

**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 a 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. Not 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 these years. You don't want to offer him tribute. To let him knew.**

**–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.**

**You panties and panty hose are on the ground. Still continuing the fantasy in your heels.**

**He looks over at you.**

**-I always know 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 light 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 the 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 though 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 buck.**

**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 your 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 being 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 felt removed from my own self. We were 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 slid 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 anser 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 need to fulfill them. I put myself in 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 to far. One night I got drunk. I wanted something to happen. I wanted to have fun. And he force 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 was where it was being 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.**

**What 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 your 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.**

**-Ten 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**

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**>>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 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 out 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 watched her die as you watched your stranger eaten away by the sting of the flower.**