

Do you want me to do this to you—for you?  
You want it. As if you had nothing to do with it, and it just happened.  
But you've been thinking it all the time. In the back of your mind.  
This is the invitation of the lover.

You want to put those other implications out of your mind. Mornings spent with bank statements. Following the lead of accounts. Every embrace of number with column so obvious and obtrusive.

I can lead you to a land of mystery.

Afraid that you have seen all the sinuous twists. Or the turns of love might take you back to your monotonous quarrel with the number.

You crave a forbidden pleasure. Where your shame makes you hide your face in a false modesty.

—Why are you hiding your face? You have a beautiful face. The curl of your smile.

—I love to smile at you. You are perfect for me. What I need to hear now.

But you are afraid of the seducer's art. That you might fall under the same spell that held you in your melancholy. Where love has the same awakening for you but what follows is only automatic.

The magic can only enliven the skin that same way for so long. Then the warm breath only makes your flesh crawl in its nauseating moistness.

You imagine his breath as dry—more direct. There is not the lingering in stale kisses. When you accept his kisses, every fiber in you will come alive.

“Haven't I been through this before?”

This.

You have been through this. The hope that one kiss could open sunshine to the decay of your spirit. Light might wash these ruins of extinct promise and hopeless longing.

—Did you hear that?

But who can hear that in this chamber of betrayal.

Has the bed been turned down? Are you ready for bed? But this sleep signals a twinge of regret. That it wouldn't be any different whether you slept together or you slept alone.

That the touch of sleep, another's sleep is only an interference into your descent into

your darkness. Better to sleep alone and shut out this pretense.

This nether world which might offer words that you have not even formed. Or a touch that anticipates the quaking of your morning.

The mirror signals how your fantasy has been dashed. But you rub your hand along the silver hoping for the appearance of the lover. Only to throw some magic dust and he is there for you.

You lie on the bed. Alone this night. Or almost alone. You are irritable. Not wanting to pursue this fog, you let it hang before you. Reaching out in its obscurity you can almost savor a caress—like a breeze that wafts the thick of your back. You shiver from its intensity.

What was that?

What was that? But could any touch, could anyone sustain that overwhelming presence? Getting lost in the fumbling of passion. Lost in a delta of intersecting melodies and conflicting desires.

If you want to receive this much pleasure, you have to give so much pleasure. Prostrate and weak, you feel like you have given everything that has held you together.

You haven't. A part of you, That ounce of flesh inside. Inside the inside.

And you wore it outside. And felt it become worn out. Still.

You needed that scintilla of affection, or affection not given so you could defend yourself against your affair with the night. A conflict that you wrestled with yourself just to endure.

“Kiss me now!”

Kiss me there. And your body turned inside now. Afraid that you could not protect a part that would say lover be with me. I want you alone.

Or would speak your name.

A new name. Maybe changing your name to one that had not been besmirched with rusted kisses. Your lover would know your new name without you even having to say it to him. He would read it on your skin.

“L, come to me.”

OR

“Lover...”

Hadn't you heard it like that before? Always before in the ardor of the first kisses when the gold would first charm the light.

Now you knew what was the change. When the first caresses lasted for days. When just contemplating their urgency sent a shudder across your body. It brought the touch to life, and you felt a hand brush across your body.

Now you have given in to the ambiguities of your own touch. But the shiver of paradise only emphasizes how far you are from that liberating embrace.

Long ago, you had felt love speed through the atmosphere and crash into the depths of the ocean. You had felt the tugging of these waters, felt it like a pain in your stomach. A twinge until you could be reunited with your dream, now fallen from the sky.

You had stitched together these veils to mask your longing, your mourning. Your lover could wade through these layers like promises, vows to your devotion to shadow, to free you from your isolation

“Don't speak here. Let your touch speak for you.”

The embrace of the lover like that enveloping of death, to calm you and cast off your burdens.

“Kiss me here.”

But the veils only became tatters. The bed of another only made you wonder.

“Where am I?”

You needed to warm yourself against the freeze of solitude.

Why did I ever show you these things?

You feared a love that asked you to disrobe again and again.

Stop. Please stop.

OR

“Put these on so you can take them off.”

And what you take off and put on and look at is nothing like you were. You see only the angles of these costumes and shadow of a shadow.

“I’ve become a whore. Just putting on different faces for different faces.”

And the only reminders are in the flesh.

What do I take so I won’t feel this pain, this deep pain inside?

“Let me kiss you.”

That echo...

You never noticed that the room had this echo.

Let me take this, swallow something, swallow my will so that I can feel the ripple of those first kisses.

In the first kisses, you gave so much of yourself. You brought pictures. See that is me. You wanted the kiss to say, to speak for that ocean of trouble.

A lover who might answer back in his look, in his kiss.

“I don’t want the words. I want the spark so fast that you cannot deny what I feel.”

–I need you to promise.

And NOW! You.

It is you who is contemplating breaking this promise. Breaking by hurting, because you have felt the betrayal. Felt it all along. But felt the kisses promise.

–I promise.

And you were so good holding yourself to. Nights crisscrossed with jealousy and suspicion. Nothing specific, just the fatigue of solitude.

And when the words did not come. You stopped expecting. Deeds. Gestures of intimacy. And sweets.

“We both like the same things.”

And you felt your hunger sated. What ravaged the body, you could taste in the flesh and it made you wild.

“Don’t stop me!”

–Wait.

–You were never tender this way. I could never imagine tenderness this way.

You had found your lover, found beyond the wait.

Now.

You remember depths unsounded and kisses not evoked.

Kiss me now!

Who can assume this vocation?

–I need time to write.

–You can write in your sleep. You just have to take the time to write your dreams down.

OR

–I need time to write to you.

–Just make sure no one catches you.

But you enjoy this fear.

“We are together. All other couplings only strip flesh from the bone. I can’t last the night without your touch.”.

Dinner reassures you. You can forget what might have disturbed your rest.

A bad dream.

–Aren’t you hungry?

–I was.

Ravaged by boy time.

The night will not focus. You need to see more or touch more.

–I have learned to touch the shadows.

–I’ve heard that story before.

OR

–Tell it to me so I can do it too. How can I help?

What can he tell you different? Words from a lover still unheard.

You seek a lover who might betray your enslavement to the daylight. To guide you through the veils of disbelief.

Your hand works its way around a pyramid of light. Your touch gives form to a

nocturnal desire.

Your hope, that a tangible form might inhabit this cluster of light. Or a kiss might say.

Ordinary kisses. Or kisses accompanied by the green light.

Absinthe or the taste of mint.

"I'll try anything once. At least think about it—just a swallow."

Looking for a friend. Someone to hold what you can hold.

What?

This is no ordinary desire.

For a reminder in the flesh. Who can answer back for this displeasure? That the night could talk back in the flesh.

One kiss.

Afraid of the sum. Of the minutes adding up. A darkness apparent between the moments.

—Turn on some music. I want to hear some noise.

The same song. Make it louder.

—I want to borrow that new CD of yours. How it sounds for you. I'd like it to sound the same way for me.

—Buy your own copy.

—Huh!

Little things to get mad at.

"I don't want you getting in my head. Not now."

He will be staring straight ahead, waiting for you to come into his glance.

"I've been waiting for you."

Or you have been waiting for him guided by him.

You have waited, and you have know that he will arrive. He will arrive.

It's would be wrong to go along with him. But you are waiting for him to take you away.

"I need to take you away."

You won't feel the change, won't feel it coming over you.

“I want to feel better, better than I do today.”

–I’m having fun today.

–Let me get you another ice cream.

–Thanks.

Do you like coffee-flavored ice cream? And you wish that you could fit in, that you could enjoy all this fun.

For now you do.

–I think that I’m already too cold for ice cream. Or I wanted chocolate, but now... After eating the coffee. I can’t get the flavor out of me.

You can’t let yourself go wrong again. Before the touch was tainted. Left you awake wondering how you could burn away the stain..

“Can you see it in my face? Do you know what I’m thinking?”

So many days of hiding and no one can know...or when they do...

“Please stop.”

–Maybe this isn’t such a good idea. I don’t really want to think about such things now...I’m just trying to relax. There’s too much ahead to worry about...

3:04A.M.

“I don’t belong here. Not in this place.”

A while ago you had spent the night in a blacker doubt. Where shadows pass over you but you cannot touch.

“I’m never going to sleep in this fog.”

All this effort wasted on a soured caress.

In this early morning, you cannot touch your wonder.

–What is a sign? How can we end it all?

“If I end it all, just before I go, I might get that clarity that has escaped me for so long.”

Red marks on the skin.

Your ambitions.

–I want you to come with me.  
 –I don't know you. Don't know what you want..  
 –I see in your face, a longing.

OR

–Are you having a bad dream?

“They can't hurt me here.”

You needed a place to hide.

–You're only making it harder on yourself.

Then the visitation. Words without a voice. Is this the touch in the night?

–I have come for you.

This is not the moment that you expected.

–I am your very own.

OR

–He is coming for you.

Close the windows. Close all the windows.

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As long as you had intimacy with your own evil, you had no need to surrender to your doubts. Kisses were free and flowing. But their appeal seized the spirit. A haze lay suspended before the eyes. You were enticed to progress further. You sought the assurances of a lover. In contrary motion was your apprehension at the nakedness of your own desire. Guilt was not an abstraction but a rush of the blood and a pang in the stomach. The same hunger that made you a prisoner in your own body excited you by the pull of the flesh. Your turmoil made your faith real. You could taste sin. You wanted it. You shuddered at its presence. You felt sick thinking about the physical act. You felt fascination how one feeling could captivate you and make you forget everything else. You felt damned.

To get caught up in your own desire insured that you could remain blessed. Only to a point could you feel the embrace, the caress, the contact of another's lips as real. They only were an entryway to a promise, some future of onrushing waters. More than the closeness of skin to skin, you sought the echo of his words. Could words reflect your hollowness, the stillness of your fear? You wanted something to fill the emptiness of your nights. But physical touch was only an illusion. Even its closeness only provoked



betrayal. No one could feel the certainty of the tides, the pull of the moon. The shrill light of the full quarter.

Worse, the night haunted you. In your solitude, a sickness held you. Any physical frailty only reflected a more elemental pain. How did you get like this? Even when you felt your own strength, a queasiness pervaded you. This trickling unease slid over your sense of self.

You had the ground to sustain your own belief. The solidity of your pain made you feel that there was something else. That there was an answer. Beyond the murkiness shone a light that beckoned. You could wash yourself in this refreshment.

Your link to illumination was transitory. Your purity could not guarantee the grip of the light. Its energy dissipated unless confronted with the density of your shame.

You needed to feel the chill of your own damnation.

The night rolled over you in the recess of the pink. Could you ever escape your sweet confinement? Any kiss would offer you respite. To push close enough to brush against your isolation. What had you done tonight, the night before. Once it all started, didn't you try to stop it. Stop it. You needed to be coaxed. You needed to be cornered by your ambiguities. Why had you let this happen? What if someone found out.

You eluded detection.

You wanted to be found out.

If you were going to get found out, you couldn't do anything about it. You wanted to make contact, to get touched in some deeper way.

Without your guilt, there was no hope of feeling this touch. All other contact would fall away. You no longer associated your doubt with the approaching night. A dusk permeated the day. A thread maintained your attachment to the shadows.

Without your guilt, you could have no moments of peace. Your guilt invited you to a time without its pressure. A free fall.

Put aside this feeling. Going along with the appeals of the flesh made you feel more empty. When they turned from you, or they tried to hold what they could not. And you stared down the dark well. What have I done, or done again?

Their words could not hold you together. Words only encouraged blame. Kept you in your place. A layer over your guilt.

You wanted to wake up from this night.

You wanted to be this night.

You knew in repulsion a constancy that could absorb your nothingness. A touch away from touch. A touch refused to you. Hence a touch promised to you. Rotten at the core meant ready for forgiveness. Totally open to an otherworldly embrace. Would you, could feel the wash of this welcome?

To be granted forgiveness meant you would have to be really mean. Only then could you feel the shock of what you had done. What had been done to you. Not to care. Just let your heart get engaged by whatever might come its way. Something so full of shame that even mercy would not be in order.

How far could you let someone else go? Not let them go. Beg for mercy. Incite anger. You knew that refusal would be met by aggression. Aggression would increase desire. Once someone else felt what you felt. Felt how appealing it would be to foul your purity. You held the prize, nurtured this. The fairest of them all. You competed with the mirror to encompass all that could attract light.

What could shock. Not just deeds. Words. Your words. To revel in your damnation.

What had you done. Again the shuddering. That you had not completely erased your doubt. The mirror haunted. The mirror delighted.

Could anyone see what was horrid in the smile?

You could not hold still to allow someone to capture your essence. You could only hold still to let them be overcome by your rotten nature.

If you got away with it. The curse. And repeated the transgression. Maybe there was nothing to this myth.

If you felt all right with your explorations, your fascination with the night.

Betray your full obsession and you lose the delight of the mirror.

Just enough to let them know, let everyone know.

So your pleading found its answer in the universal quality of your corruption. Not just one bad night. But you wanted to sneak out for many more. Until the burden of all this necessitated more mercy than available.

This was the heart of your belief. Infinity. A belief committed to a mercy beyond human comprehension. What but guilt could guarantee such being. What but the shock of evil could convince you of your intimacy with forgiveness.

You were chosen.

Nights of activity gave way to nights of reflection on your nature. Any single night was not enough. And all together, they just were a bunch of failed attempts at raising the dead.

Times would deaden your hunger. Your desire halted to zero.

You didn't want to eat.

You sought a oneness with butterflies and rushing brooks and meadows that hid their own threat.

Kisses obscured by the thick grass.

Ants and mosquitos.

The precise bites.

Would that you could be kissed in a way to quench your thirst. The thick rocks of the mountain. The risks of the waterfall. The plunge. Held below. Loss of breath.

Could there be any shame in this flow? But the roar of the waters repeated your struggle of night over night. Why had you been forsaken? What would you have to do to dirty this flow? Your own blood melting with the downstream insistence.

Like the night, the day had its places. Places protected by the sunset. Where the curves of dying light admitted the precipice and foolish dive. A shrine of rock and light.

Once you had discovered this place, you wanted your darkness to overcome it. Fumbling in the water. Kiss to kiss. Come to the waters. But no one could. He could. They could. But they would want to own this place. Steal it from you. To give it to anyone meant that it would lose its appeal for you. And you wanted to destroy it. See the oppressive heat invite decay. See the waters ravage the banks of the stream. Erode your connection of light and sparkle. To radiate this energy was to invite its sickness.

Nothing made you feel splendid. So much struck your fancy. You felt its sparkle. You saw it fade.

For a time, you needed to feel sick. Those close to you wondered what was wrong. What caused the nausea? Why were you feverish. The upset stomach. You just needed time alone. Time to heal. To heal away from everyone. Even those who wanted to care for you. Now you could make daytime night. Keep the curtains drawn. Live in utter darkness. The black chill. And the need to bundle up. Your white nightie

and your comforter pulled up over your head. Was it night time? The body heat would radiate about the room. Warmer and moist. You floated in your sickness. A prelude to dizziness.

Even if you wanted to get out of bed, you couldn't. The world was spinning for you. This was the way it must be. Like a punishment. You were meant to be alone like this and no one could penetrate this eternal night.

You couldn't eat. Couldn't hold down food. And you were becoming thinner. Even you noticed the bone clutching the skin. Elemental. This was how it had to be.

Water. You needed to drink water. You wanted to work your way back from this overpowering darkness. Maybe the sunshine would bring its promise.

You opened the curtains onto a moonless night. How had you been tricked? Your own night had gathered around you and deposed the day. Maybe your offense had been total. Banished from the light, you would never see the sun again.

Your curiosity had got the better of you. As if you could know everything without risk.

Now this!

The pain of your guilt shook you at the core. This was what you must endure for all those night of burning passion. You had burned your star away and were left with nothing.

You passed out on your bed. For the time, this guilt was too oppressive. Sleep rescued you. Pleasant dreams rescued you. You swam with dolphins.

You felt though the curtains. Morning had returned. You felt reassured. As if a prayer answered. Here was the foundation of your belief.

"I do."

You did. Up this morning on your knees in thanks, you swore to turn a new leaf. You would give yourself to the kiss of nature, and avoid the kiss of animal instinct.

For what kind of destiny had you been prepared?

A destiny without pain. You mastered the trail of the butterfly. You imitated the call of the cricket. You rode the fallen leaf in its path on the river.

You were smiling. Your fever had passed. You were no longer ambitious. You were fulfilled, now part of something.

For now.

Hadn't you done this before? Didn't the rock offer these same expectations before? For a while, you had been full of the most amazing energies. But you continued to push yourself. You wanted to know. But the fatigue returned. You had to sit down and rest. And then your doubts again crept in.

You had again been silly. Thinking that you could be enticed by these bees buzzing around your head.

You wanted to taste the honey. Not to have something to steal away made you depressed. You needed someone to lean on. To rob. To hide. To risk capture. The cycle had all its appeal. Now your mischief seemed even more inspired. You had risked perfection and lost and now you needed to bring all this down.

Again you sought destroy from within. To find a grotto of celestial light and make it burn in its own self-admiration, Perhaps an accomplice could drive you to your eventual end. Make you move your hand when you would not. Find someone to blame when you could.

Would you like to come along?

Anyone?

Or someone who would provoke your curiosity further. Promise an evil with delight. Nights of a passion to know and destroy. If you could just find such an accomplice. One who pushed too far but was easy to push away. You longed for an aggression that would rip away your mask of purity. To expose your sadistic streak. To start a fight and dispel his charm.

You know what you feared most. Your antithesis. Someone who would see through your struggle and laugh. Someone who would catch your interest, who take you over. Someone who would look face to face on your dilemma and see its simplicity as you saw it.

Someone who laughed as you laughed.

What were you coming to?

For the time being there was no threat. So you played the threat. You could not even engage a guilt sufficient to motivate your curiosity. What would sin be without its sting.

You slid along the wetness of a kiss. Not this. None of this.

The jokes were stale. No one could impress. Everything was a lie. No one could catch

you in a lie.  
Everything was a joke.

How could you rival the darkness if you were mocked by the light?

You missed your prince. But for once you had the serious intent that you had been so sorely lacking. Now you were not lost in illusion. Everything was permitted. Nothing was forbidden. In your heart of hearts you longed to blaspheme all that you held sacred. To your disbelief, you erected your new church. This was your satisfaction. You enhanced the body. In it you felt a new vigor. You fed off looks of admiration. You longed to share your excitement in your nakedness.

Where could you stop this access to pleasure? There was no stopping these drives. There no longer was shame. To give was to take.

The new code seemed so appropriate in private. But could anyone else abide by its need for respect. Respect for your curiosity. This new rule was no different than the old. You again felt yourself encroached upon by the desires of others.

A hand held too long on the skin. A grasp brushed away. A stare too invasive. A remark out of place.

A kiss lingered over and remembered when it was better forgotten

What had he got away with? You again felt skinned away.

How did you let this happen again? You needed to shower, to take something, to sleep. The old guilt returned. This time you embraced it as a new foundation.

"I'm glad it happened. So it wouldn't have to happen again."

Now you knew the night as a repetition of this same let down.

"I am sorry. I am truly sorry."

There is no place to get away now. Sleep refused to rescue you. You lay on your bed watching the ceiling, seeing in the dark. Moved by the shadows on the wall.

"I can't do anything about this. I can't. Will I ever recover from this, from this?"

Your head now heavier on the pillow.

And a nightmare would only accompany whatever sleep you planned to take. Maybe you could steal the night without having to pay loyalty to your bad feelings.

What have I been doing to myself?

There would be no sleep tonight. Shadow moving without actual movement. The darkness covered any hope of daylight.

For once you caressed the forever of night. Then you drifted into sleep.

The daytime spoke to you in the succession of its seconds. Each minute included its task. You were absorbed by its hours. An amnesia for the preceding night.

The light signaled your absolution. Never had you felt this was possible. Your recovery. When dinner came, you were hungry. You ate ravenously. Afterwards, you felt shaken. What had you eaten. Why was this stuff in you. What could you do about it? Nausea.

The night was still. The night again. The day has passed in direct movement, ticking away. The night twisted and turned against itself. Against you, there could be no onrush of time. Forever.

“I don’t feel good.”

After dinner you lay down in your clothes. But you did not want to tempt sleep, the same cycle that had entrapped you the night before.

“I want to live.”

You wanted to get pulled under by sleep. Deep sleep. You feared your own demons.

“I’ll never be able to sleep again.”

You fell asleep very quickly .

The next day you felt your heart skip a beat. The day will not obey you’re your wishes. A quarrel. You find yourself arguing with the sun or you get yourself caught in the ambiguity of the shadows.

You feel faint. You crave the beckoning shade.

The night has become your lover. Way beyond darkness, you were overtaken by its fickleness.

Faithless. This only confirmed your belief. A pin prick piercing your skin, a pain undercutting the night’s betrayal.

The phrase *crisis of faith* always seemed of curious origin to you: by its very nature faith

seemed beset by crisis. To avoid these lows, it was sometimes better not to think about the fears that your faith posed to you. But your denials only made you more than ever susceptible to breakdown before the silences of the universe.

“Maybe I’m in over my head.”

As long as the universe maintained its silence, even your lows could be ignored. A bad week. Time to move faster, not to get caught by your weaknesses. Nothing to worry about.

Even a bad month could be resolved to this opacity of the universe. Nothing too exciting, nothing too depressing.

Hardly that depressed, you could avoid self-imprisonment. Perhaps you had taken the cure.

But there is no cure. And when this realization hit, the bottom fell out.

All your past mistakes came back. Kisses that submerged the spirit, that get rubbed off before they can make their impression. How they only got you further caught up. You wanted to be treated badly so you could disengage—turn to the mirror and take apart yourself.

If you could just get away.

Now more than ever—deep in it.

You recoiled in your own self-loathing. A physical threat would have made it so much easier. At least, you could run from it.

But now the overcast convinced you that there was no escape. You shrunk before the increase in humidity.

Now you felt like an insect scuttling across ground. You were about to be crushed by the night air. Could you get any lower in the ground? You were burrowing deeper into the earth. No place for you.

Deeper than deep. Grains of dirt over your body. Buried alive by your own desire.

You wonder about the effects of abandonment on you, a night of total loneliness.

Nothing. As you become thinner and thinner in the frame.

“Look at me, look at me. Can anyone see me anymore? Can anyone?”



Crashing against the wall of your own doubt. Reprehensible--reduced to nothingness.

All around you felt the judgement about all your nights. That you never could come out of this victorious. Any pleasure that you had felt now worked to your detriment. There is no forgiveness at this stage. Only a burning that takes the place of your wilder desires.

Nothing. Feeling so low in light of the judgement. That feeling all around you.

Even to end it all, only would put you face to face with the same judgement, the replaying of night after night. To escape just made you return to what you were trying to get away from.

Day to day, you could hide from everyone what you were undergoing. But not from yourself. Not here. Not now.

Assuming that for now you could put aside these negative desires about yourself. Would that be sufficient to dispel the fears about this judgement. But these effects were not psychological. Your damnation was entirely cosmic, part of the moral order that you attributed to the universe. Even as these feelings died away personally, you remained overwhelmed by this pervasive fallen character of the world. Not in you, but in the heavens, this lapsed quality stayed ever present.

Even to reveal the haunting obscurity would not end its spell.

You had accepted your role as a seer. As such, your vision now dominated all experience. You felt certain in your understanding. You could not put aside this newly acquired vocation. It was up to you to let the rest of the world know about their damnation.

Recognizing the extensiveness of this charge, you could only laugh. This was ridiculous!

Even your humor was betraying you.

In the stadium of your desires, you were the helpless insect now displayed for an audience of screaming fans. A catastrophe of a cosmic circus.

Why have I been forsaken?

To put aside your guilt would end your connection to your own salvation. Without the feeling of an eventual rescue, your despair would freeze you in paralysis. But as long as your guilt continued to hold sway, you would continually find yourself thrown backwards in time. Each emotional flowering would recollect your past disasters.

So long caught up in your despondency, a new marvel would liberate your energies. Your irritability only reminded you how difficult your separation could be. The splendor

of the daylight could wipe away these dark blotches that dominated your sight. Daylight.

You went out into the sun ready to leave behind your former life. Guiltless and invigorated. You had know this feeling before. But then you were exposed to such small doses. As if they were only medication against your blackguard.

You would close the door of your room and forever end your servitude.

You walked in the street with an erectness in your gait. Now married to the daylight.

In your fingers you still felt the remnants of a former time. The bones seemed to be your beads of penance. Reminders of your fall. Or your attempt to get away. You folded your hands together to mark the new conviction.

Your head was clear. You had passed beyond your former allegiance to muddle. You needed to stick to your resolve. This was your strength.

The only person who could maintain this determination was you. The warmth of the sun soaked into your skin. Touched by heat, you surrendered your fate to this new impression.

If before, you found yourself overcome by a confusing sea of emotion. Now, you finally experienced freedom for the first time. No obligations. No more confounding sorrow.

The sunshine was a wall now. Overthrown by its regime, you could avoid the return to darkness only by becoming absorbed by your own sweat. The juice of your muscular vitality. The more stamina that you gained, the more you became attached to your present.. The sun remade your past.

With the light, a transparency reigned over your spirit. The dark liquors that seeped into the bloodstream were now cleansed.

Eventually, your intimacy with the sun brought its own fear. You had no ground to measure your new powers against. Should you feel pleasure for its own sake. What if it lost its flavor after while. What support remained then?

To worry about an eventuality seemed futile. It would only hold you down to an old way from which you had already recovered. The sun radiating off the blade of grass. The shadow of it passing. Why interfere with these delights? Because your world interfered with them. The grime of your everyday living. The uncompleted tasks. The greedy ambitions of your neighbors. The mad dash for success. the abrupt quality of failure.

Occasionally, a sliver of the night suggested the same doubts you had always felt. You would not be saved. It would never happen. You could never receive the answer that you wanted to hear. That you might have to wait interminably in silence for an inevitable

disappointment.

Why worry about it? The silver strap of shoe or the pink glow of your makeup. The glitter of neon on your face. All this seemed as real as the sunshine's warm glow. They each could reflect the same joy that filled your heart.

A kiss might.

A kiss would.

A kiss did quench your thirst. A man. Someone who would not make you reflect back on these nights of darkness.

White nights. Would I be asked? Or not asked. Or not believing it at first.

This affair with the sun. You loved your golden strands. And the tan that marked your exhilaration.

What had you stayed locked in this pale world for so long. Liberated. Without guilt.

Pure.

You absorbed the surprises of the flesh. Not as some counter to the ravages of the night. You were your body. Your new stamina said there was no need to stop this flow of blood in your arteries.

The head rush.

Youth re-adorned!

You shook your head in your new nonchalance. What could stand in your way.

The daylight signaled your getting your accounts in order. A pledge to your own success. The practical route. To wake up early. To read constantly. Work more. Child care or a clerk in an office.

Something.

The petty routine might drag you down. But your energy could see you through echoes of former crises. The watchword was "crisis free."

Physical problems had physical solutions. The only hindrance was time—fatigue. Make time to sleep.

Don't look back. Don't dwell on issues that might bring you down. Stay focused on your triumphs ahead. Of course.

A rough day at work. Too much to read. Get a good night's sleep. Start in the morning.

\* \* \*

You meet him while waiting for a train. He's waiting for a train too. You don't want him to be waiting for a train. You want him to offer to take you away from here. A luxury car

But he is like you. Both of you are waiting for the train. Perhaps, he doesn't even own a car. He lives in a run down apartment.

You want him to approach. He is looking at you. Through you. You are afraid of his glance. His gaze.

Is he staring at you? You want him to take you apart. Right here. Right now. To take you apart and put you back together.

He can't even look into your face.

What time is it?

–Is the Northbound running late today?

You look up. Is he talking to you.

–What?

–Is the train running on time?

–I never really keep track. I just wait a while. You always have to wait.

You want to walk away. Have it all just stop.

–Are you a student?

–Not now. I am. But...

What does he want you to stay? Do you want to be with him?. He looks older. Serious. A businessman.

–I'm going to work.

–Where do you work?

–In an office. In Virginia Center.

–Really.

–Where do you work?

–I work at home.

You are fascinated. You want him to ask you to his place of business. You want him to ask you to his house.

You are totally without guile.

–Would you like to get something to drink?

–I'm... I can't. I've got to get to class—what the hell...Where do you want to go?

As he drinks his coffee, he is staring in your face.

–You have beautiful green eyes.

I do. You don't care what he says. You want him to complement you. You are willing to do whatever he asks. You want to go along with him.

–I want to be with you. Be with you always.

You're lying. I don't want to hear this sort of thing.

You are drinking up his attention, transfixed by his stare. As if he is saying something no one before has said.

–I'd like you to come along with me. You have an afternoon.

–I can't. I'm with a man.

–I'd just like you to come to the park with me

I can't. I've got to go to work.

By mid afternoon, the two of you are talking to the ducks. You never thought that the ducks would talk back.

–This reminds me of when I was ten. I had a pet duck.

You never had a pet duck. Love begins with these simple fictions.

–When I was watching you waiting for the train, I became entranced by your lips. When I see you talk, I am take by the curl of the slips, how they caress the teeth. The soft impression of the teeth on the lips. I want to kiss you.

You are thinking about your man. The nerve of this stranger trying to disrupt a relationship that you had waited so long for. You wanted this betrayal, wanted from the moment that you saw this stranger checking you out. Looking right through you. But now it all seemed too tawdry. You had take it this far. Your whole afternoon in the park.

–I'm feeling sick. I've got to get back to the apartment. We're going to have dinner.

–Your man.

You nod in assent. You don't want to say anything else. You don't want to speak. Already you have betrayed your man. For a stranger. You don't want to give up your commitment. Everything the two of you have worked on together. Your word. His word.

I don't know you. I've got to go.

–I had a great time. I'd like to see you. I'd like to see you again. Maybe it would be better if you didn't call. Not yet.

–How can I see you again?

–I'll be waiting at the station. At twelve thirty.

You didn't want to give that much of yourself. Give yourself away. You thought about the stranger as you take the train to your car. As you drive home. When you get to the apartment, you realize that you had done something wrong. Something that you didn't want to keep on doing.

That was the old you. Feeling guilty. You enjoyed your time in the park. But that's all it was. A time. And now you are back where you belong. At your place. And you'll be meeting him later on that evening. How had you wasted that afternoon? You missed a day at work. You didn't need to go in. But you needed the money. You needed the extra hours. But you hadn't gone for a walk like that for a long time. Hadn't been to the park in months.

You just enjoyed the outdoors. Not the company. Just the time out of doors.

You enjoyed the sunlight.

The next day you are deliberately late. Or you have forgotten about the rendez-vous. It is already one. You figure that he won't be there. You could make work by one-thirty. Stay the rest of the afternoon. Stay until six.

–I didn't think that you were going to come.

–I thought that you'd already be gone.

–You knew that I'd still be here.

–I need you understand something. I have a man. I don't need anything from you. I don't really know you. So please.

–I don't want to be your man. This not about possession. This is about...desire.

–And I don't desire to be with you.

You want him to seize you. To drag you from this place.

He is trembling. He is trying to keep up his nerve.

–I stay with him, because I am afraid that he will leave me.

–Betrayal's in your blood.

He can see it in your eyes. The way you can't face him when he offers his seductive appeals. You have to turn back to face him. To confirm your curiosity.

You smile.

–How can you know that?

–You keep exploring. You are an explorer, delight in your own discovery.  
 –I have a man.  
 –And that's all you have. You don't have soul. You don't have a life. You have become part of him. That's all.  
 –That's silly.  
 –You don't know what he can do for me. To me.  
 –You've forgotten what you can do without him.  
 –That's silly. You don't know what he does. You don't who I am.  
 –If you didn't like what I was saying to you, you'd get up and leave.  
 –I think that I have to go.  
 –You're getting all nervous. What are you afraid of? Of yourself. that I might touch you in places that you've never been touched.  
 –I love the way that he touches me.  
 –I can tell. I'm offering you a future. Something imponderable.  
 –Sometimes it's better to stay with something tangible, something that I can touch and hold on to.  
 –I told you that I can touch you in a way that you'll never forget.  
 –And if I go along. I'll feel guilty about it. He'll find out.  
 –What's this. Does he have radar? You're making up something in your mind.  
 –He knows. Or I'll know.  
 –I told you betrayal's in the blood. Once you've thought about cheating, nothing's going to match the rush. Until you've done it. And done it again. With your man, you'll always be thinking about where he's going to take you for dinner. Will he please you tonight? What about the fight that you had? Is he with someone else? With a new lover, you'll let yourself go. You'll give in to your pleasure.

You are looking down. You are nervous. You drink from your water. You want to kiss him. You want him to leave.

–I've got to go. I've got to get to class.  
 –Your class is in the evening.  
 –He's going to be home. I've got to get back.  
 –He won't be home until late. He's going to be at the office. He won't be thinking about you. Or he'll be looking at that little picture on the desk. Thinking she's mine. And you can feel that frame pull tighter.

You want him to take you back to his apartment. you want him to fuck you. To tear out all our childhood dreams. You want him to treat you like a woman. To make you flourish like a whirlpool.

–You have a dirty mind. You are a pig.  
 –I only tell you what you want to hear.  
 –And how are you different from any other man?  
 –I'm not. But some other man isn't sitting with you right now.  
 –Was sitting.

You get up to leave. He reaches to grab your arm. You pull away.

You start to run down the street. He trails after you. He grabs at your jacket. You spin away.

You laugh. Your body trembles with fear. You want him to catch up with you. To do things to you. So you don't have to give in. Don't have to betray him, your man. He corners you on the wall. His arms placed astride your body.

You cannot kiss him. You will not give into him

Your body brushes by him as you get away. It will not happen now. It cannot happen now.

You are alone at home. This did not happen. This could not have happened. It was his fault, not yours. For who you are, faithfulness is everything.

What you have done already is enough. It is everything. You cannot want for anything more.

Why did you linger with this stranger? You've been thinking about having an affair. Your sexuality has become so complicated, so entangled with the trifle of everyday. An affair would let you liberate all your energies.

"I've been thinking about...having an affair."

Is this something that you could contemplate. Just to think about would short-circuit its progress. Bring it to an immediate halt.

It has such a splendid flavor. In its flourish, you can taste the electricity of the night. You can taste the flesh erupt and blossom.

When you bring the stranger's face to mind, it says nothing but sex.

You must go along with this urge. It could make your sexuality new again.

Why are you being so frivolous? Your love has brought you out of your period of despair. How could you dash its promise for a couple of nights of furtive passion?

Your man has not called you yet tonight. And the stranger's face continues to dominate your attention. If you could read, do something to take your mind off of this absurd distraction.

The water of the shower is running over your face. Blasting off your skin. Something to bring you back to the world. Your hands on your hips, sensing your curves, feeling how solid is your contact with reality. Your body is sufficient in itself, telling you that you need



nothing else.

The stranger's face fades from view as you pat your body with the towel. The phone is ringing.

Your next day is without memory of your night time fancies. No feelings of guilt. No disruptive curiosities. You have a lot of work to get done.

Class, work. No interruptions.

Perhaps your stranger has given up his pursuit. And the need that he seemed to represent quickly subsides.

You go back to what held your interest. Your man continues to satisfy you for what satisfaction is. He understands the toll of the day time as it impresses its regime on his time as well. The two of you feel the need to escape your toil. That is the well spring of your love.

An unexpected caress while waiting on the platform. A unwanted gesture. A hand brushing your hair.

You turn. A feeling of surprise, pleasant surprise, and a feeling of disgust strike you

–You probably thought that I disappeared.

–I put it out of my mind. I stopped thinking about such things.

–And now I'm back for you.

–I told you—I put you out of my mind. I'm very satisfied with my life.

–Life thrives on contradiction. Too satisfied is boring.

–I'd rather be bored than abused.

–You'd rather be challenged. Fear is at the heart of your being. You want to be scared?

–You're not the type of man who's going to scare me.

–I have imagination. I can probe. Your fantasy's start in horror and end in the bizarre.

–I shouldn't be talking to you.

–Are you afraid that he's going to catch you? Daddy's going to punish you. You thrive on such a risk.

–I'm not really into melodrama.

–You're into anything that gets the blood flowing. You're an attention junkie.

–I'm going to have to scream if you don't let me alone.

–You're going to scream if you let me have my way with you, scream in ecstasy.

Really. Who inspires him in this sort of brashness. This is all too common. Being accosted in a subway station. There are ways to stop this kind of unwanted attention.

–I'm going to walk away. We can pretend that we never met.

–What about our time together?

You want him to take you here. To lift up your skirt and rip off your panties and have sex against the wall. The station is empty. No one will see. This will motivate you...to get carried up in the moment. The nowness of the moment, where nothing else can matter or intervene—you could avoid detection.

—What makes you so confident?

—I'm not. I'm not really that way. It's you. I see you, and your eyes fill me with confidence.

—You think that I can trust that kind of bullshit.

—You'll never know unless you try. You run back to your man and always wonder if there's something that your missing. One day you'll realize that your body isn't what it was. That it's lost that grace because no one ever caressed that elegance.

—That's silly—really silly. You don't know anything that I do. My whole life is full of wonder.

—Then why the weariness in your eyes.

You had been noticing something. A listlessness. A haze in your eyes. Fatigue. Too much reading and work.

You rub your eyes. Turn sideways to him.

—It's not like you really can do anything about the way I feel. This is all a silly fantasy.

You agree to meet him for dinner. Dinner is about food and tidbits of conversation. You work to avoid questions about your personal life. After dinner the restaurant is deserted. He has you turn your chair with your back to him.

—Sex is not about touch. It is something imponderable. You have to open the mind. It's not so much about the where. What you do. Where you start. More where you want to go.

>>In the dark hollow of the self, you imagine a tone. You hear it. Vibrate with it. After the touch, you continue to vibrate in it.

You want to look back at him. To see the expression of his face.

—The tone is not something low, a bass tone. It almost opens the brain up at the skull. Breathless and gasping.

>>A ringing in the ears that won't stop. The body seems to float out of itself. Floating, then hurtling upward. A immense architecture. Beyond a grotto. And you just surround the walls. Feel this hollow but cannot cross these deep walls. So elevated in a mist. Ans then you just hang there in this honey. The sweet smell.

>>Where before the body was held down by its heaviness, now you spread out—you dissipate into the sky.

Could you go any higher? Now you are afraid to look back. That he has carried you along in this fantasy.

You want to surrender yourself to him. That is exactly what you fear, your surrender. You know that he will not allow you to retain anything of yourself.

That is what you thought you already had. But slowly you realize that your man has nothing on the stranger. That is why you want to get out of this place. His love will only rob you of any resistance. A remainder that you can use to start again

Your love is certain. For what it lacks, you can pretend. Isn't it pretend anyway. After all the stranger will remain estranged.

If he could only take you back to his place. But you are expected.

–I thought that he was out of town.

–He is. But I'm not. My obligations don't change just because he goes away.

You know that he is talking about betrayal. The exquisite bliss associated with betrayal. Leaving aside everything that is mundane and immediate. All the practical, safe stuff for this roll of the dice. The odds are already against you. It would be so easy.

The smell of betrayal fills the nostrils with its odor. It is the perfume of decay. Even the uneaten food is starting to rot before you. The scent mixes with the pungent sweetness of the body.

When you first took a lover, you noticed this mix... But now the two odors started to separate. And his smell, your man's has started to curdle. Curdle next to the purity of your own desire. No wonder you still give in to him. But he's out of town. This night is not about him; it's all about you. If you crack, it is not him cracking. You are cracking against yourself. He'll never know.

–If I cheat on him, he'll know.

Already you have evolved your body for you man. You now give off these signs for him. He can see your intentions. Each lie becomes branded in the skin. A natural brand, an eruption—a hieroglyph.

You rub your hand across your assured forehead. The skin is smooth. The mask is complete. Imposing. For now, the stranger can pierce the body. But he cannot get behind the mask.

When you get home, his call awaits you. What have you been doing? Who have you spent time with. All innocent questions. Time innocently spent.

You fall asleep in the agony of his withdrawal. The reign of his passion. Your lover.

How did you so easily escape this threat to your everyday certainty? The office. The center. The classroom. A boutique. Lingerie.

Who are you?

You shake your hair as the wind as you walk to the train. It is two o'clock—too late for trouble.

When you get home you take a long bath. You need to relax in the bubbles. You promise not to answer the phone. You can't go to the airport. Your friend will have to take a taxi.

You lose consciousness in the water. There is no pretense of desire. No need to touch or be touched.

Questions that have absorbed you too much already.

When he catches you in your reverie, it is something of an imposition. Why did you give him your key? Will you ever be able to ask it back from him without hurting part of yourself?

He wants sex. A reward for returning to you. A confirmation that you are together. Refuse and he will suspect something is wrong.

His large hand works its way in the water. You let him touch you because it reminds you of the stranger. You give in until you see his face in the light.

You ask him to stop. You want him inside you. But you ask him to stop. You want the stranger inside you.

The next day you show up at the station at precisely one. You have cleared your afternoon. You have put your man off.

When you see the stranger alight onto the platform, it fills you with a chill. You smile as he approaches. This is the day.

He invites you to a lazy lunch. You while it away in an outdoor café. You spend most of your time talking about wine, sampling wines. Staring into his eyes. For the time being, the stranger plays the role of your lover. He laughs at your jokes. He anticipates your whims. His glances satisfy you. You want more. You want nothing more.

Night falls while you are walking in a merry-go-round of laughter and cotton candy. The ice cream sweetness of his lips. He does not kiss you. He will not. He keeps you moving so there is no possibility of an errant kiss.

He leads you to a run-down part of town. Abandoned warehouses and junkyards. These are territories looking for emperors. The images of exploitation frighten you. This

is the kingdom of the night.

He has the key to a large bolt-lock on one such run-down castle. He invites you inside.

A large spot light reflects to a gigantic silhouette of yourself. the wall. He wants this to hold your attention.

–Why the light?

–I want you to see what we see all the time. Your image, dominant and explosive. Everyone lives off your charm. They feed your delights. But you are devoid of spiritual value. The glare blind you to everything in the shadows. Pleasure drains into you like a bottomless well

>>Until you let go of the attachments to your own delights, you can never confront the radicality of your own desire. Somehow you have learned to hide in nakedness. As if your hunger has clothed your solitude. Without some distraction, you're afraid to be alone. You cannot crave if you can never touch your emptiness, an infinity of nights without satisfaction. Where satisfaction is only a surface of enchantment. Desire thrives in the misery of a gaping affinity without sensation of touch.

>>As long as your are satisfied, you see desire as residing in the flesh, in the union between your flesh and another's. But desire moves away from the flesh. It screams in the night, but it can never be heard. It heads deep into space, never arriving at a destination.

>>So when you make contact, the flesh recoils with the full impact of desire. As desire strips away the layers of flesh, you have nothing to hold . Hands gripping the air.

>>You cannot release this grip. You weep uncontrollably. Your muscles lose all tension. Hope flows from you like a waterfall.

>>At this point, desire shakes the flesh uncontrollably. you feel a deep shiver quake your body. Any human contact suffices. Any human contact repulses.

>>Your body is no longer your own. It has been resigned over to your desire.

>>Oh the longing.

>>The universe laughs at your mediocrity. You pant but cannot relieve your fire. You are frozen in your sickness. This revulsion is at the heart of your being.

>>From here on you are a shell. Grunts. Stares. Aggression.

>>You scratch and bite. Scream. Feel the pavement crash against the skull. I just want some pleasure.

>>Get me something to drink.

It has been a long night. But his tyranny has only begun. You invite him to continue. You are open to suggestion

–At the summit of desire is imitation. You hear the erotic tale. You need to imitate faithfully its ecstasies and its positions. Variations meander away from the bolt of lightning that musters all your energies. You want to erupt with the thunder clap—your cue.

>>You start off thinking that you can pick and choose from the various fetishes. Whatever square of flesh invites your whim, you'll follow your fixation. If the words suggest betrayal, you'll skirt the line of an affair. If the words suggest that you explore your feminine attractions, you'll lust after the supple curves of another woman. But you won't follow through with your fantasies. You'll stop short of enacting the whole story.

>>But you're missing the point. It's all about following the plot. The writer knows how the threads of curiosity peel back layers of the soul. To skim the erotic tale is to skim your own depravities. You need to give in to extreme yearnings to know what about yourself is real.

As he talks, you want him to be with you. To use a gentle feather to thrill your sense of touch on your back. To have him strip you naked and stop—let yourself be ravished by the spotlight. You want him to ridicule your nudity. To peel open the abysmal wretchedness of your sex. Your degeneracy.

You want nothing to stand in the way of your will. Everything to fall at its approach. Everyone to ache at your aloofness. Oh the kiss!

Now you feel that he has made you his prisoner. And it is your role to reverse the chains. He has degraded you by displaying you in the light. You want to see him naked. You want to see him beg. You want to make the dog crawl.

How has he been successful in exposing this indecent liberty of yours? There is no moral restraint. You gag with the intensity of your own appetite. You are insatiate. It must be this way.

It will be this way.

He has been abrupt and frank. And now it is not he but you who is directing the path of the light. You want to pull him into it. You are totally open to his threats. He has completely lay bare your fear. How can you protect yourself in the midst of this drive? You fear him because you fear these emotions of your own that are tearing you up.

This is what drew you to your man. The immediacy of your desire. This is also what you are afraid of. That your desire cannot be contained by your lover's kisses. The stranger

feels this excess on your part. Your attraction for intoxicants as they leave you free with your darker motives.

Up until this point, you had become comfortable with tender caresses. You accepted your erotic inclinations. Now, you were seeing that part of your desire that you could not rein in. That you presented your commitment could rein in. You could only commit to this pleasure. An he sees that threat frayed on the surface. He is manipulating its irregularity because you will not do it alone.

He refuses to touch you He has become sickened with the creature that he has brought into the light. You scream for his passion and he will not give in.

–Desire is fueled by utter refusal. To have zeroed in on the loved one and to see how you are hated in your desperation. Go home and clean yourself. Your wants make me want to puke.

After you have been cut open like this, you need to have this wound satisfied. You want to feel the embrace with the salt.

You start.

–Who are you to deny me? You're ugly and old and dirty.

–Your mirror cracks with the repulsiveness of your desire. It is why are growing more attractive by the second. Your every turn, the lines of your face, the suppleness of your body. It all says sex. The more beautiful that you become, the haughtier that your become. The more I hate you. Crawl back in your hole.

Now he has only incited your passion. If other flattery had only brushed by your gradual awakening, he was complementing you deep in your being. This is was the purpose of the light. This is where you wanted to show yourself. You are a star. You want the light to explore the pornography of your nakedness.

You want to expose yourself and drench in your own desire. You want to put aside your modesty and completely open yourself. To get naked and masturbate before him. This gesture of defiance and utmost pleasure that only he could have inspired.

The destructiveness of the moment makes you feel the need to hide. You curl up. You cover your face. Everything is wicked. You even wrap your hands in you clothes.

You don't want him to share any part of you.

He is in a corner laughing. He know how you cannot invade the darkness and are paralyzed in the light.

Where you had been confident, you are now distant from your own desire. You want to leave. You can't move. You need to be taken from this place.

The light is turned off. You fall into guilty slumber. When you wake up, he is gone. Sunlight creeps in through the windows and the cracks in the walls. You wonder how

you gave you night over to such stupidity. You puzzle about how you can rescue your day.

You wonder how long you can hold out against these barrages. Or have you finally recovered from this illness.

Sex with your friend takes your mind off these perversions which have haunted your night. Why does your man no longer linger over your body? His caresses are transparent and too direct. What you took for honesty now confronts you with its contrivance.

For a while, you want to hold in the immediacy of touch, no goal, no sliding progression. Just touch.

Kisses fall short. This vibration inside you now feel like something alien. Not a seduction to your own pleasure, closer to an intrusion.

Do I know you?

You want to ask, to tell him what is bothering you.

“We’ve got to this point, the conflagration. And after we’ve been burned up, what else is there for us? What else?”

He smiles. You smile back. This is where you belong. Clean again.

You don’t want to look on your appetite for the desperate. Your hunger can be fed here.

As you fall asleep together, you curl away from his touch.

You now sleep separate in the same bed. He sleeps. You look at him in the shadows. You don’t even know why you are here anymore.

What do you share in common. Your time together. Nothing. Everything. His attempts to get interested in the same things that fascinate you. The charade.

You hate him because he even tries. What has caused this alienation? You want to look out the window. You want to see the stranger.

You want him psychotic, hiding in your bushes.

If the stranger had been like that from the beginning, then you would have repulsed completely. But now you are feeding his psychosis. You want him to be the agent of your own sociopathology.

But you are afraid that once you turn on this madness, that you will never be able to turn it off. You are afraid of your own death.



The sunlight evokes your commitment to life. The chirping of the birds. The glare of the full light rays.

The warmth. Your lover has already taken his shower and dressed for work. You have compromised with your schedule and agreed to stay in for the day. No risk of a one o'clock encounter.

Your extracurricular assignment has already progressed too far. You have real homework to do this morning. Maybe show up for work this afternoon.

It's a beautiful day.

You take a walk. Why have you forgotten this part of yourself. Why have you become afraid of your own solitude.

His face is attracting you. Your hands over his skin can mold the beauty that you seek. Hand to flesh, flesh to bone.

You have walked for most of the morning. You find yourself downtown. You wanted to go to the bank. You needed an excuse to get out of the house.

You imagine seeing him in the crowd. He beckons to you. He is in the bank to take care of some business. Finance a merger. Start a development. Innovate a technology.

His passing creates a breeze that caresses your face. You smile.

He take you back to a hotel and makes passionate love to you.

Why is your fantasy so ordinary? You've been met in a hotel full of flowers. It hasn't changed you, only made you more subject to flattery. It's silly to think that you would actually go downtown today.

You sit down on a bench in the park. You watch some children float a sail boat. Talk to the ducks. The ducks are noisy this morning.

You go back to your place. You look for some dainty underwear. There is no doubt about their intentions. You want to be dirty. You need to get clean.

You spend an hour in the bath. The washcloth rubs inside you to prepare for his touch, his lips pressing to your flesh, you melting in his. You take him and guide his intent. This is not skin to skin; it is the fluttering of the heart. You cannot hold back.

Your clothes are immaculate. They are meant to be peeled off. His hands will be firm, but gentle.

Your excitement will cooperate with his invitation. Kiss me deep.

Your choice of heels is determined. This will affect the progress of your encounter. You need to be comfortable. You want to bring attention to your legs. The path to your desire.

You are at the station at one. He is not there. He does not show.

Usually you would give up at two.

You droop into a chair and your arms hang at your side.

Will he ever arrive?

He does not. You have waited until four.

You are forlorn.

You collapse on your bed.

You are shaken by the ringing of the phone.

–You were waiting there today.

–How did you get this number?

–You’ve told me everything. Who you are, where you work, what you do with every second of your time. Don’t you remember what you’ve given me?

–I don’t like you calling me. He might be here. He might answer. How did you know I was there. Were you following on me? Were you hiding somewhere? Were you spying on me?

–I don’t have to spy on you. I know you. Know everything about you. I want you to touch yourself.

The boldness of this gesture disgusts you. But you are aroused just hearing him.

It is an affront for him to have called you. You can feel his finger work their way in the moistness inside you. But you do not want to let him know how he is touching you.

–Your access is unrestrained. I know that you are touching yourself. That I am.

You have never felt such a free flow of passion. You run your hands along the nylons that cover your legs.

–You are wearing silk.

How did he get your number? His inquisitiveness puts your off.

You hang up. But you cannot help but follow through on the fantasy. His hand has become your hand. And the throbbing muscles, the fleshy part of the hand. The contrary motions of fingers and thumb, all work together to exaggerate your ecstasy.

Even though you have shut him out. He is part of this afternoon. This approaching evening. You are too tired to stay awake and fall asleep in the soft passion of your afterglow.

You are alarmed awake by the ringing of the phone. Your man wants to take you to dinner. You oblige. He comes inside you after dinner. The pleasure is immense. You again fall asleep separately. You savor his caresses, not the lover, the stranger.

You can remain in your fantasy.

–I don't want anything to do with you anymore.

You are becoming lax with your work. Your finances are vulnerable to your pursuit of desire.

–My lover's with me and if he knew who you were, he'd kill you.

–I would love such a demonstration of his love for you. Can he really do it? Do you need this jealousy to fuel your love?

–Fuck off!

He hangs up. You don't have time for games. You are destroying your hopes for happiness.

If the stranger paid you, paid you for sex, then it might be so much easier. You wouldn't have to become involved. It wouldn't threaten your connection with your man. You could share your love, And you'd be with this stranger because you needed money. It would free up your days to write.

Why hadn't you accepted your lover's proposal when he made it? He would have let you quit work, stay home, play house, read.

Then you would have mixed money and love. You could only take money if you were not involved. If he were a stranger.

You spend the morning in bed. You are falling in love with the darkness of your bedroom.

Now you face the inert quality of your own desire.

"I don't want to have sex anymore."

–You're still in bed.

–I've already hung up on you once today. I don't want you calling me.

–Is that why you perk up every time you the phone ring? The let down when you hear his voice on the other end of the line.

–You really are a cocky bastard.

–I’ve told you. I know you. What you want. What makes you ache. You want it!

You want to tell him how you have put sex behind you. You are satisfied just being who you are.

–You’re starting to feel something. Something yourself, something for me.

–That’s nonsense.

–I want to meet you tonight. Downtown at the Ritz. Room 411. Seven thirty.

–I have to meet a friend for dinner.

–You will cancel.

–I was already prepared for this yesterday. I’ve put that behind me

–You can’t face what it means to really want something and not be able to have. To not face your own mediocrity, it’s better to put it aside. Pretend that you don’t need it. Settle for so much less. Leave the mystery on the shelf.

–You know too much about me already. It’s impossible to be with you and protect myself.

–Unless you are with me, you’ll never be yourself. Coming out of love-making with that same ache to be with the other person and knowing that none of this is enough. You have started to believe your own satisfaction. You are becoming a clown.

–I’ll meet you another night. I have plans.

He hangs up. You repeat your ritual of the night before. Before it was easy. You wanted him. Now he is commanding you. This is exactly what you never wanted to happen. The balance between you and him is now upset. You never, never, never wanted this to happen.

You want him to touch you in places that will overwhelm so much that you are banging holes in the hotel room.

You are cheating. You lie to your lover. Tell him about library duties. He wants to come along. You laugh at him. Really laugh.

You see him at the foot of the bed learning how to caress your feet. The stranger takes his time drawing each toe away from each other. The nail polish glistens in the candle light. You let him kiss your feet. Sucking you toes. Accepting your flesh.

Already fantasy blurs with reality. You cannot tell when you entered the room. You feel him inside you for an eternity. He strokes and strokes again. Reawakening your fires again and again. You dissolve into the walls and mirrors of the room. Your flesh blends with the drapes and rugs.

You are everywhere here, and he is there too. Rubbing the extensions of your flesh with his own. You sense the fullness of this moment. From the stripping of layers of

clothing, to the moving aside layers of the skin, each moment fades into every other. It repeats. You dress and strip again for him. You pull words from his tongue. He watches from the other end of the room as desire expands inside you.

Even when he does not touch you, he is growing inside of you.

The room is empty. The two of you blend in this incantation to your invisibility. You are tossed back to earth in your flesh and he thrusts inside you. But there is no anger in his motions. You open to accept his every move. Hand give way to tongue. Word to word.

The enchantment proceeds to a warm light permeating from the inside.

You both are here.

Can he be feeling the same pleasure, a total acceptance of his flesh enfolding in yours. Back to back. Face to face. Lips to lips.

Oh the kiss!

As the flesh hardens to your touch, you can feel the approaching day. More than anything you want to sleep holding this new lover. There is no remnant of betrayal. This is where you meant to be.

You wake up alone. Your sleep has been total.

–Why did you never show at the room.

You are back in your bed. The night has exhausted you. You give another morning, another day to sleep.

–Are you teasing me?

–Room 411.

–Silly.

–Where were you?

–Do you want me to come over again?

–The pleasure is really the uninteresting part in having sex. It is all about the voyeurism. The best part is watching the loved one surrender helpless in ecstasy. You love it when you know that your lover is held by the same intensity, the same surrender. But then you really cannot see the lover because you are absorbed by your own moment of dependency.

>>Desire is most inspired by this wish to pry into the lover's lack of defense.

>>You are still using love to hide your acquisitiveness, how you want to suck up everything around you. You want to see your lover cry to know that you are not cruel. that you can be constrained by his demonstration of caring, his tears.

>>But the tears, the caring, are still your excuse to hold back yourself in the act. that is why you want to be so free. So you don't let him really see who you are. How conniving is your desire. Then you would really bring him to tears.

>>Tell him about your fantasy, about Room 411. Take him there and see if you can make love to him. I want to watch you. I never want to touch you. I can't. I want to watch you come. Not while I am in the throes of passion. But while I'm smoking a cigarette. Drinking a cocktail. Sitting in a chair across from the entangled lovers.

>>I want to walk over, completely clothed, and look you in the face and laugh. Is that all you can manage? You call that desire. You call that love. That is pathetic.

–Why are you so cruel? Why are you so abusive?

–Tell him about Room 411. Tell him and we will see abuse.

–It's not like that.

You understand your open invitation to the Ritz. You will not meet him tonight. You do not need him. You are becoming afraid how love can be so self-destructive. You cannot imagine anything close to love for this stranger. But you feel the passion spilling over. What is this. You need him to tell you something. You are becoming attached. Does he melt with your tears?

You rush to get dressed. You head downtown. in the lobby of the Ritz, you feel the stares of the businessman. They can see your lingerie underneath your dress. This is ugly. You don't want to be hear. You retreat to the safety of your man's apartment.

The next afternoon the stranger catches you at your apartment. Now you want to hurt him. Hurt him for not showing.

–I thought that I'd see you yesterday.

–I came to the hotel. But I couldn't go up to the room.

–You wanted to go upstairs.

–Don't you have anything nice to say to me—ever.

–I love your green eyes. Lost in their pools.

–Not just complements. Concern.

–Don't you feel that in my caresses?

–Sometime, you just seem all too professional. I'm starting to feel things.

–What do you want me to say? I don't want to lead you on. We have what you want.

–Are you starting to think about me when you're doing the most nonsensical things.

–Do you want me to say something?

–How much do you feel for me.

–I'm starting to cherish my time with you. I need you.

–You know where I was last night. I didn't come to see you because I was fucking. It was awesome. I met a man. He wanted me to marry him. He was visiting the city. And he brought me back to his hotel room. Room 807. And he fucked me! I was fucking another man.

He feels the sting of your betrayal.

–And after that I went home, and I was fucking my lover. My lover didn't know about you. Thought that I was taking a bath for him. I was just getting the smell of my first conquest. After that, I fucked my lover. You weren't with me. I was fucking him. And there's nothing that you can do about it.

The stranger may be laughing. Or the stranger may be in tears.

There is a long pause. You imagine the phone hanging up.

–I didn't want to touch you. I wanted to see you come.

The after impression is still burned in your face. You have betrayed your secret lover!

You meet him for a drink. That is all. He will not touch you. It is not disgust. there is no feelings of sorrow. He needs to see you face.

From this point on, you see that there is no betrayal of the stranger. All your energies are leading back to him.

You want to know his secrets. He has figured out all of yours.

–Let me know something about you

–You destroy yourself just to see it again

Your man is out of town. It's three in the morning. You call your secret lover.

–I want you to come over.

–It's late. I'm already asleep.

He refuses to come over. He is punishing you with his jealousy. He's not going to just come over on your whim.

You want him. You burn with your desire. You want to let your fire rage. Then you want to extinguish the fire with him.

You can't sleep. You're thinking about nothing but him But he will not come to you. Your passion is overtaking you. Every pore oozes with sex. The need to hold, to touch, to make something out of nothing. Too flow in your excitement. This slippery appeal. Your mercurial lover.

You cannot stop yourself. His image dominates your dreams. His touch. His warmth. The pungent smell.

Your touch is his touch and you are becoming insane. The kisses. The chatter. The love wails. The tittering. The giggles.

Trying to slow down. The beating of the heart. The heat.

You are seized by your enjoyment. The pleasure of your imagination and his touch.

He will not. But you will. NOW NOW NOW.

Kiss me

Squeeze me. Hold tighter. Don't ever.

You are really getting into this fantasy. Your sighs. Breathless. Murmuring. Gasping for air. Giving in. Vanquished. Again and again and again.

To touch him. Feel his touch on your moist skin. To repeat in your solitude the same manipulation that would get you close to him again.

Poetry is your flesh moving together. Your heartbeat beating with his. Your flesh beating with his. So close that you can feel his breath even when he is not there.

The blood rushes to your head. You cannot even see. You are stunned by the explosion of his passion. Oh heaven, how mind-blowing.

You exhale and collapse on your bed.

Why didn't he call. What had you done. Your solitary pleasure underlines your loneliness. Sweat turned ice cold on the forehead. Already four o'clock and the alarm would ring in four hours. Three. Two.

Another night without his kiss. And you are buried by the isolation of this fading night.

How could you still love him after this? But you want him to ravish you. Ravish what was left. What is not consumed by your sadness.

You'd be at the airport tomorrow. Your man would return. And you'd forget about the loss of this night. This dark mood would go away for good.

For what is left, you give way to your fatigue.

A sleep without dreams. The bed still wet with your sweat. You drowned in the murkiness of your desire. What you could not have. Did not need. Possessed and are possessed by.

You are awakened by a phone call.



–Did you learn your lesson last night? The fundamental lesson. That no man can hold you permanently. Only you can own your desire.

– Lover, you really do take yourself seriously.

– I didn't fall asleep thinking about you.

– So you were with another lover.

– I just needed to sleep

You want his hands digging into your flesh, almost as you wanted your nails digging into his back. You hate the intact quality of his skin as you hate your own innocence. You want to be marked by your experience. That others can see this corruption that you are coming to enjoy.

You are available to satisfy his needs. In that you will feel satisfied. You want him to want you all the time. Want, lust after, possess, own. Not cherished. Cherished in his caresses. Caresses that will linger on your shoulder. The back of your neck. The small of your back.

That is all. You want the memory of the flesh to endure. Not your spirit. You never want him knowing what he cannot touch.

Hence the intensity of his touch. The intermixing with fear. You want him to shake you up.

That you are only physical. That there is only weakness in dreams. Already you had thought that you had made an escape in your own flesh. But the details are becoming messy. You man's fears have been showing through. He has already shown his weakness. In inappropriate anger. An eagerness to make up. To use these alternating states to fuel the relationship. His desire to please is curdling.

You feel stomach cramps.

The stranger is your only cure. To bring all of your contradictory personalities into one view.

You want to meet him for dinner. Why hadn't you given him your number? That your friend might find out.

You are beginning to think about your own emotions in some code. You can't let your friend find out. If you're not straight in your head about what is going on, you might say something out of turn.

You know that you want to break down. Say things. Throw things.

You want to hurt your man. You want him to make love to you. While you hurt. Where you hurt.

No wonder you can't focus in on anything. You can't make clear your motives. A bigger fear is coming over you. that you are losing control. That you've never told anyone what you want, what you really want.

You ask for an elephant and you get it. But could that be what you really want? Could any of this be what you really want?

You have, could have everything. You need to be touched. You need to be denied. You need to deny him, deny the stranger.

The stranger has finally broken that wall separating refusal and acceptance. You accept what he want without question. Gush in the danger that he offer.

What danger? This is all risible. You cannot and will not go along. It's like a porn movie.

You want that danger. Who is he? Maybe he's a murderer.

Once your man discovered his aggressions, he ran from them. He tried to make them part of a ritual. He became clumsy asking for what he wanted. Everything about him became aggressive.

The stranger is your confrontation with death. Not these vague attempts, these brushes with sickness.

He's the full-blown thing—the threat. The gamble. That his will may be so strong to completely devour you.

This is what you will accept. You need to accept him.

You let him follow you. you lead him to an another abandoned warehouse. Neither of you should be there.

He won't let you look at him

He touches you with his words.

He undoes you with his words. If he was at all more obvious, you wouldn't give him chance to get as close to you as he is. under the present situation you end up participating in your undoing.

You along to get his approval. Meanwhile, you're also pushing the envelope to get his attention or to get your attention for him. The stranger is pushing you to see if you'll continue to follow him.

You can never describe the actual dynamics because of the weight of this everyday experience and what it means to be normal with your feelings. You only know that you want to be with the stranger.

You want him to tell you about his other woman. You want him to betray you. So the experience of these other women can become your experience. Women who just seek his approval. Unable to see themselves except through him.

The foreman's office is in a place overlooking the warehouse floor. He takes you there. You watch a couple come into the warehouse. They lie down in a bed in the middle of the floor. A light shines on the floor. It is faint but permits you to see the action. You want to make love to your stranger. He wants you to describe what is happening on the floor. He points for you to watch. You try to kiss him. He pushes you off.

–They can't hear us up here. The room is sealed off. I want you to describe what you see.

–How did you know that they'd be here?

–There's always someone here.

–They know each other. But not that well. There is hesitation in them undressing each other. She wants him to tear her clothes off. She is afraid that he is going to fast. She isn't sure that she wants to be here. She looks away. Thinks that someone is watching them. Thinks someone is watching them. She doesn't want anyone to know. Doesn't want anyone to tell him.

>>The man she is with is more confident than her lover at home. He knows what he wants. He wants her flesh. He is an adept lover. He can use his sexuality to suggest so much more. When he kisses her, she gives of herself without reserve. His kisses devastate. They draw her breath and in so doing capture her being.

>>He comes to focus on the back of her neck. She lies there and takes in everything from his attention. Her world revolves around these kisses. He makes time stop for her. Her head curls in utmost pleasure. The kiss is the portal to an enchanted wonderland. Her body dissolves into his. Her face gives up to his caress. He runs the back of his hand along the line from her forehead to her to her chin. Certain along the bone of the nose. She tries to bite the hand as it passes her lips.

>>She captures a finger with the lip. She is victorious in her quest. She sucks the finger as if she is taking him into her. He plays with the gestures of her mouth. He feels the vacuum holding him. His lips press the neck more intensely. She sighs. Oh the passion!

>>Again they fade in their expressions. He welcomes her body in embrace. His other hand caresses her back. The room is warm. It leaves no doubt about their eventual destination.. He undoes the zipper of her dress. She wants to help. She is a bit clumsy, almost breaking the spell. She thinks about someone else for a moment. He uses this pause to gather her assent. The dress is pulled off completely. Her bra and

panties are lavender. They are not dailies. They are meant for a moment like this. She knew that she was planning an assignation. She wishes that she was more spontaneous. She wonder if he thinks that she is too calculating. Have her caresses lost their sparkle? Do they seem almost professional?

>>He loves that affect. That there is nothing between them but this absurd physicality. It is so fragile because there is nothing else It puts more of a premium on each caress. that they have to be believable.

>>He has unclasped her bra. They are less deliberate about undressing him. He's still in his clothes. His shirt is undone. The reticence is more on her part. She wants to accept some of the embarrassment for this whole event. He can have many lovers. She has one. And she is betraying him. Just in her heels and her panties, she is an object of lust. Abandoned to the cruelty of these furtive kisses. Nothing protects her against his insights.

>>It is hard to watch this scene. The desire to stop the action or to want to get involved. Her body is inviting. Her smooth back inviting. Nearly enough to invite a third party. Someone to kiss her on the back, while he plants his kisses on her breasts. He has taken one of her breasts in his mouth. She recoils in reply. Leaving herself for his ravaging lips. He sucks the flesh up. His teeth bite and send shiver up her. At this point, she can feel him inside her. Feel him move with her every turn. Her back slides in delirium. You feel him place his hand on her. He braces himself with this motion. She opens her eyes and looks down at him. She runs her finger through his hair. Pulls him closer to her. His teeth brush her breast. It tickles. She smiles. She exhales slowly. She pulls his shirt off.

>>He wants to kiss her. To draw whatever breath is left. To make it impossible for her to take a breath except through him. She shakes in this passionate onslaught. The kiss is tender and aggressive. Waves.

>>Don't stop. The bodies writhe in reply. He can feel her utter nakedness against his pants leg. The furnace-like warmth. The moist contact. She undoes his belt and unzips his pants. They flop around, hardly coming off. His lips are now working on the other breast. She alternates between enjoyment and an effort to pull down his pants. What was now the breeze of paradise is now a more raw storm wind. Everything is ripped up in its progress. She is counting on his penetration. He want to go down on her. She wants to deny her satisfaction, deny that she is implicated in this affair of the lust. She does not want to leave her heart exposed. But she wants to feel everything that she can.

>>His caresses have already set her at ease. He is protecting her so that he can more easily dash her hopes. Please!

>>He trails the elastic of her panties with his tongue. She likes the utter naughtiness of this gesture. Now she sucks one of her own finger in anticipation. She lets him remove

her panties with utter submission. The smoothness of the skin is interrupted by the honesty of her pubic hair. Now there can be no doubt about their intentions. She offers him her gift. It is salty and electric. He licks the walls of her vagina and nestles his tongue on her clitoris. The moment is entirely charged. Flesh and excitement and revelation and acceptance. She crosses a threshold. She is floating. Her body a mere memory. The rhythm undulates with his exclamation points.

>>Her hands are anew deep in his hair. But now the contact is savage. This continuity from her to him, this wildness. Skin and bone and sweat and hair. Her flow is without reserve. The blood no longer flows to the head. She is flush in its wash.

>>She now is grabbing at the sides of the bed. She is shaking her head back and forth. She bites her lip. She signs. She signs again. She speaks his name.

–Oh God. Stop. Don't! Oh, oh, oh! Yes!

You want the stranger to make love to you. You want to join them on the bed

–What are you doing in that dark corner? Beating off?

–I need you to keep talking. You are disturbing the moment.

–His heart bears her scent. She senses that as she pulls him away and draw her up to kiss him. This is entirely animal instinct. And it is right. Kiss me. She wants him inside her. She pulls off his underwear and puts on a condom. She slides him into her. The flow is too intense for him. He is dizzy by her intensity. He wants to come, wants to pass out. She is positively savage. As if she wants to knock him out. She accepts his thrust. Oozes with her own. This is ugly. This is beautiful. Nothing left but this drive. The force pushing into the bed. bed. the room shakes with their energy. I am sick just trying to describe it. So much! So much!

>>They move together for an interminable time. Time stops and time hurtles forward. Their eyes force to the back of the head. The seismic activity signaling an inevitable collision. Her hand are slamming the bed. She is biting his lip. Anything to sustain herself against this onrush. He can taste the blood of his lips, her lips. They are one in this graininess of their existence.

>>I don't want to watch any of this anymore. I want you to fuck me on the floor here. Fuck me, and then just leave.

–I told you that I need you to tell me what is going on.

–Who are these people?. Why are they letting us do this? Did you pay them?. Let me get closer to them so I can see their faces.

–Sex is not real until other people are looking at you. Watching, wanting to join. You can hold on to pleasure. It floats just beyond you. And that is why I need you to tell me.

–Need me to tell you how they regret the passing intensity. Need me to tell you how nothing can separate her from him. Need me to tell you how their embrace tries to recover every ounce of their expended passion. Need me to tell you how only constant

revisits will sustain this angry euphoria. That she is thinking about her man. That she hopes that this will not jeopardize their fragile relationship. All this...

>>Now you sit there. And I want your tongue inside me. Want you to speak your words inside me. To hear your echoes in the cavities of my flesh. So when I sigh, our conversation has spoken volumes. I want this now, All this and more. I want the intimacy of this contact. Until then I will bend deaf to the world. I won't be able to write or speak. I want your contact.

–I will tell you what I can give you and what I can't. I want you in the same way that you want me. But that is vain. We must get past our delights. I want you to write me a letter. I want you to express your passions.

–I don't know where you live.

–Bring the letter to the warehouse. Put it in the mailbox outside.

–I want to make love.

–I can't love you. Go back to your little friend. Get him to gratify your absurd passions.

You are angry by his refusal. You end up making love with your man. You bring some of the technique that inspired the couple in the warehouse. But the experience is even more automatic than ever. Your lover wonders if there is something wrong. Of course, you have been cursed by the stranger.

You don't want to write his stupid letter. You want to be alone, cut off from all human contact.

How can you ever survive through this crisis. How.

You piece together your day with what remains of your desire. You are unruly. You will not give in. But you need to write. To write back to him. To interfere with his certainty.

***Dear Secret Lover,***

***When I first met you, I wondered why you were bothering with me. Maybe you were a psycho. Or maybe you did this with all kinds of women. Picked them up in public. Fucked them in hotels. I wanted you to take me to a hotel. I wanted you to be anonymous with you.***

***Right off I felt a connection to you. The more that we talked, the more I filled in this connection. That I could see an image of myself in how you talked to me. I wanted to take this picture inside of me. I wanted it to grow organically. Pregnant with your words, I wanted to flower in your touch.***

***I was afraid that you would not care for me. That you made such an effort convinced me that there was more going on. You could have stopped after the first encounter. You didn't even want sex at first. But now you are part of my every waking moment.***

***Bu affirming this, you are becoming part of me. I unravel the interlocking thread of our invitations to each other. How you listened to me, how I heard your voices, how I constructed my reply to pick up on things that you said to me, how you tailored your reply to incite emotions in me.***

***Indeed this connection was riveting in capturing the full participation of the myself. It has become e so involved that I need to chronicle this journey.***

***To tell the world how you could ultimately touch me in such an unexpected way. That's what you did for me last night.***

***We have shared these experiences together. I know how deeply you have touched me. I only hope that you have been touched by me.***

**LOVE...**

You are afraid to take this letter to the warehouse. Afraid to see what he might say in return. This is all too overwhelming. He could never feel what you do.

You want to rip up the letter. But you do not. You make the trip to the warehouse. The street is deserted. The neighborhood is frightening. When you finally arrive at the place, your frustrations have reached an apex. You have been clutching the letter. The tension causes you to pull at it—to rip it up. Tear up the pieces and scatter them.

The mailbox is propped open. There is a letter inside. It is addressed to you.

**DEAR \*\*\***

***I knew that you would come here with the intention of leaving me a letter. I also knew that your frustration with yourself would cause you to rip up that letter and throw the pieces on the ground. Don't worry. The wind will scatter the pieces in different places. No one else will know about our love. No one.***

***You profess you love for me. But you want it both ways. You stay with him. You act like you can keep your commitment intact. Do you know what you are doing?***

***At some stge in your life with him, you felt the need for a deeper commitment. You didn't want to lose him. Didn't want to feel that your caresses would head out into space without eventual reply. By mutually agreeing to this commitment, you felt that you were obtaining the protection that you needed to pursue the intimacy of your interaction. Without this commitment from him, you could not have further indulged in your developing intimacy. Your promise together guarded this enchanted land. Never spoken, but always felt—the two of you, citizens of this new world. Each sexual gesture charted a region of this territory. You were binding his sexuality to yours, explorers arm in arm.***

***Understood that you were making a similar commitment, but the commitment on his part was central to the step that you would take into this colony of delights. This commitment affected his expectation for your actions on your own. Separate from what you created with him, at some moment you sealed this commitment for yourself.***

***Over a period of time, you have entered a zone of interactions that violate that commitment for yourself. They violate that commitment because you see that he would break up with you if he knew about these actions. That these actions are repeated pose a real threat for the commitment. They violate a commitment that you have made for yourself.***

***You have become devoted to your own pleasure for its own sake. When it is not maintained at its peak, you feel betrayal. There you need to betray so you can increase your own pleasure.***

***By returning to him at this point you are admitting that a set of accustomed behaviors and a level of physical intimacy now provide a level of emotional intensity previously served by the commitment.***

***He simply is not privy to the details that you feel would violate your connection. You know that you have been awakened in a way that he will never comprehend. Last night, you showed an autonomy that will only be crushed under his yoke.***

***Now, it is his commitment to you that holds him in the interaction and the intensity of his emotions that hold together the relationship. You can continue to believe this physical reality and return to your old ways. In fact, you have substituted that physical intensity (or simply the comfort and security of the relationship) for the actual commitment.***

***If you want to keep him, you'll need to renew the commitment. But if you request this, he'll wonder if you've been cheating.***

***More than ever you are casting him in the role of the villain in the piece. And this acts as bait to lure others into saying nasty things about him. The you can act as if you still love him. And it someone else who bears him bad will. To confirm that you are still in love, you are afraid to have a moment's peace without him by your side. If you miss a phone call, or cancel a get together, he will feel that you have betrayed him. You will feel it.***

***You are desperate. You don't want to be found out. You are worried what he might detect in your breath. Will he catch an errant fragrance in your hair. You pretend that he can notice the smallest changes in the skin. The myth grow bigger***

***If he finds out, he will.***



***You incite his anger, to make him angry. This is only a prelude to him enraged by jealousy. All this inspires your passion for me.***

***That is why I need to frustrate you.***

***He knows if you've had intercourse with another man. He know if you've been thinking about it. He knows, and you will know too.***

***You are the violated virgin. Violated because he keeps this structure intact for your eventual marriage. All these scenarios whether humorous or otherwise cast this image of the punishing husband, which is tantamount to having abused his wife. They also underline a horror that still haunts you.***

***You already have entertained a scene where I would confront him in public, and he would threaten me physically.***

***I don't care. But you do!***

***You know that he would be distraught if you broke up with him. You want to be found out. Given the emotional significance of your relationship, you never can break up with him.***

***You simply haven't dealt with the full magnitude of the letdown he would undergo. Nevertheless, you have some inkling of all this picture. And it further fuels your casting him as a villain. In such a role, he can't possibly hear the actual details of your behavior, because he'd kill the relationship and all it means for you.***

***As such he'd kill you.***

***So you need a patsy in this tale. You have invented me. Invented an encounter in room 411 of the Ritz. Invent a home invasion that turns into a quick tryst.***

***You want to profess your love for me. You want to keep me at a distance. Hence, the pieces of the letter thrown on the ground.***

***It is time. Do what you have to do. I have done all that I can for you.***

***I do the dirty work. I get rid of the monster. Whether you stay with him or move on to someone else, you value your reward over looking at the actual picture.***

***YOURS IN PASSION,***

***THE STRANGER!***

What nerve he has to think that he can monopolize your psychology. He doesn't know. He can't know.

–Did you get my letter?

You are resting at home.

–I don't want to talk to you.

–I didn't get yours.

–You bug me.

–I'm only telling you what you know to be true.

–I want you to make love to me like we did in room 411.

–That wasn't me. That was your fantasy.

–Don't you know that I...

You can't say. You don't want him to hear it.

–I want you to quit hiding behind this childish feelings. I want you to openly admit that you are moved by these raw drives that you haven't brought under control.

–So you can.

–I just want to see you satisfied with your love—your life.

–Really.

He meets you at a café. He is sitting with a couple. The man is nondescript. An assortment of leering stares and inappropriate laughter. The woman is eroticism personified. Exotic, with thick lips, smooth olive skin. Explicit with her display of skin. Soft cheeks. She beckons to you.

You feel that this is some kind of set up. A prelude to group sex. You are both enticed and totally repulsed.

His comments are consistently inappropriate. You zero in on her.

–What difference is there between having sex all the time with one partner or finding someone new from time to time? Every night. A lover can mistreat you, and you both end up having sex together. You hold it back and it's another strike against you.

–There's a difference between a spat and an out and out argument. You shouldn't hold out sex over a spat.

–Sometimes you just can't tell the difference unless you've been with someone else.

–You can have a drink with someone without having to sleep with him. That tells you enough about his worth versus the worth of your lover.

–Nothing can boost your independence like telling a man what he can do for you in a single night.

–A stranger may end up telling what you to do. Things could turn ugly real quick.

–That's the appeal of the danger. Knowing how to walk the line and still give the orders.

Until this point the men have been silent. Your stranger pipes in.

–Sex is all about luring your partners into your way of thinking. It's the art of seduction.

–A little threat doesn't hurt now and then.

The woman's lover is staring at you. You stare back to counter his rude remark.

–Sometimes it's just too draining to try to deal with some stranger after sex. Their curiosities are obnoxious.

–That's why I always do mine at their place. Get out and leave them hanging.

Her utter lack of shame is appealing. You wonder what your stranger has in store for the evening. You are disappointed when they get up to go.

–I hope to see you again.

You look right at her. She plumps her lips. The nasty friend continues to leer. She pulls him away.

–I can tell that you want her.

You blush. The drinks have made you more than unusually uninhibited. You want him to take you back somewhere for sex. He wants to talk. The education has only begun.

–She has a point. One lover or two. It's all the same. You become attached and you become possessive.

>>You see how you are giving in to your pornographic imagination. First you betray your lover. Then you are fascinated by the couple at the warehouse. Now you want Naomi.

You will not admit your feelings to him. You are drawn to his prowess. But if you tell him, you only risk being smashed to the ground. You want to kiss him in front of everyone in the café. Will he be able to focus his desire? Will he ever let you...

A love that is all encompassing. You are hypnotized by the sex. Your heart swells as you approach him.

The kiss is simple and entirely innocent.

You tingle with his spirit. You want him to take you in the restaurant.

He smiles and looks away. Nothing in your life will ever be as perfect as this moment.

You stare at the ground.

–What are we going to do tonight?

–You're going to go home.

–I want to be with you tonight. I have business to do. I'll see you tomorrow. the usual place.

–I don't want to do it like that anymore. I want something consistent.

–I'm not your toy. I'm not your lover.

–Why am I doing this? You don't even give me gifts.

–Now I'm your teacher. You're supposed to bring me an apple.

He looks at you. Your eyes sparkle.

When he leaves, you cannot get out your chair. You keep drinking. You want someone to pick you up. You have already betrayed your man. You can't go back to him.

You can barely stand up. You are afraid that someone might follow you home. You hail a cab.

Tonight desire is this hollow that permits no satisfaction.

At this point, you feel satisfaction lies in returning to your man. You plan a dinner for that night. You're going to cook for him. He'll bring wine. You decide not to show at the station. You expect a call from the stranger him before diner. There is none.

Part of you feels glad that you have hurt him. Really hurt him.

While you're boiling the rice, an image of the stranger's body starts to haunt you. You want to...  
You do nothing.

Your man arrive as you are tossing the salad. He kisses. A passionate kiss. It reassures you. But he takes overlong in the bathroom

You didn't want to wait through dinner. You want to make love. But now he is perturbing. His conversation is boring you. In the middle of the entree, you excuse yourself and go the bathroom.

A hand pulls you in.

–I want to make love.  
–What the hell are you doing here?

He pulls his body over to yours. You lock the door. He props you up on the sink. Your ass hugs the porcelain; your legs spread out from the platform. To brace yourself, you balance on the your hands on the towel fixture. You wrap your legs around him.

He is inside you. This is the encounter that you reserved for your man.

As you progress, your lover wonders about the delay. The stranger wonders about your increased ardor. All this is a natural development of a bad day. Now it is starting to turn good.

–Are you OK in there? I've been out here fifteen minutes.

More like twenty. You swallow your panting gestures.

–I'm sort of sick

–I'm sorry, honey, if I upset you. I just had a bad day at the office.

–Just give me a minute. I think it's the rice.

He stops talking. He's probably gone back to eat. Sometimes he's just too into his food.

The stranger now pushes your body into yours. Your balance is more precarious and this adds to the excitement.

You flush the toilet and close the door.

Your man has come back.

–I've been waiting to get in here.

You hesitate. He smiles.

He closes the door. You go back to the table. You are quick to finish your meal. Then you put your plate in the sink. You go back to the bathroom to watch your lover walk out.

–I need to get in there again.

–Are you going to spend all your night in there?

You both laugh.

Where the hell is he? The shower. You pull open the shower curtain.

The next day a package is waiting for you. It is a mass of bright paper, ribbons, and bows. You finger the black ribbon. Its rigid black cuts the line of the finger in two. Here is the abrupt confrontation contrary motions, exploration and restraint. It is at the heart of your desire. Curiosity. Undoing the knot invites the magic of the present. Even before you open it, this is the tangible form of your excitement. You feel the binding of your desire as you pull ribbon away from the box.. Casually, you fling away the undone ribbon, and tear at the paper. You dig your hand into the opening of the box and rip it open. You draw pleasure from how the box wedges the hand and sense the release of the sides of the box being broken apart. In crepe, the gift is cradled. Black lace. Sheer and revealing. Your fingers again enact the hide and go seek. They anticipate the bulging of the engorged flesh. You caress the bra and think how the stranger might work his fingers under the strap, how the elastic might act contrary to his desire to open and expose. The panties are size 5. How did he know? They panties show too much, say too much. They frame a suggestion too ripe for any eyes but those of a lover. The straps cradle the legs. They flare out from the regions of danger. Just ample to cover his hand, they are the intersection of his desire and your sex. The cheeks of your backside are fully displayed to his inspection. They entirely engage his attention. You want to model your prize. You stand naked before the full length mirror and slip the silk along your smooth legs. The bra complements the panties in their desire to constrain and reveal.

–Did you get my present?  
 –What are you talking about?  
 –Are you wearing them?  
 –Wearing what.  
 –You’re lying on your bed now. You feel the gentle touch of silk so lush on your body. Between undress and hiding, modesty and exhibitionism. The vestments await the placing of the hands. You’ve cheated me of my pleasure of putting on my gift. But I can still watch you model.

You let your urge stretch out on the bed. To protect your delicacy, you curl up and listen to his evocative invitations. You want to test out your new costume.

Can he simply watch and not touch? Is sight sufficient to absorb his interest?

–I need you to come to me. I’m ready for the reward that your gift can give me.  
 –It should be enough just to indulge me.  
 –After such indulgence, doesn’t your lust requires forgiveness? Can you contain your excitement in the walls of your chamber?  
 –Wait. I have to go.

The keys have engaged the lock, and he is entering the room. Your man arrives to disturb the fantasy. You are already hot. He is real. The stranger is not.

Your robe covers yours new acquisition.

–Aren’t you glad to see me?

You give in to his kiss. It transports you to the lover’s cave. He starts to undo the belt of the robe. You want to go along with him, but you fear discovery of the new dainties.

You grab his hand in a grip of complicity and reserve.

–Is something wrong, something distracting you?  
 –I couldn’t go to class. I was sick today.  
 –You have been sick quite a bit recently.  
 –What’s this supposed to mean?

You disengage from his embrace.

–You haven’t been yourself. Don’t you love me anymore?  
 –It’s not fair asking a question like that. You know what you’ve meant to me, how I’ll always love you.  
 –Then what is it?  
 –I’m just feeling that there should be something more in my life.  
 –What does that have to do with me? You haven’t thought that maybe you might find more pleasure elsewhere.  
 –Maybe, we need a break. Maybe, I need some time.

- Are you telling me that you want to break up?
- Just some time.
- Don't you know how much you love me?

He seems so pathetic now. You had always wanted this expression of love. But now the more that he loves you, the more you start to despise him. The more he wants your kiss, the more you want to dispel his enthusiasm.

- I just had a shower. I need a rest.
- So do I. Let's lie down.

You want to feel his body next to yours. But for this instant, his touch disgusts you.

- It would be better if you left before we say something that we'll regret.
- What could that possibly mean?
- You don't want to hear. It's just not a good time.

He is very reluctant to leave. But you sigh in relief as you hear the door slam after him. It is better this way. This is hardly the time to tell him anything. You have been distant. You have been distracted. But you can hardly give all this up for some stranger. Definitely strange.

Do you need these afternoon naps? Or are you becoming accustomed to this erotic wilderness to which your dreams invite you?

At this moment, a burning sensation fills your body. It engages all your senses. Asleep or awake. A woman dominates your view—Naomi? Her full lips incite yours. Her tongue lays a trail across your back. She surrounds the cheeks of your ass with her mouth. You are engrossed by subtlety of her caress. The tongue licks are gentle and avoid the urgency of any man. You melt in her constancy. Not the solid touch of flesh, but the ripples of liquid. You are awash in caress. A current in the massive ocean of your desire. You feel yourself opening and opening and opening. There is no end to your expanding feeling.

Nothing can hold you or restrict you. Entire release to pleasure. You are warmed by these waters so that you can hardly remember a winter's freeze. Blood rushes to your head. The frenzy. You are locked in this excitement. Her. You. The waters.

You give way to the blackness of the waters. A deep sleep. You have separated yourself from all your lovers. From your lover, your stranger, from Naomi, the man at the hotel, the boys that have pursued you, the night that encloses your days. You sleep and you sleep. Way past evening. Way past morning. This is for you, no one but you. This sleep is the wall between your world and all that has been interfering with you.

Your body stretches out in this new excitement. You cannot be stopped in this pursuit.

When you wake up, nothing can disturb this new found tranquility. You make yourself tea and bundle yourself up in your bed. Surrounded by shawls and blankets, you seal out this winter of alienation.

The tea warms you. A reflection of a night in the depths.

–Has your descent prepared you?

–There are some of my pleasure that you will never share.

–What’s standing in my way?

–Your anger. Your need to possess. Now that you’ve opened something in me, you’re trying to pull it back. It’s gone too far for you to control what is happening. I don’t really need you.

–Independence. Just act it out in a little more original way.

–So you don’t want to see your present.

–Not now. Not today. I’ve just got a little surprise and I need to prepare it.

You hang up the phone. For all that your dream meant, you realize where the actual currents are pulling you. Away from your lover and towards the stranger. You’re going to throw it all away. You have been throwing it all away. Your daytimes, your night times. Tossing away everything for just a glimmer. You crash on the rocks of your desire. Your destruction awaits.

There is neither light nor darkness, only touch. His touch. What was real and immediate is now mystical and eternal.

This is silly. Really silly. What does he have to offer you. A dramatic abandonment. He has pulled your desire from you, an affection, and turned it into a thing, to be tossed away, to be crushed, all this and so little else.

You want his lips against yours in reassurance. You detest this balance. Why has he never given you his number?

Kiss to smile. You want to see his smile. Come to me.

This is your destruction. So he can move on to another love. You want nothing so much as this. So he ultimately can have no hold on you. As there will be nothing left.

Nothing left.

It’s not love, it’s ambition.

With that residue of desire, you can turn on him for destroying you.

“Why have you done this to me?”

Even your poetic hideaway has been abdicated to his empire. What tyranny!



What can rescue from this eternal night. You take the nail.

Oh, the condemnation, the kiss!

You want him to hurry to your side. Him. Just to take you. You want to resist. He is forcing you. But you show no signs of resistance and he is relentless in his forays. Your body yields entirely. It is not his intention, but this contact is replete with violence. Your thrusts together erase all hopes of tenderness. His caresses are gentle, but their import is forboding. What! You don't want another lover, another slayer.

In a love so great, there can be no hesitation. It is better this way. Otherwise, you might have to answer for this total devotion.

As such, you need the dazzle of something practical to distract you from this intensity. I don't want to continue with this masquerade. Men.

The stranger can anticipate your shift. The appeal of the triangle. You have know the triangle of jealousy. A man. A woman. the other woman. Felt the part of the other woman trying to separate the loved one from his lover.

Now this omnipresent triangle with no hesitation. No punishment. You complete the circuit by wanting the woman. The man desires you both. He has engaged your passion. You cannot return to your lover. His reign has come to an end.

The stranger calls you late at night. He wakes you up. You are alone.

–I want to meet you for lunch.

–I can't. Not tomorrow. I have something to take care of.

–Let it wait.

Does he really know what he is talking about? He continues.

–I want you wearing nothing but the bra and panties, garters and heels. Wear a trench coat over them. Meet me at The Select.

–I can't.

–Twelve noon sharp.

You wanted to talk to your man, but you know that has to wait. You go over the scene in your mind. The stranger will be at the restaurant. He will be early. With a cocktail. His eyes will slide over your body as you enter the room. He will draw you over to him. The path is inevitable, until.

Somehow he has convinced you to put your legs on the table. Spread in full sight for his view. That it what you expect. What he wants. What you will not do.

Or watch him drop a napkin or a fork.

Or run his foot along your leg.

He blindfolds you. This is totally unexpected. Expected, but not at this moment. Either too tame or too full of suggestion.

He leads you to his place, some place. The dusty smell of a man. The room full of objects.

You are blindfolded. He gives you something to drink. Fills a morning already spent in alcoholic delight. None of this is real. It is all too real.

The blade. The threat. Hands to the neck. Anal sex.

All these curiosities refused. But the fear of the blindfold and his intense aggressiveness.

You have wanted this all along. So you would have an excuse to hate him. So you could get totally taken up by his passion..

What is this fear. That he has you in a trance of terror. That his hands are gripped around your neck. Not that he wants it. That you want this. That you find this bizarrely exciting.

“I want you to kill me! Kill me, kill me!”

You want to be choked by the stranger. Because you hate everything that you are doing, everything that you have become. Once he does penetrate, you can no longer resist his advances. Whether from behind or in front. The tongue is given free reign to your body.

The next day, you meet your man at a restaurant. You don't want this humiliation to occur at home. It has to be a public place. You can plant this dagger and escape before he has a chance to counter.

Your man is expecting a rendez-vous. He has flowers. A funerary gesture.

You take the flowers. Love the fragrance love the gesture. But this will not halt your plans for the assassination. You know that this is suicide. You have invested so much of yourself in this contact. And now you are destroying this link to your past, this link to the roots of your desire.

–I need to leave you.

You save your announcement for the period between dinner and dessert.

–What are you telling me? Don't you know that I love you more than ever? I want to marry you.

Do you really love him? How can your desire be divided between two men. Can you share?

–I can't keep going with this charade. It's over.

–We can still spend time together.

–Of course. But you do need to see other people. Just to get some distance from this experience. Just so you won't get pulled back in my life.

There are tears in his eyes. You want him to leave. Please leave. You want to have dessert in peace. The ecstasy of the chocolate.

He hangs on, won't make the break easy. He whines. He disgusts you. He leaves before dessert.

On the way home, you are crying. you know that you have made a mistake, but you are now directed by your necessities. The frills have to be edged away.

Form and function. The bone and the flesh.

The sacrifice. And the reward.

–I need to be with you.

–Not now. Not with what I've been through.

–I couldn't really

I have a surprise for you.

–I don't think so.

What could be your surprise? What could be left that you haven't done yet. Lies, cheating, betrayal, cruelty, aggression, anger, inflicting pain.

Murder.

Suicide.

You feel all the ugliness boil up from the sewers and the stench pervade your room. Animals, unkempt, unwashed—their waste.

You stand by a mirror brushing your golden hair. You look at your smile.

You are beautiful You deserve so much more.

The vision of the woman from the dream envelops you. You are that woman. You haven't lost anything. You are. Your desire is everywhere.

You don't need the stranger. You don't need your man. You repeat what you have been telling yourself for days.

The fantasies are over. Even when you touch your own body, it is not in anticipation of another's touch. It is pleasure itself. From now on, any man, anyone will have to live under this proposition. Your pleasure and your pleasure alone.

The next time that you show up at the stranger's, he meets you at the door in a robe. There is no illusion about his intentions. You feel that you are losing your ability to love or to care. But you want to be with him.

Is this part of the suicide that you fear? You still walk on the earth. You still see the sun. But you are immune to its warmth. His caresses are firsthand and forthright. You feel their import. You have given your nights to him. This is the exchange that you have made just to stay alive.

He makes a poem from the curve of your hip. The massage with oil. The heat of his kisses. The closeness of his skin to yours. His hip glued to yours.

You accept him inside you. His hands seem ubiquitous. Around your back. On your rear, In your hair.

You light. The presence of another. You fear the warm breath. But you are not surprised. It could be Namoi. It could be anywhere. Your body expands. Each orifice an opening to one, two.

She cares for you by how she kisses. How she eases your back in rhythm with him. The three of you locked in a mystical circle.

Your flowers, lotus on her tongue. Her tongue water lily to your torrent. His roses certainty to your night flow.

You welcome gestures by him that seemed impositions before. His penis in your mouth, leaves open your pussy to her stimulation.

The sex is mind-blowing.

The sex cannot end.

Fatigue always has its renewal in the multitude of partners. While you welcome him from behind, she is on her knees and is licking his backside. You finger your clitoris to increase the pleasure. Her fingers reach around to welcome his penis in your vagina. The proximity of all three together. His hands cradle your breasts.

There is no longer any empire of the penis or the vagina. Every bit of skin is enlivened by this contact. This is your wish and your wish is now reality.

You cannot breathe. You are only breath.

Why had you waited for such an encounter? Beyond the cherished, pleasure becomes the all encompassing. A feeling of wholeness. An enclosed world view. All one...all this pleasure. All of it.

There is no self, no selfishness. A continuity of giving. You don't have to take. There is no taking as all is given.

The masses of skin fade into the heartbeat, yours, theirs.

A buzzing in the brain expands into a dullness, a faintness, coming ever closer. An overpowering ROAR. You are now amongst it. The shower. The torrent. The waterfall of your youth. OH!

You and her and him. You scream. They scream. Such ecstasy.

The three of you curl separately on the bed. You each sleep dreamlessly. There is nothing more to feel or see.

Your depression of the day before is now only a memory. You come back to your apartment unafraid of work. You read for the rest of the day. You want to return to the fold. You call him. He is not home.

He shows up later. You tell him that you want more. He tells you that she is not there. She is not coming again.

You want her number. She is the source of your new-found pleasure. He can do nothing. She was paid for her work and has now disappeared.

You are hurt by this arrangement. You want more. Surely she feels the same. But the stranger assures you that she has been well paid.

–That is the business. To make pleasure.

–This was beyond pleasure. This was Shangri-la.

–You are again carried away by your own fantasy. You expect to say things, to see things that only you see.

–That's ridiculous.

–No, it's what happened.

–I want her number.

–You can never afford her.

–And you could.

–Why?

–For you.

–That's ridiculous. You were the one with two woman. You wanted it that way.

–No, you did. I did only what you want.

–Don't say that.

–What's that?

–That you need me.

–You think that I need your innocence. The act of you giving yourself. That's impossible. I don't need any of this. I can find any whore on the street and if I pay her enough, she'll make me feel like I'm in a paradise that I'll never leave. But that is the lesson. You have made a prison out of your utopia. Any whore could make me feel better than you do.

You need to leave before this gets worse. Sleep is the answer for this morass. You need to stimulate yourself just to sleep tonight.

Your next day is nothing but misery. After this final betrayal, how could you be any different? No, you are beginning to understand his pursuit of money. It sharpens his tastes, permits him to stimulate himself to the highest degree. For the thrill of it all!

That is how you can escape this depression. Commit yourself to pleasure for its own sake. Work with those along the way. But see passion for its own sake.

You have become accustomed to the stranger's touch. That night he offers the pleasure that you guarantee. Your tongue becomes married to each inch of his body. He obliges you in the same way.

There is little to say at this point. You love his lingering embraces. He is affectionate with his fondling. You are his pet and he treats you with respect. He feeds and clothes you. He takes you out for walks. You cause him pain and he enjoys its sting.

If you had only accepted sooner this reality.

Some days you walk the whole day hand in hand. He teaches you to make money, and you teach him to make time. You work hand in hand. He tutors you in his darker arts. You admire men and woman. You watch couples nestle together in the park.

You want to be with him. He tolerates your foolish whims.

Is this love?

Where do your expectations end and his ambitions begin.

You have lost one love. You do not want to lose this, whatever it is.

When he thinks that you lose interest, he introduces you to other cultures and their sexual practices. He teaches you to see like a cat in the dark. You watch his skin glow. Your mouth surrounds the glitter. You too are all aglow.

Occasionally, you are moved by other waters. But you remember how he can stir you up. He anticipates boredom. A new restaurant. A spicy liqueur. An excruciating dessert. The fragrance waft around you. You bathe in them, surrounded by the bubbles.

Champagne breakfasts and honey lunches. Incense and jewels. Linens and silks. You are now knit into this physical reality.

What you had been missing? Your eyes now wide open.

Just when you get ready to question his method, she shows up again. He leaves the two of you to be alone. Today, she is being paid to talk.

–How can you let yourself be sold like a donkey or a piece of meat?

–I am paid so well that I own the rest of my time. So he is buying my art. I am an artist of love.

–How do you attain such a skill?

–You use the body as a canvas. The crevices and the piercing. The smooth regions and the tattoos. Silver on the skin. A chain. A bracelet. The blade and the necklace. To protect and display. The tingling of the metal together. Bells on the ankles.

>>Total in your nakedness. Absolute in your clothes. Immaculate.

>>Your invitations. Your flowers. Your sex. No modesty. But the need for veils and control. Revelation.

>>Pulling her flesh to yours. The ability to burn away time. The healing touch. An art with his body. Care for his member. To worship its power. Challenge its dominance. His back, his legs. His chest. Strong arms in embrace.

>>Knowing that it is your touch that creates attraction. Your touch that creates beauty.

>>That you know your worth and do not give in for anything less.

–But when you give yourself to somebody, doesn't that relate to what he's been able to share with you about himself? Or what you've shared with him? Each new caress or sexual position shows a deepening of the closeness between the both of you.

–Girl, that has nothing to do with any reality that I've lived. Once you've become a professional, sex is all about performance. How you can give pleasure. How you can take pleasure. This extra bit of psychology is just that—an extra. It get in the way. Sex is just that... You like it or you don't. You don't because you can't do it right. Something's messed up.

–But what about the feeling that you get. Can you say something about them to your partner?

–You do when you touch them. When they touch you back.

–But how can you protect yourself against them twisting your emotions and tossing them aside.

–That's the beauty of sex. You can't. Only to a degree. Sex is about letting go, not holding on.

–But the other day you seemed to say so much more to me.

–And then I got paid and left.

–Not today?

–I like you. I like talking to you. I could tell that when we were together. But I'm not going to let it affect how I do my job.

–And you do love to give pleasure. But isn't there regret.

–In a relationship, yes. But not in this, for what it's worth.

–But sometimes you need the physical intensity to make the relationship work.

Sometimes that intensity originates spontaneously. Accidentally. Without warning.

–It does—so?

–But that's it. You get overwhelmed. And you can talk about it. If it happens in your work, you can forget about it.

–But doesn't that happen to everyone. You go back to a lover and tell them. I just can't bull shit myself as easily as you do. You want to believe things about your lover that just aren't true. You want the sex to say things for you that he won't say.

–You've just got too hard. Were you always like this?

–Did I always get paid for sex? No. But the first time that it happened, I felt good about it. And I did it again and again.

–But doesn't it drain on you doing three four customers in a night. Doesn't your look become hard?

–Did you feel that with me?

–Maybe, you're different with women.

–Are you coming on to me?

–What if I was? Could you deal with it? Or would I have to become a client.

–I love your body.

–And I love yours. But there are so many issues about caring.

–See--your hangups again. You can't enjoy sex for what it is. A pleasurable physical thing.

–I can. But I want to share that pleasure with someone with whom I share other things.

–And I do too. And sometime I get paid to do just that.

–And sometimes you get spit at. Or insulted.

–We all do.

–Do you have a past? Were you always so...free?

–I wasn't always anything. And either were you. You learn with each kiss. With each dollar that you make. And sometimes you stop worrying.

–What are you trying to forget?

–Nothing any different than you are.

–Abuse.

–There's a lot of abusive men. Men and women. We all meet our share.

–You sound like there was something serious that happened to you.

–You still have this view of sex that's dirty. It's not the pain that forms your sexuality, it's the pleasure.

–Often the pleasure feels so good because of the pain.

–That sounds like S&M.

–Maybe it does.

–When you feel the crack of the whip on your ass, it makes the slightest kiss, stronger. You savor the relief. You want the whip to hit stronger so that you can enjoy the kiss more. The you enter regions of ambiguity. the bite of the kiss. Drawing blood. The love bite.



- When can you stop that cruelty? And isn't that what you start to crave. Doesn't that get to be sort of sick.
- Not if you enjoy it. It's not a moral issue. It's an issue of enjoyment.
- But if you find you start enjoying pain to the exclusion of pleasure, then it is an issue.
- For you maybe. But you like what you like, you can't change that.
- So when did you start to enjoy cruelty?
- I never did
- But when did it start?
- You're trying to make it seem that is what I enjoy.
- And, it's not?
- I enjoy to fuck. I enjoy fucking and being fucked.
- And making love.
- If that's part of it.
- But one can be tender and the other is just so—well, gross.
- You've never just enjoyed a fuck to clean out the system. Like you argue with some guy and you just take it all out on him.
- And what next? You act like the argument never happened.
- This is going in circles. You enjoy to fuck or you don't.
- I don't know any more. I just had too many arguments with my man and no amount of sex was going to make it better.
- Or you found a better fuck.
- That's not the issue.
- The hell it isn't. Whether you enjoy your body, or you're hung up about it. You think too much about this.
- I don't think that I could just make love with you now, knowing what I know
- What's that?
- That you got paid for it. I never thought that I'd really be able to follow through with a woman.
- Did you enjoy it?
- I loved it. It was the best sex that I ever had. Mind-blowing. Uh!
- What?
- I felt that way when I did it. But now I don't know. He was with me, and it made it so much easier.
- And now? You'd do it again,
- I don't know if I could. If I would, if I ever would.
- But you did.
- I know.
- Do you feel bad about it?
- Now you sound like me delving into your past.
- Men have a way of destroying it. They think that they have a special privilege just because they've fucked you. Like they get to see inside your head. That's what I'm trying to tell you. If you make each gesture mean something so specific, then a man's got control over your body. You need your whims to protect you. So you can just one day say, hell, you don't know what I'm feeling.
- They never do.
- Until you need one inside you. Just to know what you are, or what you're not. And then you feel like just puking.

Both of you stare at each other. There is no sex in the gesture. But there is a nakedness to the understanding. You can feel her tongue massaging you. You will not give in to that feeling. There is still something too glib for you in her understanding. Automatic. Like she no longer works for insights. She has taken you apart like a john.

You can tell that there is something difficult in her past. But it is no longer of issue. You are worried that you are getting that hard.

The stranger has let you talk because he knows that she is always a professional. She can make you feel how you have become hard. How you can give without expecting acknowledgment. How you have compromised principle for a promise given in the flesh. How you are even more vulnerable to loving words. And tears. How you can't detect dishonesty in a touch?

She told you that she was not being paid but can you ever believe her? Maybe this is just the return visit. The quality control. What quality. If you were drunk you wouldn't care. It wouldn't bother you that she doesn't really care. You'd let her kiss you. Go down on you. Tonight, it's not like that. You see her for what she is, what she's always been.

The stranger hates you for this supposed honesty. He know that the two of you are more alike than you know. At least, that is what he wants to believe.

Did he expect the two of you to make love? Is that why he left the two of you together? She gets up to get a drink. You want one, but you pass. You need your wits about you. Her ass is firm. She has worked the mirror and the exercise room. You wonder if you look that good.

You want her to hold you and tell you that you look that good.

You look at yourself in the mirror. They are laughing at you. You still look like a little girl. the worry of the last weeks weigh heavily on you. It echoes in your eyes, the lines in your face. But the lines are visible only to you.. You want to mimic her world weariness. To yourself, to them, you are still a little girl. Student whore. A psychology project. You can rush back to your safe suburban home and pretend that none of this ever happened.

Pretend until the nightmares start up again.

"For me, honey, this is real."

How real? Nights sliced through with coke and ecstasy. Mornings avoided by an embrace with the bottle. Valium and encounters with a shrink.

If you had not enjoyed this so much, you could put aside her fancies. You never wanted to get that hard. You'd rather hang on to your confusion. To your tears.

Sometimes you just have to say I quit.

The stranger wants to continue to test you. He hold the key to your fantasy.

–Did you love your visitor?

–What are you trying to do? Test me.

–Test how.

–Trying to turn me. I'm not one of your girls. I'm here because you asked me here. For no other reason.

–And you like being here.

–What are you talking about?

–You like the rush.

–You think that I need something to keep this going.

–You're an addict. You're looking for a bigger and bigger jolt. That what she means to you.

–I like it for what it was. I'm not going to pay for it.

–You're always going to pay for it. With your wondering. Your worrying. You just pretend that you're hanging on by this caring thing. It's about the jolt. Or the cool. Or the chill. It's a high thing. Or staying in the freeze.

–I'm starting to get sick of sex. I just turned over one loser for another. All you guys just poking something in me.

And so it goes.

You just want to borrow all his videos, stay at home and learn his tricks. Bang.

You feel your body has just become a spectacle. You can't make love. You've got to have an audience.

You see him taking you in a room and having sex while all these eyes are staring at you. You hide in your modesty. But as time progresses, you start to like the attention. Each eye has penetrated you, and you writhe in their individual provocations.

Could you ever see it getting taken this far?

Not without your knowledge. But he might get you started, and when you find out, you'd just say keep it going. You'd never want to stop.

Anytime. Anywhere. If you want it, then he does too. If he does it, you'd just go along. You joke about doing it for money. About letting a friend join in. One night you imagine some other men joining in. You look about and wonder who is this guy going in and out on you.

How could you ever get out of this?

You begin in the morning saying no way. Then you just give in. Like any other night.

“I want a new car. I want to go fast. I'm going to get a sports car. “

“Come on, man. Take me somewhere”

You wait until you have something on him. That he’s been with another one of his woman. Now you’re playing cop.

Where’s the next adventure? Maybe you have to take a lover in training. Teach him to play all the games that the stranger taught you.

The stranger doesn’t seem too strange anymore. You seem to be the strange one. You’re just looking for another score.

–Want to go to a party.

–What kind of party?

–A high rollers party.

–What are they going to be doing? Dropping their cash on the ground?

–You can drink for free.

–That’s what it all comes down to. First, it’s youth, then it’s sex, then it’s just about getting fucked up.

You been spending too much time in this run down apartment.

Maybe a party is what you need. His friends have a big house in the hills. A winding driveway. Wrought iron railing on the balcony. You’re sipping drinks as the sun goes down. Your skin is touched by the waning light of summer that’s held on to November. You don’t want to go in. You don’t want to see what’s going on inside. This has gone way beyond curiosity to certainty. But it’s too cool to stay on the balcony. You start to search for the stranger. He wants you to explore the rooms.

In one room, a man whips a woman who is tied up. Is this Naomi’s disciple?

In another room, two girls wrestle in paints. This is art. What happened to the art of conversation.

What delight might tempt you?

The stranger is alone in the next room.

–I was waiting for you.

–To do what?

–To tie you up.

–Is this some kind of fetish humor?

–I want to be with you.

–And that’s tonight’s entertainment. You think it’s enough just to be with you. There has to be a trick.

–There’s other rooms here.

–I’ve heard the story before. A wife gets bored with her rich husband. She starts hanging around with her liberated friends in the hope that she could teach her about true pleasure. She take her to a brothel but it’s more like a women’s club. After a while, they

start turning tricks like it's a school for lost lovers. Then the woman meets some rich guy who's not just a good trick, but the best sex that she's ever had. And her husband is just hanging around like some lame fuck. But then loverboy starts getting into rough trade, and she says whoa. But he won't go away. And then the husband gets involved when the lover shows up at their place. Then a little gunplay, and she just goes back to the American dream.

–What is this? Whore USA?

–More like Baby Goes to College.

–So did you bring the video with you.

–I don't see the VCR.

And the two of you are racing sports cars down Main St.  
It's night time. And this is where it's at.

The sheets are black satin. They put you off by their ostentation. He is instinctive in his movements. You have grown used to the up and down. He is getting no closer to you. Only repeating the same actions. How can you possibly find satisfaction? Because as much as you know that it's always the same, it still grabs you in. This is your nature.

You have outgrown your stranger. But you cannot leave him. This is the essence of your desire. The nightmare is just beginning because you are directing the puzzle.

What are you going to do?

You get him to go for another round. This will break up. You know that you need to break him before he breaks you. The trick has changed. Before, he was trying to bring you down. Now you have to extract his secret. You're his surgeon.

You get up from the bed to wash your hands. What follows needs to be antiseptic. If you play doctor, you got to play by the book. You want to reduce the pain felt by your patient.

–It's easy to say you don't need sex after you've just had it.

–I just think that I feel pressured to go along with you.

–Pleasure comes from this moment that you give out. There is nothing left but trying to raise your own pulse and just trying to bang away at your underworld.

The hard line. You hang with it. Want to drop it. Kept alive by it. His kiss.

Funny how that's come to mean something so different.

–Sometimes I wish that I'd just crash into a wall. Go into a coma. Or just end it all.

–What prompted that?

–Me. You.

–What do you want to do tonight.

–You're not taking me seriously.

–What do you want me to do? Join in.

- This is the only thing for which you aren't prepared. I can be your pleasure model. Follow you on these journeys. Get carried along by these moods. Everything to inspire curiosity. And anger. And love. To sharpen my appetites. To make me want women. Or multiple partners. Or someone different ever night. But now I've become this monster and I can't go back to being comfortable with myself. I just want out. Not being with one person. Or going back. I want to end it all. How does that affect your game? Were you prepared for that emotion?
- That's the most extreme stage of desire.
- Is that all you can say? Can't you show more concern?
- Concern. You just want to be absolved of your own experience. I wasn't pulling your strings. You wanted all these things.
- Things. I wanted what you told me to want. You gave me these delights and I wanted what you gave me. And now you say it's me. You trained me to be the way that I am.
- And how is that?
- A sex fiend. Nothing can satisfy me.
- That's not my story.
- I can't focus any more. I just love sex for its own sake. Now I'm totally vulnerable.
- Now's the chance for you to intervene. To finally give form to your life.
- And what could that be?
- You have the insight into how people really are. You live in the heart of their greed. You watch them rise and fall with their appetites. I have taught you how to get whatever you want. You hate your own freedom.
- This is not freedom. I'm a slave to the wind.
- Or you can blow like a hurricane. It's up to you.
- And if I don't want to burn inside.
- You don't want to live.
- Exactly. I want to die.
- Then that too is part of desire. You have to push yourself until you feel the throes of death. And just before you hit that final bang yell wait.
- You think that's going to work.
- It's always worked for me. Pleasure resides in the interstices between life and death. To let the feeling hang. To let it take you over. Feel the gagging and making it continue until all that remains is this sliver of resilience.
- This is sick. It just gives you the justification to torture other people. You've grown so use to your own suffering that you feel the necessity to torment others even more.
- I just know what can make people feel more satisfied.
- These just aren't about delights. There are people behind the private parts. Or don't you care to know.
- Programmed personalities. People who can't follow their own lusts. And so lust after the avarice of others. That is real acquisitiveness. Who need things because they are afraid to face their own feelings.
- And I am facing these feelings. And I'm going nowhere. I'm starting to hate everyone. I'm starting to hate myself. I want to end it all, and it's not part of some sex game. I don't want to pull back at the last moment. I just want to push on through.
- Admit your reprehensibility. You are garbage.
- Can't you offer me any help.
- I'm not here for that. I can only make you feel better.

–You are what disgusts me.  
–You need to be alone for a while. With your own depravity.  
–And where can that lead?  
–You’ll realize that there’s nowhere to jump off.  
–Think about your worse fantasies. Are you afraid to bring damnation to yourself? That can be your most extreme ecstasy. To see that all you is your sex drive. Then you scream in your own darkness.

In your nakedness, you scream for some salvation. But you have not been answered. You have been taken to paradise, but you have not been heard. It is ultimately silent even there. There is no wind in paradise.

You are struck by the ample quality of your own sex. That your body is blasphemous in its very form. To curse your origins is to seek the ultimate satisfaction. You would never admit going to this point but realize that this is the most satisfying. A crucifix. To join in his suffering and make him suffer.

The silver makes your body tingle. You rub it along your smooth legs. So smooth as to rival any perfection in the universe. Any man would melt under this temptation. For what they are and where they lead. More than that as they wrap around his body. The rhythm is hypnotic as you touch the silver to your hips. Move it close to your ass. Around your clitoris. You begin to stimulate yourself. Give to this more than you have given before. In your hate is your love for this and this alone. This marriage of heaven and hell. You don’t want moral prohibitions. This is your own desire. To be seized and seized by your passion. You continue to stimulate yourself with your fingers as you move the crucifix into your vagina. Any man would give in to your sex appeal. You are irresistible and you know it. You could damn any man. Make him submit to your yoke.

You scream in your ecstasy. At the pain that you have caused. At the pain you feel. But you are a monster. You cannot kill yourself. You cannot be killed. You cannot die. You are immortal. Immortal in your passion.

–I need someone who I can dominate. I thought about you when I was with another man. Someone who I just picked up on the street. How I could hurt you. Deny you all forever. Just give it to someone who never could know my name. Look what you have turned me into.

But the stranger is not there to rescue you with philosophy. And you need to live with your own ecstasy.

You have achieved that mystical union with your lord. And still you are left wanting. Entirely damned and entirely saved.

Ultimately, this silver trinket has no real significance. It marks your servitude to men. The torment of a woman under his yoke.

How to celebrate your descent. You seek out a brash sixteen year old. With no desire on your part but to break him down completely. He is a friend of your cousin. Prone to the appeals of drugs and alcohol. You teach him how to delay his gratification. He becomes devoted to giving you pleasure. This is not enough for you. You want to make him privy to the crisis of the spirit.

You pick him up at high school To let him know what is really going on. As time wears on, you make him puzzled about his inability to reach orgasm. Later, he is unable to achieve erection. He plies you for drugs. But he is reduced to licking you for your pleasure.

He wants you to impart your wisdom. You laugh at his absurdity. What does he have left?

A proclivity for petty crime. Shoplifting gifts for you. Holding up convenient stores. He starts to get sloppy. A total embarrassment. And he won't go away. A sick puppy. Drooling. A dripping nose.

A fucking little junkie. Is this enough for you? Not yet.

He show up one night bleeding. He gets in on it with the cops. They wound him. But he still gets away. You want nothing to do with this.

You turn him in.

—I expected more from you.

You can't look him in the face. You really hurt him.

Your next conquest is a priest. He takes you in as a project. Wants to rehabilitate you faith. He fascinates you with the ritual. You fascinate him with yours.

You spread him across your altar. This is where love ends and pleasure begins.

The damned among the damned. He is able to resist your initial appeals. The need to get close enough to redeem this lost sheep. Hand in hand you investigate the power of prayer. The power of love. You want more than he can offer with his counsel.

His questions make dark nights darker. To forgive sin, he needs to contemplate sin. To know sin, you have to act out sin.

He offers the scenes. The kneeling penitent. The prone patient. The hopeless case.

A massage turns into a punishing slap. Anger turns into a make up kiss. Confession demands a consolation hug.

A night watch against the inroads of sin. To prevent the visit of the dark one.



Sleeping in the same bed to make sure that you do not fall under the spell of a fever. He starts to massage your neck. Kiss you.

A naked embrace to keep the both of you warm against this winter freeze. The insertion of his penis to warm your insides. You share another mystical union with your lord.

The priest starts to get possessive. His loss of virtue, he blames on you. So he can't let you go, or he will face divine wrath in his nakedness. He clings to you. He seeks your succor. You are already spent. He is worse than boring. He is a moralist. What's good for the goose is not good for the gander.

He wants to convert you from your evil ways. He wants to convert your evil into the goodness of his vocation. Why didn't you heed the warning of your stranger? This vow of spiritual poverty was draining what little resources that you have left.

Eventually his pastor learns of these transgression. You are banished in the scandal. The priest is hidden in another parish.

You feel no better after this encounter. You start to prime a married man for his resources. He makes all these protestation about leaving his wife. You find his claims rather comical. Only the sex is your interest. he can give without expectation. And you don't have to fill him with love poetry. Time spent writing is given over to time in bed.

You rediscover your physical charms. He feels the need to complement and you find his devotion rather quaint, cute. He hands stroking your breasts. Gazing in his eyes. Hand in hand, cheek to cheek dancing.

For the time that he is with you, you totally hold his attention. And when he is gone, you put him out of your mind. He loves sex for what it is. And you regain a belief in yourself.

Sometimes he gets guilty about his wife. You play along. You ask him to leave her for you. You tell him that you think the world of him. You don't. But he needs to believe you. It gives him reason to return home.

After a while his stupidity starts to grate on you. You tell him that you're going to inform his wife.

–You miserable bitch.

–You want to fuck me. You could just ask.

–If you ever tell her, if you ever think of telling her, you're going to regret it.

–You're threatening me.

–I'm just telling the truth.

–A threat!

You will tell her. This guy is a pig. But you need to get something out of him.

–Do you just see me as a bank?

–I've never taken a cent from you.  
 –What about the theater, the clothes, the dinner?  
 –Are you accusing me of being a whore?  
 –I love you.  
 –Are you being giddy?  
 –I haven't had anything to drink.

You slap him. He grabs you. He hold you down on the bed. This had gone too far. You're not going to let that happen. You reach for something, anything to hit him with.

The arrangement comes to an end. You send his wife flowers and a note about her lovely husband. You hope to see neither one again.

You should have scammed jewels out of him before he went over the edge.

The affair had reactivated a hedonistic streak. After considering a series of one night stand, you recognize that this is not your style. A few drinks and you get left at the bar with another phone number for your collection.

Your desire is hedonistic, but your performance is not. You wouldn't mind if everyone in the bar was in pursuit of you. The star turns to her fans. And you need to make sure this adulation is real. But to follow through again and again, you'd need to be drunk all the time.

Maybe, that could substitute for you need for actual concern. Men who you used to seem appealing, now annoyed you with their desperation. Especially those who hid their lust behind heart and flowers. You do something that you had not done in a long while. You seek the company of women.

Some are aghast when you tell your story. For others, its is their truth. Sure, a woman's caress could protect you. But it still comes too easy. There is not the give and take that you value in understanding a man's touch.

Your sisters observe that same insight. A few find the give constantly turning into take. Other women yield to the stream of gifts from men, learning techniques to skim off rewards for the most automatic gestures. You laugh together about your guile. What you give up for your own pleasure. What you could supplement your enjoyment with. You come together not to give pleasure, but to question the roots of the pleasure-seeking individual.

You spend time taking walks in the park. You make tea together. Sometimes, you all were filled with a spirit of hilarity as you tried your hand at baking. Flour tossed around the room. Dissection of male anatomies and male complaints. Or a dialogue absent of male interference. How to feel complete in your skin.

You do not worry what will happen after you part company. There is a sense of communion that carries over. into your other experiences.

That night you have an amazing dream. A rebirth, in water. Not from your mother, from the depths of the sea. You feel like you have discovered your true home. You float up from a cave into the whirling currents. You twist up to the surface.

Floating like a mermaid, trailing seaweed, you want to return to the cave. You want to go back to your origins. Back to the dark pool.

Obscurity dominates your view. The delta. Where the river meets the sea. The tow waters in conflict. Rolling in the tensions of these whirlpools. Drawn down in the suction. Submerging. then lifted up in the flow.

Your flower. This tingling washing over you. Your heart suspended in this blooming. Blood flow

Your flower. From where all life proceeds and all life is expelled. Coughed up.

You hold in these contrary motions. Burst from your loins. Blood rush in the head. Take off in the sky.

The body cannot sustain this bloom. Spreading out. Extended in all directions.

Organic. Plant-like—growing. Full of light—resonating—the sound

Casting off this dark bile. Nights spent in poisonous vapors. You have suffocated and now you can breathe free. In air of in water or even in stone.

Your flower. Fragrant. Narcotic. In sleep, you sleep, and sleep.

Dream in dream, rest in rest.

You smile as your flower seeks the sun. Opens to its warmth. Smile to smile.

You are everywhere. You sense by the warmth. Almost feverish. Touched by dew. Glistening.

Rise and fall in the breeze. Vibrate in the tremors of the earth.. You burst forth and again seek the light. You can see with these rhythms. Sense the presence of mountains. Immense peaks rivaling the sky. Deep valleys.

Rain—bathed in rain. You feel fire and water and wind co-mingle. You are whipped around in this mix.

Suffused with this storm. Let it come down, rise up, twist around. Come into me. Let me enter you. Let us twist one on the other. We are and together we are. You are we.

The flower—burying your hands in it. Flowing the petals on our face. Losing yourself in it. Water lily float.

Your tongue is imbued with chatter. Words flow into a stream of meaning. A tartness on the tongue. Understanding of nonsense syllables. Sentences to express feelings not yet felt. The whole universe echoes this language. Surging of the spoken word.

The tongue resounds with this harmony.

You awaken from this dream with a sense of closure. Your search is over.

You want to call someone to share the dream with. You want to return to your stranger. You knew that through all this aimless wandering that you were coming back to a destination. Your original place of departure.

You seem to catch him at a bad time. He is on the other line. You wish that he would throw everything up just to come beat your side. You know that you abandoned him. But he more or less expected this end.

So he knew that you would need to return. Hence, the need to frustrate you. He does not call you back. You call later and he had already left. No doubt he is with a new conquest. No doubt.

Why had you even bothered? Because you will try back tomorrow. You'll keep calling back until he acknowledges you.

You can't remember how long its been since this journey began. A month. A year. Two years. Three years.

You feel much older. The mirror will not betray, but you will. It is in the eyes. The knowledge of these years. You cannot engage this toil without some fatigue. Inside you have been carved out. He had to have know that about you. His desire to break you. To set you up. After all the pleasure, why had it come to this?

No names.

Insults!

Pet names.

Whispering cat. You remember that. Had he ever called you that? What had he called you? Love rabbit. Snake.

If you could just recall a night of tenderness. Or he had lapsed into tenderness. Lapsed into boredom. What did you have on him.

Your supple body. Innuendo. Promise.

Was there any reality in the touch. And if he does call back. Will you rush on back. And what do you risk?

–Why did you come back?

He does not want to get to close. He wants to admire you from afar. Like a prize. His prey. A leopard ready to strike.

–Why are you looking at me like that?

–You’re the one who wanted to get together. I’m just trying to figure out your motive. After all, you left me.

–That’s not how I recall it happening.

–Whatever.

–I just got sick of your resistance. Your torture. Your games.

–It wasn’t about games. It was about who you were. Peeling back the layers.

–Or creating the layers as you did the peeling.

–Because the creating could echo desires that were real. Urges too deep to admit.

–For years I’ve had all this emotion that I can’t express. I was rotting away..I could feel my skin withering away. All my years come to nothing—so weary. I needed you to see that to see me. But you wanted to toy with my affections.

>>Now, nothing changes. I stare in the darkness, a drink in my hand, wondering what’s happened to me. There’s nothing that I can do but sit here and drink. When I felt things change, change between us, I thought that there was a ray of hope. Just maybe we could be together. Maybe a ray of hope. But you’ve always been so cold to me. You don’t see me at all. When a person gets like that, there’s this total emptiness.

–We just shared some fun. We had great memories.

–So the feeling was only on my part. The past months, I haven’t not doing my work. Just surviving. This constant chase for joy from night to night. If I died some night, would anyone even miss me. Would you even give it a second thought.

–You still want to touch me?

–And if I did?

–Are you threatening an episode?

–I don’t know. I think that I’m starting to despise you. I’ll keep waiting and eventually, I’ll go completely numb.

Now you wonder why you had made an effort to come here. You had wanted him to fuck you, maybe give the illusion of caring. But you don’t want to give him back those years. You don’t want to offer him tribute. To let him know.

–I figure if I just let the hate build, I’m never going to want to come here again.

You are feeling out of control in the light. This is all that he can see.

–If I have I just had something to drink.

Then you can forget what you have given away. Still trying to you protect a space that no one can get to. But more overwhelmed by your own fear and disgust.

–Let me take you somewhere. One last date.

–Aren't you afraid of what I'll make of our time together?

The Elysée is a high end brothel. Not really a brothel, an entertainment club.

–You can look but you can't touch. That'll only drive the price up.

You believe the market would serve a hedge against actually trading money for sex. You fantasize traipsing 'round with the girls.

Look at my body. You have a nice body. Something to make up for those years of withering. away. For the first time in a while you have a sense of confidence about yourself.

The faces. The bodies. You watch their moves. Wonder about the gaze of the men.

–Do you see the desperation in the faces? Faces that cannot look you in the eye.

You ignore the fragility of these bodies. The walking skeletons. He continues.

–Can't you see?

–I could do this. It would be great to be up there.

So much for your devotion. He brings you here precisely for that reason. He wants wanted to laugh at your devotion, your nostalgia.

He calls one of the women over to the table. Has her dance for you. The money continues to flow. A private room. Touching. He will not touch you. She touches you both. And you want to join in.

–Can I touch you?

He peels off a couple of hundred.

–Anything that you want.

What do you want? At this point, it goes beyond fantasy. You want to see yourself like this. You start to undo your dress. You massage your breasts. Show both the stranger and the dancer that you still have it.

As you peel off your dress, you see more eyes watching you. Your audience. Every man wants your, want to touch you. Do they have enough to pay?

All these eyes. The walls have eyes. You wonder what they are thinking. Will they keep thinking about you when they rush home to their wives.

“I was touching her, but I thinking about you.”

You hear the chorus of voices all around you. Still in your panties and panty hose, you are envious of the dancer's total nakedness. Your writhing mimics that totality. You slip your finger under your panties. Your fingers first are rough. You remember past indiscretions. As you become aroused, you sense your excitement transmitted to everyone around you. You want to fuck, someone, anyone. You don't care. The money can make you forget. Five hundred dollars. A thousand. Thousands. What do you need to forget the pain?

Your panties and panty hose are on the ground. Still continuing the fantasy in your heels.

He looks over at you.

—I always knew that you'd come around.

At this point, he cannot, he does not.

You are back in your seat, dressed, having another drink. Had you been touched? Had you ever got up from your seat? None of it really happened.

The stranger looks satisfied as he looks over at you.

—I had agreed never to be with you again. But tonight, you've convinced me.

—What about tonight?

—It was what it was. Now I want you to meet me tomorrow at the apartment. I want you to be ready for sex.

You are frightened by his blunt tone. But the next night you are ready. You have thought about this moment for a couple of years. All too anxious what it would mean for you. Your reawakening.

The lights in the hallway are out. Only a reflection from the street lamp. This ought to be a cue. But the fear inspires you. Your stomach is nervous. Why should this encounter mean anything more than that.

When you open the door, the lights are off. You are even more afraid. His touch comes from within this fear. What is this?

His tongue on your neck. Tongue to tongue. Face to face.

You are transported to the Elysée. All eyes are on you. Your nakedness is not a stripping away of your veils. You are naked just virtue of being here.

What if you want to stop this? Is it already too late?

You feel him grab you. Did you want it this way? It is all too rough. Too fast. You feel that he has forgotten your body. The two of you do not move well together. He marks you. A bite. You never wanted this.

You want your body intact.

“I don’t want anyone to know.”

His teeth are on your breasts. To a point, he feels so good. But then he starts to hurt. You ease yourself away.

The following caresses are uncertain. Trying to recover from his earlier miscalculation. But you want him to want so you that you ignore his clumsiness.

You had imagined the stranger as so certain. His touch had always been precise.

This is nothing like you needed, nothing like you expected.

When he penetrates you, you recoil in pain. The pain shakes your whole body. It shakes through your years. You hide. Hide in that part of you that no one can touch. What have you done? Why have you made it all so easy?

He doesn’t even seem to notice your lack of enthusiasm. He just enjoys his own excitement.

He has fucked you against a wall, and you collapse to the floor.

In the darkness you hear a laugh. A candle is lit.

You see the outline of the stranger. He is not at your side. He is sitting in a chair.

–What is this?

–Your fantasy. Every man wants you. Wants to pay for you. How much do you think that you are worth?

You are empty. Angry. Crying.

–What?

–Twenty bucks. Fifty. One hundred. Five hundred. I sold you for five hundred bucks.

You are sobbing. Gasping for breath. In a panic.

–I want my cut. Four hundred and ninety nine.

–That’s not the deal.

–The deal was that I wouldn’t get kissed if I didn’t get more money.



More money. You spent the next nights in a constant stupor. You feel like he has killed everything in sight. He has killed you and killed you again.

–I can see the face in a mirror. We are on the road together. The road to hell. I despise you. What you have done to me.

He will no longer answer. He disappeared in that night. Your price. You never got to set the price.

Still with a hope that the answer is in your past, you decide to look for your man. It's been two years. But does love ever really die?

“Think about the blindfold. The hands around the neck.”

–I always wanted to marry you. You know the offer still stands.

After everything that you have undergone, the offer seems quaint. But you want to go back.

–I'm not ready to go all the way yet. I need time.

–I'm patient. All the time in the world.

How have you gotten back to that earlier congruency so easily? You are ready to give in.

Or are you?

The next couple of months, you spend trying to recover. You don't ask too much. You don't expect too much. Your desire seems focused. You finish school. Start a new job. You think that you have put away your old life.

There are still echoes in your lover's kiss. Still the promise of a wedding that can erase all your years in darkness. Bleach away all the guilt. The cleanliness starts to burn your lungs.

–I knew that you'd get bored.

–I'm not bored. I just don't know if he's right for me.

Where did the stranger get you number? How had he tracked you down?

You still wanted to make up for that night. Or perhaps act out the desires that it had opened up in you.

You had played whore for your man. And it had hardly satisfied your wonder.

You still wanted that stranger. If not his affection, then at least his counsel.

I meet you very late in the development. You are looking for someone to tell your story. You have given up writing, but you still want someone to hear

More than the hair, the green eyes the curve of the cheekbones, I am taken by your story. That I have got so close to that core. I start believing my own fiction.

–I want you to let me go. Don't think that you know me better than any one else. Don't think that you have a better hold on me than anyone else

–Now that I've found you I don't want to lose you.

–You already have. I belong to him.

I show you my notes. You are fascinated by the process. You come alive to your own reflection. Another night dancing at the Elysée. All eyes are on you.

You still cannot break the glass that protects you, surrounds you, prevents your from touching or being touched.

The more you read, the more you want to talk. The more that you want to share about yourself. Each veil removed and each layer I feel removed from my own self. We are becoming tied together.

I envision myself with the gifts of lingerie calling you up, setting up a rendez-vous.

I am becoming the stranger. Doing what he can no longer do. Your story is becoming a call to action.

You are now the adept. You pop in a video into the VCR

–What do you see?

–It's a waterfall, a cascading waterfall. The ripples curl into a mass of foam. Her body is washed by this rush. Her long legs. A white t-shirt. It hugs her form. She stretches out. Her public hair—she wears no panties.

–Remember the key is not just to tell what you see. But to see below sight.

–She removes her t-shirt, and she is entirely naked. The water accentuates her firm skin. She shakes her head. Her hair flows in the mix of water and sunlight, electric. Her eyes are closed. She has already transcended this imagery. She welcomes. She wants someone to share her reverie. A current flows inside her. She gushes with force of the falls. She is part of the falls. She beckons to be touched. Long caresses that cover the whole body. That linger. That invite. Inside and outside. Turned around by desire. Entering her world—love cascades you down her enjoyment. she anticipate and remembers simultaneously. Satisfaction already envelops her. She stands up. Her hair trails her motion. Water slips along her sleek body. The radiating golden fondle of the sun. At the center of this explosion, her sex, full and inviting. I want you with me!.

>>A torrent of water falls on her. She is playful. She shakes it off. She runs on the sand. Naked, she splashes in the water. Submerges. Comes up to face him. He has

been watching her all along. She is asking him to come in the water with her. No words are exchanged. His gestures point out what she expects from him. He tosses his clothes on the beach. He wades over to her. They embrace. They lose their balance and fall into the water. Their love making is unambiguous. They do not embrace the water. They slide off of it. It makes their twists more fluid. She gently hold him down in the shallow waters. Their bodies establish a rhythm to counter the surf. She kisses him. She stops. She look at his face and smiles. Invited deeper by that smile. She holds on to him, does not want to let go. They get buried in the surf.

–I don't belong. It is not me by the water. I want to be in the desert.

–You need water.

You play with the ice in your glass. Your answer to the hot sun of the desert.

–The desert would be good if you had cold drinks.

–Why do you need me to describe the scene?

–I don't care about these things. You still do. Hearing you excites me.

I grab your hand.

–I don't want it that way.

You do. You resent that I know. You want me to know your resentment. Your punishment for revealing your secrets.

That is why he is still with you. This man who guarantees that you love him because down deep you hate him. And as long as you stay with him you do not have to deal with that hate. Beneath that hate is your hate for yourself.

–I want to drink. For the moment I want to go out and drink and not have to return to him.

I follow your lead. Various night clubs and late-night cafes. You are drunk, I am happy.

You ask me to massage your neck. I kiss it. We jumps up not wanting to linger on that embrace.

–Don't you wish that you could be completely free. Nowhere to go. No one to have to see. Do what you please.

I am delighted by your light heartedness. But a glass-shield seems to surround your world. Innuendo trailed on innuendo until you vanish.

–Really, I have to go.

Is this the beginning of the night or the end? From this point on does the spirit leave the body and the body continues on for a full-blown hedonism.

What new entertainment could keep you by my side? Protect you against the crush of the impending dawn. The Elysée. You could introduce me into its depravities. I had spent all this time hearing the tale. Now I wanted to live it. But once I went down, could I ever make it up for air.

Instead, a bitterness seems to creep into the night. You feel the need to talk—to tell me more.

We return to your place. You get undressed. Put on a robe. Make some tea. You want to talk—finally want to talk...

More than our journey in the night, you are journeying through the cruelty of experience. Even still you can't help but to reenact all the brutality in your life. The more that you relive the story for me, the more your new life seems like a shell. You have turned to me to insure that you have not been completely destroyed by this process.

You want me to massage your neck. To kiss you. Not to kiss you. A trance emerges from all these transformations. You are massaging your breasts before me. Putting your hand down your bathrobe.

—He's the only one allowed to touch me.

Your gestures become more explicit. I want to go. I motion to go. You put my hands on yours. You want me to touch you, to stimulate you erotically. You are totally absorbed by this wave of passion. At point, I am hardly involved. When I move my hand away, you will not let it go.

You are now acting out your words.

—You know my story. The darkness from where I stepped out of. Such trauma marks you. Keeps you alone. It brought me to this savage place. I harbored desires that I was afraid of. But they were my desires. I needed to fulfill them. I put myself in a dangerous place. The savagery of the desires. But I couldn't finish my fantasies. I wanted others to trick me. Threaten. Force me into this place where I thought I belonged. Savage, so ugly and so exquisite. I felt guilty and I could never let myself go completely. Since I didn't enjoy it, I pretended that I didn't want it. But it went too far. One night I got drunk. I wanted something to happen. I wanted to have fun. And he forced himself on me. I thought he was so beautiful that all girls wanted him And he wanted me. I didn't want him to. But he raped me. I wanted to stop him. But I didn't say anything.

>>My head became cloudy. I felt guilty. I didn't know what was happening to me. I was being sucked into a giant drain. I tried to brace myself. But I enjoyed the sex so much.

I couldn't resist. I enjoyed how he touched me. No one had ever touched me like that before.

>>I hated him for what he had done to me. I loved him. That it had been him who took me to this savage place. After this I could never be the same. I needed him to promise to marry me. that would be OK. Like all this would have happened anyway. I just couldn't stop him. Never really could.

>>For a long time, I had had desires and I didn't know where they came from. I had these weird sexual appetites. But I was afraid to travel to this savage place.

>>I never would let myself get taken there. But I was ripped apart by my desire. And in my passion, I imagined drawn to the sweet destruction of the self.

You loved horror because you could inflict the pain on yourself. You could combine your exquisite joys with the turn of the screw and the twist of the knife. As you got closer to the grotesque, the spirit would disengage from the body and fly free. You gasped at the force of this passion,

You pull my hands over to pin yours to the bed... You want me to hold you down. You direct my hands as restraints. There is fear in your face. But you expect this of me. As if it legitimizes what your man had done to you. That is the source of the love. What the stranger could never get over. What he loved and knew that he could take advantage of. What was starting to eat him alive.

You look up at me in terror.

–Do you want to rape me?

This is both defense and invitation. I am already sick with disgust. Face to face with my desire. A desire for you that is growing up to this point. This is where it had led.

–Do you want to fuck me?

–Do you want to have sex with me?

As if your man had forced you. As if you lost all ability to challenge him. Feared losing his love.

Had you felt these restraints before? Had you struggled? Had the will been sucked from your by someone holding you down? From that point on, did that same gesture open a wild longing in you. Why did you invoke that event that had ripped your apart?

That you still feel the force emanating from this savage place. You had always erected a wall to separate you from the world and that place. Submerged deeper and deeper in this overgrown garden.

You want this desire be ripped out of you and exploited. You have come to expect this brutality. Faced with an echo of that, I am feeling crushed.

You can't help but get taken up by the experience. More than automatic, your behavior is driven. If just the violence.

–Whatever you do, don't leave any marks.

What are you afraid of? The monster is bigger than anything that now really threatens you because, once, the monster was bigger than anything you could have imagined.

Why are you afraid of him finding out—that you know who he really is.

So you have feigned amnesia for so long. Continue to leave out details so he'll think that you're dumber than you are. The numbness is starting to solidify. and you'll never get out.

What he will say--What you will say

–He owns me. We are all owned in some way, knit together by the thread of our appetites. Begging for satisfaction. I'm supposed to have sex with him. It is expected. He is MY man.

>>Just don't mark me. I don't want any marks on me

The mirror still loves you. Art in your room reflecting the beauty of the mirror. I can't resist. Caught up in my attraction for you. I want to create consent off of a few nods.

–He forced me, and you are doing the same

–No, I am leaving

I want you, but I see the nightmare forming around us.

Alcohol and guilt served as your narcotic and brought on a deep sleep

I become incensed that anyone had done this to you That anyone could do that to you. Am I trying to absolve my own aggression?

Once I felt that pull, could I resist? I did resist. I left. That is the difference.

I want to tell someone so you would have to face yourself. I want to tell you. The you who could see.

The you who could still talk about this.

Turn a blind eye toward the whole thing

I am seeing your personality divide before my eyes. Such a division could never retain the hope that I had for some understanding.

I don't care. I want to walk away. Caring takes on a brutal form. I need to avoid that. The brutality had been encouraged for so long. I don't know what is going on.

You want me to help you continue the book. We meet at my office a couple of more times. You are losing interest. I am afraid.

You return to your man. I still see you occasionally. Not in the same way. We both want to finish the story. You want to end the story, end your life, this life.

Your man thinks he understands now. Marriage seems imminent. You still have loftier goals. You seek out the stranger. An intellectual perspective.

–You had your chance and you rejected me.

–We always end up doing the same thing. We need to stop blaming each other.

Tears are in your eyes. You know that if you leave him again, there is no returning.

–I want you to love me.

After all the hate, he must be kidding.

–I'd kill myself before I'd ever love you.

–Then that is your curse.

–I love a man.

–I know. But he doesn't love you.

–He told me so today.

–He can't love you, because he can't know you. Know that you love to cheat. Know that you are selfish. Know that you have only been held by your infatuation. Knows that you are only held by his yoke, his veiled threats of violence. That you still can't feel pleasure except by some artificial inducement.

When he goes on, you find him gross.

–What's wrong, honey, cat got your tongue?

You've already tried this before. At least your man is consistent. Why replace one jailer by another?

You stare at him. He looks back. You want him to break down. To tell you something.

On the way home, you start crying. You just want to be alone with your sorrow. You don't want to say anything more. You want to die.

The stranger knew what had gone on with your man. And when you realized that, you kept going back, thinking that he could increase your pleasure a thousand fold. This would be your answer to the brutality. But you had just become an addict.

Later that year, you start rooming with a woman. She offers the salve for your wounds. You have a refuge. Soft kisses. No expectations.

Your man continues to call. You go out to eat. You don't see the stranger. You hear that he has gotten deeper into drugs. Heroin or opium.

You too seek the remedies of the flower. You had been so afraid that medicine was being forced into your diet, that given your release, you now can accept its drip.

Afternoons impress their flavor. Holding out for dusk, fatigue wears you down. Almost passed out, a ringing phone wakes you. You listen to the spiel of a sleep merchant. Is this call invited or by accident. How did she know that you've had difficulty sleeping.

—My guilt extends to childhood. That there was something that I should be doing instead of sleeping. I wrestled with the light of the day and contradicted the darkness of the night. Why should I give my slumbers to either. Once eternity surrendered to the measure of the day, you felt the demons' watch fill your every waking second. His pressure made you fear being drawn back into interrogation. The incessant screaming of the dream executioner.

>>To relate my dreams became a form of confession, I knew that absolution was held away from me. The telling would only renew a need to repeat the crime. I had been warned about the offense. Made to feel the sting of my own pride. But I felt the need to steal away golden pleasure from others as they never could attain a complete mystical union. Why let them enjoy this partial ecstasy when I could use their efforts to shore up my terminal rapture.

>>I knew that other might consider my pursuit wrong. But I had already put aside conventional morality. Nevertheless, even as paradise waited so close to my aspirations, I continued to be afraid to savor its moments. I always felt the interruption of the demon as imminent. I enjoyed my naughtiness. I enjoyed leading others into naughtiness. At the same time, I felt proud about my unblemished record. From that point on, I nurtured this opposition. I could always retreat to my sweet disposition and blame others for disrupting what had been a dainty time. Sure, my descent has progressed too far, and I was faced with the blackness of my own transgressions. But to what had I done ill except my own purity.

>>The split in me made sleep with a new friend. the gluttonous demon could threaten punishment. And I would be a willing participant in his feast. But his fangs and the gnashing of teeth would send me cowering for the morning light. Why had I been forsaken?

>>How could I cast my fate except through an incident that might besmirch my reputation? I left myself without defense. Sought company who would definitely push the limit. what had formerly disgusted me, he costumed as appealing. As the appeal grew, so did my reprehensibility. I would never give into his advances. But I had been rejected from my immaculate state. Tears followed the violation. He could not



compensate for my guilt. No one would listen to my tale. I had one what I shouldn't and I had been punished.

>>This change acquired a cosmic flavor. Cataclysm cut the day in half. I needed to identify with this renting. But repentance was essential to my survival. I was vulnerable to the wayward impulses of the kneeling penitent. When this tarnishing proved insufficient, I sought a master in vice.

>>I had given myself to the pursuit of idle pleasure. Why did I not satisfy myself? Why did he not please me? Tr as I may, I still clung to my illusion of purity. And this made him ill. I tired to return to my former state. Devotion haunted my nights. I sought forgiveness. This state convinced me that I was on the right path. But i had already detached the demon's helper who could ravage my desires. From that point on I was helpless to the nightmare.

>>I told myself that I had not given in. I made a religion out of my own pleasures. But the day now became overrun with the minions of darkness. Thus, I needed a jailer, a succession of jailers, so that I would not be utterly subject to my whims. I could blame them for my loss of will. They obliged with their brutality. When things became too cruel, I could run from one to another. When pleasures held sway I could give myself without reserve and find abandon in their prodding. And when I need to abandon their cell, I could sneak out on the pretense of their harshness. Besides, they all had joined into my order and pledged total loyalty to me.

>>How could I end my days except in resignation to my utter depression? I would not. I could not. Self-medication was the only cure. The golden expanse of noon imbued me with its honey. The drip of the queen bee provided the sting to lead me out of the obscurity of the cave. Can there be any greater salvation to a time spent under the yoke of my own guilt.

The sleep doctor wants to offer her recommendations. But you are already too far for relief. You are assumed into the sisterhood of the flower.

Your time with your man continues to be one of suspicion. Is he trying to catch you in a lie? Or do you want him to catch you. At dinner, you consider throwing ice cream at him. But he will only be captivated by this sweetness.

He starts by smelling your breath for alcohol. Even though he had started his regime under such potions. What's next? Licking your nostrils for drugs?

You are convinced that you have hidden everything from him. He get his revenge in the night. He finds a glee in your helplessness and know that he can eventually commit you to your own phantoms.

If you could only see his face when you have your eyes closed.

You exaggerate your need for his touch. He responds by attending to your every second. This fealty has already grown tired. He loves you prostrate, as this guarantees that he has finally won you over.

–I belong to him.

Where else can you measure such commitment except in the near occasions of sin.

But you have started to get sloppy. He starts to get sloppy. He is a victim of his own impatience. His anger has you seeking comfort in various amusement. What does he want?

You want to confront him. Ultimately, you always succumb. To not entertain guilt, you indulge his pleasures.

Why had this thread not broken? Why doesn't he see the marks that you now try to hide?

The story is endless and eternal, until death do you part. Your friend introduces you to other pleasures. He cannot even suspect this woman.

The devotion to the flower continues. He vanishes in his own greyness.

You wait for the stranger's call. Each ringing of the phone signals the armies of lust are in effect. You line up for inspection.

In fact, you hear that he has given himself away to dissipation. You too have been subject to the same intercourse with the shadows. You decide to seek him out on your own. You are mortified.

The stranger drifts deeper and deeper into his opium haze. He starts attacking an imaginary enemy. In his paranoia, his jealousy attains its real form and he battles his enemy by frontal assault.

–This guy is slime. A real pig. He's destroyed you.

Sometimes you think that he is talking about himself. You are looking into the glinting eyes and noticing something of the former shine.

–A greedy bastard. He has sucked the life out of you.

You watch a fiery dragon curl in ash.

–It's all gone beyond jealousy. I finally see him for the bloodsucker that he is, that he has always been. When he blindfolded you that first time, you didn't tell me that his hands were wrapped around your throat squeezing. How did you get him to stop—cries—words. What could you say to make him stop?

>>Had you remembered the cruelty. Or the forgiveness that followed. The gifts. The excursions into the wilderness. The call of the wild.

>>This is not about acquisitiveness. This is about just holding on. On to his smoke. Or his curses. Or holding on to you.

You have come back for revelation and you see it all unraveling. If he could only kiss your cheeks, make it new again. What had the stranger opened up with the games. An insatiable hunger. He had frightened you away. Chased you into the streets. Finally left you no choice but to return to your lover.

This ritual is about returning to a flawed vision of the past. You wanted to blow some life into the stranger. If he could enact one more erotic scene, you could ignore the fundamental cruelty at the heart of his vision.

As his haze gets thicker, you drink to accompany his same rhythms. A morning migraine will remind you of what you have done. How you need to return to your lover, before your pity begins a new cycle of submission.

You are enticed by the idea

Time makes the world grow bigger. These stories are dwarfed by volumes of your new adventures. The scent of women and the certainty of teak. I catch up with you in a bar. We smile, but I hardly recognize you. Your muscles have even more definition than before. They speak of a new earnestness. Your soft edges have been hardened.

—I was in Saigon with a girlfriend. When we arrived, I said we were here first. We weren't. It wasn't unusual or exotic. It just was. We spent our time trying to score her some smack. Purer and purer. She just kept getting more and more strung out. And I got infected—hepatitis. Prostrate in some hospital. Knowing a few words of the language. Hearing, how my friend had been under the grip of a potent spike and never woken up. Too sick to cry. Just wanting to stay alive. Just wanting to come home.

You watch her die as your stranger gets eaten away by the sting of the flower.