you’re trying to put all those experiences out of your mind. Your pretending those ideas aren’t controlling your life.”

“An idea can’t control my life if I don’t want it to.”

“If you find something pleasurable, then you can’t live without that level of stimulation.”

“Yes, I can. I accustom myself to another level of enjoyment. Or I become excited about something else.”

“Yeah, that is possible. But if you are in the presence of the same stimulus, the old feelings could take hold.”

“You could be holding me close, and I’m still not going to feel anything for you.”

“You don’t know that for sure.”

“I know it deep in my heart. And nothing that you do to force me is going to change that feeling. If you tried to change me, I would only resent what you did.”

“You’re afraid to admit that I know everything about you. And under the right circumstances, you would come around.”

“I’m not just clay that you can mold as you like. I have a soul. I’m my own person.”

“You just tell yourself that because you don’t want to admit that you’re governed by forces out of your control.”

“I don’t feel that happening. The only force emanates from you.”

“I feel as if I know what you’re going to do even before you’ve made up your mind.”

“You may be able to predict now and then. But it’s still not you who is making the decision. I am. I see the evidence, and I do what I think is best.”

“Most of the time, we’re not so deliberate. You just do what comes naturally.”

“So be it. But it is still me who is deciding.”

She pulled the curtains and hung up the phone,. The conversation was over!

I had thought about my experiences with her. Had she already given me enough to work with? All that I needed to do was prime my imagination, and I would be totally convinced that we had been together.

“These are memories that I have.”

“I have wracked my brain, and I still don’t know what you’re talking about. I can’t remember ever being with you.”

“It happened again and again.”

“I still can’t remember.”

“Don’t you find yourself doing things that you regret later?”

“We all do.”

“I’m talking about things that you are mortified about.”

“Just because I feel terrible about something doesn’t tell me what I feel terrible about. I might have said something to you that I wanted to take back. Or I might have realized that things were getting too serious between us. But that doesn’t mean that I ever touched you.”

“This is like one of those trick drawings. You don’t have any idea whether it’s a duck or a rabbit. It’s all about how you turn the picture.”

“What are you saying now?”

“I’m not sure which one of us is saying what.”

“You’re saying that you touched me, and I’m saying that you didn’t.”

“You’re saying that I touched you, and I’m saying that I didn’t.”

“Which way do you want it to me?”

“I want to touch you now!”

“Can’t someone tell me who is talking? Am I her or him?”

“How do you want it to be? I can touch you. But you can’t touch me. That way you can deny that you did anything. Someone did something to me.”

“Someone did do something to me. And it messed you up.”

“Someone did touch you. He got you used to being touched like that. These were a bunch of different experiences. Eventually you found them all pleasurable. You got over your displeasure, and you wanted to be touched like that.”

“Is that who I’m always going to be. That’s part of my identity. I have to admit to enjoying things that I know down deep are wrong. My whole life is about being forced to enjoy something that really disgusts me.”

“You can grow sick and tired of things that you once cherished.”

“Who are you? You’re the one who will always deny that did something to someone else. It’s just my perception of what happened. You are constantly revising your story.”

“I just want things to turn out right in the end.”

“So you sit across from my window and stare at me.”

“You appear exactly at the moment that you know that I’m there. And you do all these nasty things right in front of me.”

“I didn’t invite you to look into my window.”

“But every time that I look, you’re doing these really sexy things. You want an audience.”

“You’ve somehow timed your looking to coincide with me being there. But that doesn’t mean that I want you to watch.”

“The coincidence must be based on something besides the simple fact that I’m sitting there watching.”

“Yeah, you’ve studied me like a lab animal, and you’ve learned my habits.”

“It’s more than that. I know who you really are. No one can understand you like I do.”

“I don’t want to be understood in that way. Who do you think that you are? God?”