Four Short Fiction Pieces

A Senior Honors Thesis

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[Advisor's signature]

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She had absolutely blue eyes. They were not light nor turquoise, but royal blue, like the coats of wooden soldiers. They reflected the sun, like sapphires. You could drown in them; literally, when you saw them you would catch your breath and only later would you remember that you needed air--after you had stared for a time in pure wonder.

I make people uncomfortable by staring directly into their eyes; I'm searching for a pair like hers. They were rarely seen. They were usually hidden under long dark lashes in a down-tilted face, one with soft white skin and sensual lips. The face was rarely noticed. Most people gave up trying to see it the first time their friendliness met with silence.

But the long dark hair and pale skin caught my curiosity. Then, one rare moment, she leaned forward and tilted her chin up. I saw the long graceful lines of her chin and neck. Her hair fell back behind her shoulders and, for the first time, I caught a glimpse of those eyes. They haunted me. I thought of them constantly; my mind would wander always to them, and at night they were my only
thought. I sat behind her day after day, watching her and waiting for her to glance upward again. One day, I caught sight of two bruises, one at the back of her neck and one just peeking out of her shirt sleeve; and I felt a curious shock that something was wrong. Before she could pack her books to leave the room, I stepped up to her desk and took her wrist gently in my hand. I slid back the shirt sleeve to see the imprint of large, strong fingers on her forearm. She jerked away, her brilliant eyes blazing in fear, before she rushed from the room.

I knew from my class that her name was Rebecca. It was the name her father had chosen for her—a Hebrew name meaning "hound." In time I came call her by her second name, Amanda, which means "worthy of love" in Greek. She was beautiful and fragile, closed and withdrawn. She was a fascinating enigma. I was beautiful, outspoken, extravagant, different. And obsessed.

My friend Tom was standing at my locker the next day.

"Athena, whatcha up to?"

"Going to class. What does it look like?"

"We're all supposed to go to the drive-in; will you be
there?"

"I think so.... Later." I dumped my books in my locker and got out others. "Where's Sherry? She's supposed to meet me tonight. I'm suppose to help her study."

"I haven't seen her. She's a lost cause, though. She'll never get that stuff. I've studied with her before."

"I think I'll manage. She pays attention to what's she studying with me. Unlike with you." I gave him a sarcastic smile.

"Maybe she should pay attention to what you're doing."

"Excuse me? What is that supposed to mean?" My attention shifted from my books to him. He couldn't be implying anything; I'd always kept my thoughts to myself.

"I really don't think I'm the only one with ulterior motives where Sherry's concerned."

I guess I was more transparent than I thought. He said it with a grin on his face, but I took offense anyway.

"My ulterior motives are none of your damn business!" I said, slamming the locker door.

"Hey! That was a joke! No need to be bitchy. Who am I to say anything about what you do? The way you look and act, you can have anything you want and everyone knows it."

He was right. I could charm anyone; I knew exactly when
to play by the rules and when to break them.

At that moment, Rebecca walked by.

Involuntarily, my eyes followed her, and then my feet went, too.

Over my shoulder I heard Tom mutter, "Oh oh. So much for Sherry." I ignored him and went on.

"Rebecca...."

She stiffened up as though she had been stabbed in the back. When I stood beside her I could see her face was crimson and her hands trembled.

"I'm sorry if I frightened you before...." I started my explanation, but then she looked up slightly and her brillantie eyes, still fearful, met my dark ones, sending a shimmering shock throughout my body and making me suddenly lightheaded. The fear in them made me want desperately to do something to reassure her.

"My name is--" I started, and her mouth formed the almost soundless word with me-- "Athena. You know who I am." She nodded.

"Can I carry your books for you?" I unburdened her hands before she could answer. It was a useless gesture, and quite silly-looking, because she only had a math book.

"You're going to algebra?" encouraged by another nod, I
pressed on: "I'll walk you there."

She didn't answer, but looked around as if she wanted to flee. We walked in silence for awhile.

"I didn't mean to hurt you, or frighten you before. I'm usually not that abrupt or rude. I don't know why I was...yes, I do. It's your eyes."

The matter-of-factness of my last words made her stop, and for the first time she turned her full, questioning gaze on me.

"You have beautiful eyes."

We were at her classroom door, so I handed back her book. She said a silent thank-you, and turned, head bent again, into the room. I stood in a daze for a minute, until I realized there was someone at my elbow. I turned to see Tom, with an impish, conspiratorial grin on his face.

"You're late to class."

"Oh, shut up."

The people I knew, the ones who knew me well, had ceased to wonder at what I did. I was too charming, too daring, and too self-confident. But they also knew I was also loyal, caring and good. No one ever asked me if I was falling in
love with her; it was never talked about. But I knew that my friends could see it and they became comfortable, even fascinated, with it.

I gave her the softest smile I could. I moved gently, slowly, calmly, when she was near. I talked to her in whispers and she gradually acknowledged what I said. It was long before I discovered she had a voice that spoke above a whisper. It was soft and low like bells that chimed rapidly, blending to make a sound like rippling water. I really don't remember anything she said, but I remember the voice.

I knew she wondered why I did it. I asked questions about her homework, her classes, and her possessions, but never her family. I was afraid to touch that subject. I was amazed that someone so beautiful could so completely isolate herself from friends and attention, but I was sure that her family was the cause. I must have been a strangely comic sight, following her, talking to her, and she speaking only after I spoke, looking as though she wanted to hide.

But she didn't dare tell me to stop. I wasn't teasing her, and she soon realized it. I controlled every movement I made, every expression on my face and every tone of my voice to convince her that I was honest and sincere. Her answers became more at ease as time went by, but I suspected that it
was only because the questions I asked were safe ones. I
think she realized that I wouldn’t harm her.

I wanted to see her out of the context of school, where
she didn’t always have something she needed to do, where she
wouldn’t always be distracted from me. I wanted to know more
about her and to have her attention.

"Have a picnic with me tomorrow," I asked her standing
near her locker one day, "Please. There’s a park near my
house. I want to talk to you. I’ll bring food. We can
talk. Please?"

"All right," she said, hardly looking at me. "But I have
to go now." And she hurried off to class.

The park was secluded enough that she couldn’t hide from
my attention by watching things around her. I laid the
picnic out on the lawn with a red-checked table cloth; and
as she sat under the surrounding trees, the contrasts between
them and her skin, hair, and eyes were beautiful. The radio
played; a soft, low woman’s voice sang:

"Headed out this morning
into the sun.
Riding on the diamond waves
little darling one...\nWarm winds caress her,
her lover it seems."
Oh, Annie, dreamboat Annie, ship of dreams..."

"What music do you listen to?" I asked.

"Classical," she whispered, looking as always, in some other direction. "It feels good to listen to. Like a caress."

"What do you do? When you're at home, I mean. Do you go out? Do you have friends? How do you spend time?"

"I study. I watch TV. I don't go out. I don't know many people. We moved in last year, and I haven't really..." she trailed off as though she had touched a subject that she didn't want to think about.

She began again, though, "I... I like to paint. I do a lot of it. I like landscapes, and some portraits. I know that's not... interesting."

"Yes it is. It's much more cultured and talented than anything anyone I know does. I'd like to see you paint."

"I'm really not sure I'm good." She ducked her head in embarrassment, but this time it was pleased embarrassment, and she was hiding a smile. I leaned over close to her and ducked my head to look in her face.

"I believe you are," I said softly.

She was surprised that I was so close, and moved away.
"I'm sorry. I wanted to see you smile. I wouldn't hurt you. I promise."

She smiled at me, shy and embarrassed, and moved back.

The sight of her smiling, so beautiful and in such a perfect place as this, was like a dream. Almost instinctively, I wanted to touch her, to make sure she was real; but I wasn't sure how she would respond. She stared calmly, directly into my eyes, so she didn't see how my hand trembled as I reached toward her. I took her hand and held it. She didn't react, as though she didn't realize I had it. It was slim and soft---fragile. I could have crushed it in mine with a little effort.

We didn't move in what seemed like forever. Her smile grew more steady.

I smiled back and took a lock of her hair and played with it. It was smooth and silky and as thin as spiders' webs. It waved and flowed through my fingers and glinted in the sunlight. I traced the shape of her nose with my finger. Her skin was the softest I had ever felt.

It got very late before either of us noticed. I looked at my watch.

"What time is it?" she asked. She was suddenly very afraid: the radiance disappeared and gave way to the
tenseness she had before.

"Fine."

"I have to go." She got up and hurriedly collected her books and coat.

"Wait. Why? You could stay, or I'll walk home with you."

"No! No, I have to go; I'm sorry."

"Why are you afraid of being late?" I caught her arm to make her stay and talk to me, but I accidentally caught it and held it too hard. Suddenly all her fear was directed at me and I could feel and see her start to tremble and move away from me as if she expected me to hit her. I was astonished; I let go quickly.

"I'm sorry. Please wait. If you're afraid... Will you come to my house? You can call your parents from there and tell them where you are. Please don't leave."

"I have to go." I could see that staying wouldn't relieve her fright and would probably make it worse.

"Please.... Take care." I took her hands gently, stepped up close to her and looked steadily in her eyes. "I'm worried about you and... your safety. You're... important to me." What I said came out haltingly—as a hoarse whisper—and I realized that I was trembling, too.
I met her at her locker the next day. She was much more introverted; she barely spoke to me when I talked to her. "Would you come to my house to study tonight? You could stay over night." She looked surprised and a little scared, so I dropped it, but I asked again the next day and the next. I didn't plead, or push, but she knew I was serious and I was frightened for her.

On a Friday afternoon in mid-September, she came to me and asked if she might stay the night with me. I guessed that she knew I loved her, and that I wouldn't cause her pain. She had hurried away early the afternoon before and during the day she wouldn't speak, although she seemed glad I was around her. I was relieved that she had come to me, that I didn't have to urge her to stay, but I was frightened of what would happen to her later if she did. She was sure that was what she wanted.

Amanda went to dress in my pajamas in the bathroom. I waited until I thought she might be partially dressed before I went to the door. She stood with her back to the mirror. I saw the bruises and teeth marks on her back as she slipped on the pajama top. She had unmistakably been sexually abused. I stepped up and leaned in the doorway. She buttoned up and turned to leave. She jumped in surprise and
a little fear when she saw me, then looked away. I took her hand and led her to the bed. She didn’t speak. I tucked her in and kissed her on the head. I sat in the chair and watched her sleep.

We were nervous the next morning, expecting something to happen. I knew she had to go home and I was afraid of what would happen to her. She wouldn’t stay or let me go with her. She was compelled to go, and I couldn’t understand why. She came to see me Sunday, in the morning. He had been too drunk to even notice she was gone.

I sat behind her, put my arms around her and held her hands. She wouldn’t look at me while she talked. I sat down behind her and breathed into her hair.

"Often?" A slight nod.

"Why do you let him?"

"He says he loves me."

I went home with her one day after school. Her mother was friendly and kind, and her home was immaculate as well as beautiful. I brushed against a crystal vase filled with silk roses that sat on the table in the entryway to the front door. Her mother offered me food and seemed pleased that I was there. She told me she was glad “Rebecca” had brought one of her friends home to visit. When Amanda left the room,
she said she though her Rebecca was a good girl, but that she was shy. She had been worried that she hadn't made many friends.

I was surprised and uncomfortable at the way she acted, and at how normal and typical Amanda's house and mother seemed. It seemed unreal that her mother might not know what was going on. Amanda's room was filled with the oil paintings she had done. Many of them were very beautiful landscapes and some were portraits of people or scenes. They all seemed to reflect the life around her, however, never her own thoughts.

As it grew closer and closer to four o'clock, her mother grew more anxious and she watched the clock often. I realized she did know, and that her actions were either to mask it from me or to preserve an illusion she had herself. I was careful to leave before four.

I used to love having my room face the east, so the sunlight would wake me through the open window in the morning. I awoke to find Amanda snuggled up against my back, curled up in a little ball with her arms wrapped around my
bear, Knickerbocker. When she slept she was a completely different person; the tension that always showed in her face was gone, and her shoulders were relaxed. Her expression was one of angelic contentment. I longed to be able to wake her up and still see that look in her face. But I knew it would vanish the minute her eyes opened, so I kissed her, and the bear, and went down to make breakfast.

My mother was standing in the kitchen reading the paper with a shocked look on her face.

"Athena, read this," She said, pointing to one of the headlines. It read:

"Local Man Beats Wife, Flees With Daughter"

Thomas J. Thorne, 31, of 4101 N. Rosewood Ave, fled town last night, possibly with his teen-age daughter, after allegedly beating his wife, Felicia, into unconsciousness.

Police were called to the Thorne household at 2 a.m. last night by neighbors complaining of a noise disturbance.

Officers found the front door open, and Felicia Thorne lying unconscious on the living room floor, the victim of a vicious assault. Thorne and his daughter, Rebecca, 16, were nowhere to be found.

Witnesses stated they saw Thorne speed away from his
home in his car soon after a crystal vase was thrown through a plate glass window in the front of the house.

They were unable to determine if Rebecca Thorne was with him, and stated that the girl might be spending the night with friends.

Police have been called to the Thorne household on three different occasions in the past five years by neighbors complaining of noise caused by domestic disputes.

Thorne has also been the subject of police investigation for the past two weeks for embezzlement from the Livingston Group, Inc., where he works.

Investigating officer Lt. Mike Harrigan relates that the investigation was drawing to a close, and seemed to implicate Thorne heavily in the crime.

Mrs. Thorne was taken to Riverside Hospital, where she remains in stable condition.

I went up immediately to wake Rebecca up.

Her mother was conscious when we arrived; she had just awakened. She gathered Rebecca into her arms, saying only, "He noticed you were gone." They sat together for a long while, looking at each other, neither knowing what to say.

Then her mother looked over at us, saying, "he's not a
bad man, really, he just has so much stress; it's like little
demons inside him eating away."

I wasn't willing to agree with her. He had no qualms
about setting those demons on others.

She curled up with her arms around me and buried her
face in my shoulder. The curves of her body fit comfortably
into mine. There was a smooth rhythm between her breathing
and her heartbeat; I could feel both as she pressed against
me. Her moist breath was warm against my neck. I could feel
the tip of her nose and her cheek under my chin. Her legs
entwined with mine. I could feel a warmth begin to flow
through my body. "I love you," she said, before she fell
into sleep.

Her mother got out of the hospital later in the week and
seemed to be all right. She didn't say much, but she cried
that her husband left her. She wouldn't listen to what I or
my family or Amanda said to her about him. She still loved
him. I think Amanda did too, in a way, but she knew that
that love was destructive. I wasn't willing to take anything
from her that she didn't feel good about giving me. I didn't
want to be like her father.

I felt that I couldn't really give her what she needed.
I told her that once, when she was curled up next to me.
"I'm sorry."

"Why? You have nothing to be sorry about."

"I wasn't able to stand up to your father. I should have told him to leave you alone. I should have done something. I should have protected you. Instead I let you get hurt."

"You did do something. You let me know you love me, and that you could love me without hurting me, and that I can love you without fearing you or feeling ashamed. I never knew that before."

I never thought I could feel so happy as I did then.

The basketball game lasted longer than usual, and it was raining, so the ride home was treacherous. I drove close behind Amanda's mother. At a sharp turn, I saw the glare of headlights through the trees and at the turn realized they were in our lane. Rather than swerving off the road to the right, Amanda's mother went left, and the car, realizing the mistake, also swerved into the other lane. Ours went into the ditch. I scrambled out of the car and up on to the road. The engine of Amanda's car was lifted by the force and shoved..."
into her lap.

I broke the window but the door was so mangled I couldn't do more than stick my head in. The car's overhead light was slowly flashing, the result of a short in the system. It seemed like a slow strobe light flashing on the horrible scene. I could see that there was a long gash on her thigh that blood rushed from. She had a large gash on her forehead too, and the blood surged from the openings in time with her heartbeat. She was conscious, and she could see me.

"Help me, please; love, help me!" She screamed over and over, but I couldn't reach her. I tried to pry the door open, I tried to reach her through the other doors, but I couldn't.

Her voice grew fainter as the sirens grew louder, but I still heard her last words, "Help me, please, love" and all I was left with was the memory of those words she spoke and the crimson blood that ran into her blue eyes. I could not help her when she needed me most, and that thought will be the one that guides me the rest of my life.
"Love and Death"
by Stephanie Mineart
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Settling her father's affairs and preparing to re-invest
the money she inherited had been almost too large a task to
accomplish over the telephone. But she refused to fly across
the country to deal with a man that she knew more about now
that he was dead than she did when he was alive. He had been
far wealthier than she realized, and she was now far
wealthier than she ever expected. Most people would be
celebrating. She refused to admit how emotionally drained
she was. He hadn't been a source of support for her at all;
there really was no reason why she should feel a loss. But
she had always held a small hope that sometime they would
form an emotional tie between them. Now even that
possibility was gone, and she really was alone.

She left the office early, telling her secretary to
cancel her meetings on the way out. As she entered her
apartment, she kicked off her white pumps on the white carpet
by the door and dropped her white overcoat onto the white
couch. It was chilly, so she lit a fire and closed the
French windows. She looked down at the way she was dressed
and realized that she would not look out of place if she were
a sculpture standing in the corner. In fact, she would fit
very nicely into the decor: a beautiful, exquisite, cold
statue in her beautiful, exquisite, cold apartment. As she
shook the absurd thought out of her head, she noticed the
light flashing on the answering machine. She rewound and played the messages while she fixed a drink at the bar.

"Miranda, dear, this is Bob. I just flew into town; I'm at the airport. I want to have a drink with you. for old times sake, you know. I just finalized my divorce with my wife. She was a complete bitch about it, too..., but I came out fortune intact, anyway. I heard about your father; I'm very sorry. How much did you get? Ha, ha. I know I was wrong to propose to you last year. when I was still married, but I just couldn't stand the idea of you with some woman.... You know I've loved you all these years, even though we broke up.... I'm hoping you'll see me again. I'll drop by later to take you out. 'Bye."

"Sweetheart? It's Justine. I know you don't want to talk to me, but...I was hoping I could just see you. I know I hurt you, and I'm sorry. I know I've said that a thousand times, but I really mean it. Not being with you is killing me. I'm not with her, I swear it. I didn't see her after.... I'm afraid you're avoiding me because you're seeing a man again. Please tell me you're not. You know that's not what you need. It would really kill me to find out you were. I love you! Please, please, please call me...."

She finished the drink and fixed another while she went through the mail.

Dearest,

Just dropped you this note to tell you Happy Birthday.
I got this absurd little gift for you: I think you'll love it. We've had such a good laugh over having ours done. the woman is quaint and adorable and VERY SERIOUS! Enjoy yourself, and tell me how it went. And do drop your baby ex-sister-in-law a line sometime!

Love,
Julia

Inside was a card that read:

MADAME BULOVA KNOWS ALL!
HER INNER EYE SEES KNOWLEDGE
FROM OTHER DIMENSIONS!
YOU ARE ENTITLED TO:
One free palm-reading session
from Madame Bulova.
No appointment necessary.

She laughed. Julia was always good at lightening up a bad mood with silly, absurd presents. Picked up her coat and drove to the address on the back of the card.

The fortuneteller was a mid-fortyish housewife who invited her into her bright, tidy home. She looked at her for a few moment before taking her coat to hang it up, as if reading something in her face. She took hold of her left hand and put her other hand at her back, and guided her to a
comfortable chair. The fortuneteller asked Miranda a series of questions about her background and career. She took her left hand and spread the fingers apart, tracing the lines in her palm. Successful—yes, she knew that already. The woman traced the other two lines of her palm, the love and life lines, with a look of intensity on her face. She asked, “May I read your cards?” Miranda was startled, and the fortuneteller repeated the question. “I would like to know more about your future than what I’ve read in your hand. May I read your tarot cards?” Miranda nodded; she was a little confused. The older woman jumped up and got a large deck of cards. They had pictures on them: men, beautiful women, wizards, castles and monsters. She cleared and shuffled them, and then drew five of them and arranged them in a pattern on the table. She finished the pattern and looked over the pictures carefully. She had a look of astonishment on her face as she then looked at Miranda.

She pointed at one card. “Dishonesty is the problem in your life. You are unhappy because you feel that your lovers are never honest, and that you can never really know them. You can’t feel for anyone because they can’t be honest with you, nor you with them. You can never have a relationship that is anything more than a mask unless you solve this problem. You must solve it rationally and emotionally.”

She then gestured to another. “The rational solution for your problem is Expediency. You must set your mind to one purpose and adhere to it, no matter what happens.”
She pointed to the third. "The emotional solution is vulnerability. If you cannot expose your feelings to your lover, you will never achieve the trust and communication you need."

She picked up the fourth card. "This card represents the forces working to help you solve your problem. It appears that you have all the forces of the universe working to help you." She held the card and looked at it for a long time before she put it down.

"The fifth card represents the outcome of your problem. It shows that you will be happy. You will meet the lover of your heart's desire, and you will have a long and happy relationship; but one that will end tragically, in violent death."

She looked at Miranda to gauge her reaction to this, and saw that she had dropped her guard, and that all her emotions and longings showed in her face as she stared at the cards. So she got up and got her coat, helped her put it on and showed her to the door. squeezing her hand in reassurance before she went out.

Then she sat and stared at the cards again. Love and death . . . love and death . . . love and death . . ." She repeated, staring off into space and rocking slowly back and forth.

Miranda walked into Knickerbocker's and sat at the end of the left bar. The drag show was part way over; Vicci
Layne was lip-syncing to the Eurythmics song "I Need A Man." Vicci recognized her and waved from the floor, and Miranda smiled and waved back. She ordered gin and tonic. She hadn't really wanted to face the raucous noise, but being alone seemed a more bleak prospect. The blue lights above the bar shone on her left hand and she opened it and stared at her palm again, wondering how the woman had gotten that interpretation from these lines. It had been weeks, though, and nothing had happened. It was absurd to have actually believed in what she said, but it had truly shaken her up to hear the woman describe her emotional problem so exactly. Although fortunetelling couldn't be that realistic, really.

Vicci's song was over, and people swarmed to the edge of the floor to give her tips. When Vicci was through, and another performer came on, she walked over to the woman and placed her hands on her shoulders. "Hello, my dear, how are you tonight? Still lonely?" the bass voice whispered in her ear. She was as startled now as she had been the first time she heard that voice from the mouth of what appeared to be a very pretty woman. In street clothes, he was a pretty man too. "Yes," she answered, and then took another drink.

"Athena's been hoping you'd drop by."

"Oh, really? Why is that? And when do I get to meet the elusive Athena?"

I don't know about that. You know how she is. But she has an idea. She thinks that you should speak to this young
lady over here. She's been in quite a bit lately. She seems to be as bad off as you. Looks as though she might finish a whole fifth of rum tonight."

She turned to look at the girl. She had never seen her before; she would remember if she had. This was the lover she had constructed in her mind's eye—the face, the body, the hair, the clothes, the gestures, the expression—all of this was what she had imagined: the standards by which she had judged everyone else and found them lacking. She was sitting alone, and looked as though she didn't want company. The girl was slim and tall; she had huge blue eyes and a sweet, soft face. Her hair was long and golden; it hung halfway down her back and curled over her brow. The way she sat was strong; her muscles seemed slightly flexed. Her expression was one of sorrow and bitterness. Her brow was creased and the well-defined muscles in her jaw were tensed. She was well-dressed, but her clothes didn't command attention to themselves. She stared for quite some time and then took her drink to the table and sat down.

"Hello."

"What?" she looked surprised, and a little angry.

"Can't I talk to you?" The woman talked softly, pleasantly.

She opened her mouth as though to be rude, but paused as she focused her sight on her intruder. The girl stared for a minute as though coming out of a fog, and said, "Sure. What do you want to talk about?"
"You. What are you interested in?"

"I'm a writer."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-one." Seven years difference, then.

"How much have you had to drink?"

I don't know." Far too much.

"What do you write about?"

The girl perked up, and looked directly into the woman's eyes. "Are you sure your interested?" The woman nodded. She began to speak slowly, "Love and death—the two things that fascinate me more than anything else. Love—because it's one of the most powerful of our emotions; few people can sustain anger as long as love. I can't. And death—well everyone's fascinated by a mystery like this. Exactly where are we going anyway? It's so closely tied to where we come from and what we're going here. It seems I can't get past these two ideas in my writing. They have a vitality to humanity that makes them a key, but they have been written about and discussed by everyone until they are a meaningless swirling mass of theories and behaviors in my thoughts."

In less than a moment the girl had become animated. She spoke with and earnest expression on her face—the change that had occurred was startling, and her honesty was so open it was almost brutal. "One moment this mass blinds me, and I cast desperately around for something else to write about.
certain that I can never say something new, original, good about either. And the next moment, those two subjects, the emotion and the condition, impose themselves back on my life, forcing me to try to work out my feelings on paper."

She took another shot of rum. "I no sooner box in love and define it in my mind, put it in its place and map out my behavior towards it, that it, being irrational, being an emotion, strikes me again and I have to deal with it. And so I write about it again, in hopes that I can figure out something about it, or if I can't, that whoever reads my story will learn vicariously from whatever I experienced. But no one seems to be able to learn. They ask me "What's the point?" "What's this supposed to signify?" I guess it's supposed to mean that it's never easy, you know? How can two people fall in love and stay in love forever? And if they can, why can't I? Sounds like the song--"if pretty little bluebirds fly/ above the rainbow/ way up high/ why, oh, why can't I?"

"Death's answers continue to elude me, as they do everyone else. I need to ignore it, to put it out of my mind, but it sits like an unfinished jigsaw puzzle left on the table. Sooner or later, I'm going to end up dealing with it. I never had a real experience with death or its comical sidekick-grief. No one's ever died. My grandparents, my whole sprawling family--no one, not ever. It doesn't seem
inevitable to me. I don't want to die. I have no experience. I know sooner or later some experience will come, and the shock will be great because I've cruised on auto-pilot so long. I'll be forced to go and try to put a few pieces in the puzzle, and I don't want to because I don't want to see what the picture is. I know there's some underlying connection between death and love. I deeper connection than just loving people and they die, but I don't know what it is. But I can feel it there. Have you ever had anyone die?"

The woman answered, "Everyone in my family has died. I'm the only one left--I'm alone."

"The love--everything's tied up in it. Death I try to ignore because I have to, but love I can't ignore, because it comes up at the oddest times. I want it. I hate it--because I can't define it, can't keep it, can't place standards on it. Yet it keeps coming back, changing hurting, twisting."

People had moved onto the dance floor to dance. Another Eurythmics song was playing, "I need you to pin me down/ just for one frozen moment. / I need you to pin me down/ so I can live in torment. / I need you to really feel/ the twist of my back breaking. / I need you to listen to the ecstasy I'm faking..."

"This is the bitterness I've ever felt. There is
a difference. You know, between loving someone and being in love with them. I've loved before but never been deeply, romantically in love. And I thought that even if I wasn't in love, that merely loving someone would work. But that isn't honest, and I wasn't happy. I did more damage than good—I hurt someone I cared about because I had to be honest and tell them I couldn't be with them anymore. Everyone thinks I'm terrible for what I've done. Do you think I'm a terrible person?"

"No, but I do believe that you are the most coherent drunk I've ever met."

"I've been more drunk than this..." the girl stood up to go back to the bar.

"I don't think you should drink any more." She placed a hand on her shoulder and gently pulled her back to the chair.

"Why not?"

"Because I think you should come home with me."
watching each of her videos as they came out and got
seen before. I immediately felt like tears down my spine, and
seeing a person that is both you and someone you’ve never
so close to mine... it was like holding up a mirror and
first time I saw her on television. Her personality seemed
that character struck a responsive chord in me from the
right.

It hurts.

and will find a way to do just that, no matter how much
character that truly matters that it can touch a person’s
steely character trying to cover and care for open wounds. A
edges — tell the same story her eyes and body do; she has a
her songs and the music — a hard jagged rock with raw, soft
that remind you of driving on a gravel road, the lyrics of
her voice is deep and soft with low whispering undertones
for it.

hoping you won’t hurt her but she expects you to and is ready
characterizing you to hurt her in some way. Or as though she’s
disrupting: as though she feels vulnerable and yet also is
reading real emotion. Her brown eyes took both distracted and
and the tenseness of her soul, smooth jaw betray that she’s
she’s not just acting or performing. The look in her eyes
keeps the emotions in the words coming out of her mouth;
it’s evident when Jessica mast sings that she really
Munche, Indiana, 47360
220 1/2 N. DILL ST.
By Stephanie Knerir
"Deep-Through Heart"
and reflection would shatter that image. The thought of
her perfect image, the thought of humanity as perfect,
was very clear of this reflection because I'd seen
reasons. I was very afraid of this reflection because I'd seen
want to see him any more, but I couldn't do it. For several
enough to sleep. I knew I wanted to tell Don that I didn't
even though I was tired, my mind wouldn't let me relax
soon after, and as usual said only, "Goodnight."

got up and went to my dream room and went to bed. Meade came
to the same way. Shocked, I turned it all off, my thoughts and
in a practice I had of her hands caressing my body in
and softly and stroked it with a soft but determined touch,
intact, but not harsh or ugly. She heard the guitar, girl

dark background. Her hands are long, slim and strong.
and white, and brought fingers to her face and laid it
her twelve-string acoustic guitar. It was strummed in the
footing. It cut several times to close shots of her playing
feeling of dirtiness, or watching on shitting and with no
atmosphere with no real direction, it gave me an eerie
and, like many of hers, full of imagery about love,
heart was just released. It was a sweet, melancholy song

Finally, well, special mask I placed under "see-through" my
roommate's head. Meade was acting her usual distant and
I sat in the dorm lounge that night and watched my with
and I knew that something was going to change.
face that the emotional tensions in my life were building,
explore the reasons for. The fascination grew at the same

untouched play started a small fascination that I didn't dare

\[ \text{Missing text} \]
being alone terrified me, too. I'd never been alone. I went from one relationship to the next — I was always someone's girlfriend. I needed that support, that sense of belonging. Breaking up with Don and being alone would be committing social suicide. All our friends were mutual. Actually, all our friends were his. I completely cut off ties with mine when we started going out.

The main reason I didn't want to tell him what my feelings about him were was that I couldn't justify them. He was, after all, a desirable man. He was big and athletically strong, clean cut, and handsome. He had attractive, striking facial features, ice blue eyes and very short, neat, Nordic blond hair. He was usually easy-going and quite charming, except when his plans were disrupted. He was popular, accepted and of average intelligence. And at times he seemed to genuinely appreciate me.

The only uneasy spots we had in our relationship were over my choice of future career and our differing moral views. I've always had a gift for writing and wanted to use it. The only reason he thought that was acceptable was because I would be working at home, where he thought his future wife should be. But he didn't see that as a career, or even something worth more than a few minutes consideration. We both grew up in households with very narrow-minded, sexist mindsets. Don accepted the values easily, and I did uneasily. My irritated sense of fairness wasn't strong enough to rebel. Going into our relationship,
I've never slept through the dreams. I've faced myself as a
worker and my unconscious takes over and plasma into my
retroactive fiction stories that way. I can literal enough to call
it. I started planning my story threads. I felt that

To off to through those thoughts from my mind and to

my thinking...

enough reason. It's those was something wrong with me. It was
to the touch, and there I saw a strange stick became of
sexual encounters because I felt guilty that I didn't respond
attention to me sexually unless he was excited, and he pushed

but then didn't prove to be true. He pushed it all.

love.

she, and I felt a gnawing loneliness for which there would become

denied all. Don was expected. I was sure he would reach
what was causing my anxiety. I felt nothing when I noticed I
never reacted much. I never reacted much attention to

before this, but I knew my body responded sexually and knew
since that would grow. I had never had sex with any boyfriended
that way all this. I didn't know anything for him, but I was
attactive. So why did his touch repulse me? I didn't react

were me. I knew his personality and body were very

leavethrough about don. It wasn't something wrong with him -- If

I knew that moral unreasonableness wasn't the reason for my

decisions.

I decided it would be easiest to let you make our value
and the clothes were wet and cold, so I wasn't just a
bag tied to the saddlebag. I decided to take a little
break and tied the saddle bag to the saddle and
rolled up, and the other end of the saddle
bag was tied to the tailgate. I then started
earning to the left and sang a little, a little
horse was, and then when I stepped
outside to draw water from the well, I was
surprised to hear a horse neighing, so there was a
cloud in the air. I was an early summer
part of that particular occasion. I saw a
small town, and a hard dirt path through the woods
characterized by a fourteen-hour country settlement.
I've already run through your rack. If you've got it set the trip, but it's dangerous to be riding after dark and you've
night, so you could get a fresh start on the morrow. If you'd
-... knew...

dark if that was their choice, but that must be someone I
would have agreed and sent a slumber out after
stranger, like district, I don't think anything came
after surgery. Recognition of the voice was coming
outside you, I think for a minute and seemed to be considering this. This
think your horse is able, and rather are you. The stranger
is just after interruption. If you're of that mind, but I don't
there's one a day, and so away. You could reach
the nearest three... where I can stop
in between here and there whole I can stop
was real disappointment in the voice now. "Is there another
is it that I could be of very close. There
face, I responded.

It's a day-and-a-half ride away if you set a good
seasoned traveler.

It wasn't a wise thing to do at all, this obviously wasn't a
stranger had apparently ridden all night by the moonlight.
the horse moved and the way he strode in the saddle, the
should be able to pick it from my memory... From the way
suffer and very weak, but it was very lamentable, and I knew I
have played for the king.

Maneuver 6
Another commonality that was reserved for family and
together. While I was there glanced at the basket of
pantry and got a plate of butter, something we never served
end of the table. After a second thought, I went back to the
got the bread and cheese from the pantry and set it all one
I went inside to the kitchen and set down the bucket.

then...

there'll be supper thought, and you'll probably be awake
cheese. I normally don't feed together breakfast or dinner.
her head. "Come to the kitchen then. I have some bread and
she shook some her head to the shop and pointed to the
breath away. I recovered from the shop and pointed to the
in the morning. She said it with a smile that took my
it SO. I'll have to get it out of my cockpit mind. I'll stay
I suppose I'll not get anywhere arguing with you with

on her knee to study me.

she didn't seem to notice my reaction. She leaned an elbow
remember from where, and I didn't know why she recognized me,
...electric shock. But though I recognized her, I couldn't
surprise of recognition turned thought me at once like an
All of the fascination I felt about her compared with the

au to look at me directly, revealing the shoulder-length
The stranger laughed and reached up and took off the
room at all. "I said it firmly with a direct look.
in your kitchen mind to take a flak. I'll not give you a

kneeling

I
matter-of-factly and didn't change the expression on my face.

"I don't serve jodgers fresh fruit," I said to
unanswer for an hour to serve jodgers fresh fruit.

"Oh, she picked up the peach and examined it. It's
either me and my father lives close by.

"I'm not by myself. I have very few help that look

"Isn't this difficult to manage by yourself?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. She was strange for awhile.

"She's dead."

"Where is your husband?"

as she ate.

was an emotional electrify in the air. She watched me
was very hard to believe that she was there for supper. My senses were heightened, and it seemed there
where I continued preparing the meal that would stew all day
where I turned and went to the other end of the long table
before she let go and took the cup.

eyes locked. I felt a physical pulse race through my body
she helped in a fraction longer than she should have, and
our chills outdoors, and the touch surprised both of us so that
our cup. My hands were warm, but her's were still cold from the
accidentally wrapped her fingers around mine as well as the
looking at the plate when she reached for it, and so
the bucket into a cup and held it out to her. She was
down, without taking off the cloths. I poured cold water from
hand and placed them carefully behind the door before she sat
she came in then with the juice and the tea and bag in
help. I picked a place at the table and took them to the table,
down, if you'd like."

"I can't. I've lots of work to attend to. You can come

sometime."

"Well... would you like to stay

realize..." I've been in a hurry. For no reason
days. She blushed and looked abashed.

I thought that you've probably not had proper meals in

for the food."

"I'll not stay later, when others are here. Thank you

might get complaints."

"No, not at all. There are no other lodgers now, or you

the Jude.

I'm not distinguishing you, am I? She asked, gesturing at

on the small table and turned to me.

the Jude on the bed, and took the plate and cup. She set it
she quietly opened the door all the way so I could enter, set
wondered why I was there, until she noticed the plate. Then
she opened the door and stood for a few seconds as though she
took it to wp. I knocked on the door, and the music stopped.
could picture her playing it. I prepared another meal and
boys. The soft melody of a Jude drifted downstairs and I
at once time I laid food for John and Jason and the two

shut the door.

immediately drew the curtains and laid down on the bed, and I

Enraptured in silence and I showed her to a room. She

eyes, though, that she was surprised and then puzzled. She

or took away from my work. I could see from the corner of my

Miners! 9
"I might later."

And she did come to sit in the kitchen with her lute in the afternoon, while one of the boys and I finished supper preparations and began to make bread to raise overnight. She played songs I've never heard before--songs she'd sung at the King's court. Travelers came a few at a time, and Jason gave them rooms and showed them to the dining room as though he were master of the house. It was an arrangement that suited us all best.

It was nearing the supper hour, and I realized I didn't want to give up her company to the men in the other room.

"Would you eat in here with us? There will be better food...." I stopped when she smiled and nodded. She sat opposite me at the head of the table while we ate.

We went up to the sitting room while John and the boys cleared and helped Jason wait on the guests. I spun wool during the few daylight hours left, and she continued playing the lute. She began to sing softly and became so caught up in the song that I could watch her without her awareness. The light fell softly on her. She was soft, emotional and sensual without being weak and effeminate, and solid and strong without being rough, large or masculine. As I watched her, I felt a warmth diffuse through my body and I felt a vague desire grow....

Then Jason came to the door and gestured that he need to speak to me. I went out to the hallway.

"Two more travelers have stopped, but we don't have any
I knew that desire to touch her, and a fear of that desire, and I felt a tinge of her body diffused in the candlelight, and I felt a
out of them and tipped the skirt over her head. The sheet tipped into a nightshade, and I opened my eyes to watch as she slid
kneeling. Her clothes rustled softly as she began to change
wanted to have a chance to comprehend her without her
asleep, but pretended to be when she came in, because I
bed, but let the candle till for her to see, I didn't call
I went to my room, changed to my nightgown and went to

"Will you?"

"Why, then it come to bed, I'll try not to wake you."
"I'd like to check on my horse first, just to reassure
I'm going to tell her now," I told her.
I told Jessica and she went to move her

"Thank you."

"That's fine, any bed will do, do the smother.

situation.

sorry to inconvenienc you, but I can think of no other
them, I don't feel right about turning them away... I'm
beds. Would you mind sharing my room and giving yours to
We've had two talke loaders across and there are no more
she stopped taking and tooked up at me.

they seemed wonderful to me, I turned and went back to her.

"What sounds reasonable, I'll ask her to do that. The
would give here to them. We waited for my reply.

night. If the mistress woman would sleep in your room, we
more beds. We wouldn't be tight to turn them away this

Wednesday.
face and her long hair falling against my cheek, she moved

with hers. I could feel her hot, sweet breath against
her hands, then she locked into my eyes again and held them
her gaze over the rest of my face and down my body. I could
she locked into my eyes for a minute, and then laughed
across and propped herself up above me.

If looked over her features, and she moved closer, stroked
thoughts, desires, and fears. The unspoken discussion she made
back and forth between us as we both registered each other's
again in the moonlight from the window above us. Margery
stared to climb in, but stopped part way, and we locked eyes
I asked. She nodded, came over, and drew it out. she

"Are you coming to bed? I shouldn't waste the candle."

As we, when I was thinking, but couldn't be sake, and didn't want to
the sound as if she were uncertain of what to do, she guessed
and hoped, wished, prayed, that she felt the same desire...
the only thing I could think of, I looked at her intently
wanted her to kiss me, and the idea consumed me until it was
"I didn't think you were awake. I didn't answer. I
first and then laughed.

come to the bed when she saw me watching her, she jumped
shook her head, out of the collar of the shirt and turned to
she sleep next to me and I would feel them all night. She
I couldn't push my feelings away this time, that she would

However,
getting concert schedules, press release packages performing in a
testimony to the way acts to music emanate. The announcement was
somewhere would happen to change my title. I passed the
coming day, both because of my dreams and because I felt
went to breakfast the next day. I felt a dread towards the
couldn't sleep the rest of the night, and got up early.
my real desires aside again, no matter what I felt. I felt I
suffered about what I had been dreaming, and I could never push
lay in the wet alley in the midst of any other congress conspired with
chill to the night air against my body. I started to shake.
I sat up suddenly in my dorm room and felt the

My body

sudden realization suffuse all consumable pleasure seared through
streamed and her lips to mine and caressed and kissed me. A
curves of her beneath her shirt. She pulled her hands to my
came down on myaching body and I let the smooth, soot
patted her body once more. I caressed as her sight met mine
desires became an ache, and I grasped her neckstrait and
the tempting of her lips and body so close made the

tears,

eyes, and my fear faded, for I knew she was telling the
I am you, "she said. She was looming directly into my
didn't know or understand..." he asked "why are you?" I
All of the sudden I was flabbergasted—this was something I
tapped past way, teaching me.

just enough my body. The leaned down to kiss me again but
away and looked at me again, and my blood grew hot and
desire
three days in Cincinnati, a four-hour drive. I detoured to a phone and called my father.

"Daddy, do you remember when you arranged to get us concert tickets last year?"

"Yes, sweetheart."

"Could you do it again?"

"It depends on what concert and where...."

"Jessica Mast. In Cincinnati three days from now."

"I think that's supposed to be sold out, honey. There's no way I could get two tickets...."

"I only need one."

"One? I could do that, I think, but what for? You can't go to a concert by yourself if it's four hours away...."

"It's not for me; it's a gift. Could you get it as close to the stage as possible?"

"I'll try, but I can't guarantee. That's a really strange gift, honey, who's it for?"

"I can't explain now, Dad. I have to go to class."

"Well, all right, sweetheart. I love you; stay out of trouble. And say hello to Don for me."

"I will. Bye."

I went to breakfast and came back to find a message from Don asking me to come meet him in his room. I went up stairs, opened the door, and started down the hall, but I stopped. Don and four other guys from the same dorm floor had another guy, Phil, pinned up against the wall. Don had
"Don't, what if you hurt him? What if he desists?"

"She's a baggo! You don't touch baggo's, are you?"

We into the room. He smashed the door and turned on me. He watched over and grabbed my arm, pulling me up and dragging
me. What the hell do you think your doctors get over here?

..."Yelling at me. I started to reach out to him, until I heard Don's voice. His eyes and the blood streaming from everywhere, preceeded me beside him to help, to do anything. The agony and fear in
their dropped into the room, and they bear him until the couldn't move. Don didn't have an answer, so he staggered there. They all

Don't you leave me alone!

I don't give a damn about you! What are you afraid of? Why
I don't look at you in the goddamn shower, you filthy
what you where I live!

I don't want you looking at me in the shower. I don't
break free of the line men!

of your damned business, pull your tight back, trying to
and the hell do you think you are at? What I do is none
his face with a snarl.

You out to be shot, you fucking baggo! Don shouted in

any different.

never understood why he thought so. He didn't think or act
always nerved him, because he said he was gay, although I

Matthew: 12
"He won't die. We didn't hurt him that bad. He needed to be taught a lesson. They're sick. If he dies, he deserves it."

"Since when are you God, that you decide who deserves to die?" I didn't expect the blow that knocked me to the floor.

"Don't you ever talk back to me. And don't you ever question what I do." He said in a low, vicious voice. Then he left. I heard the door to the stairs shut, so I got up looked out. Phil wasn't there. I lay down on the bed and wept.

He came back an hour later.

"Darling, I'm sorry hit you. I should never have done it. It just upset me that you questioned my judgment. I'm a good Christian. Nobody would say that I'm bad, or that I did the wrong thing. I did what was best for society. You can't fault me for that. It bothers me that you don't agree. I think it would be best if you let me make decisions like that all right?" He sat down next to me and lifted my chin.

"Darling, you know I love you. I'm sorry. I'll never do that again. I called you because I wanted to go out tonight, all right?"

It seemed that he was truly sorry, and that touched me. I surrendered to my need for stability and familiarity and to my fear that he would do the same thing to me, and I nodded my head.

I was uncomfortable during the whole date, especially when he put his arm around me in the theater and squeezed me.
I prayed that my roommate, Meade, would be home when we got back, so that Don wouldn't stay. I knew he would want to have sex, and I couldn't stand the idea, but I had no clue how to handle it. She wasn't there.

Don was in an energetic mood and grabbed me roughly and kissed me after he shut the door. I tried to squirm loose, but I couldn't move in his arms. He finally relaxed his grip and I shoved away for him.

"What's the matter?"

"I don't feel like it. I'm tired."

"Oh, you'll feel like it in a minute," he said, coming after me.

"Don, please go," I asked, moving away again. He backed me up to the bed.

"Come on, you never acted like this before."

"Don."

"Oh, you want it and you know it."

"I don't want it! I don't want you. I never do; I never have. I've never loved you and I've never been attracted to you. I've only been with you because I thought I had to to belong." I said it in rush, hoping that it would hurt him enough to make him go away. I'd seen many expressions on his face before, but I'd never seen him look completely stunned.

"What do you mean? You've never loved me? You've never been attracted to me? What about... all this? You told me..." He shook his head.
"I lied to you. Not to hurt you, but I thought I had to. But I can't anymore. I don't want to be with you. Can't you understand? I care about you. I really do. But I'm not in love with you." I hoped he would understand and forgive me.

"Then who are you in love with? Who are you attracted to?" The shock was starting to wear off and he was moving from hurt to anger. I shook my head helplessly. I couldn't tell him I wanted a woman, and one I'd never met. I couldn't even tell that to myself.

"Who?!" He seized hold of my shoulders. I couldn't back up anymore; I was pinned up against the bed.

"I'm not with anyone."

"You're a slut." This time I expected the blow that came crashing down on the side of my face. I landed on the bed and Don lay heavily on top of me. I started to scream as he ripped open my shirt, and he jammed three of his fingers in my mouth. I choked on them and beat against him, but I couldn't move, and I could barely breathe. With his other hand he ripped through my skirt and unzipped his jeans, and then took my hands and held them above my head. He raped me. Then he struck me again, got up and left, slamming the door.

I got up and locked it.

I lay on the bed and cried for a long time, before I realized Meade would be home. I didn't want anyone to know. I took off my clothes and went to the shower. As I was getting ready to go to bed, she came in. I hadn't looked in
Sweetheart,

opened it. There was a note from my father:

she reached over to my desk and picked up and envelope. I
you'll be happy you'd be here tonight. He brought this.

now, did you know that your father stopped by to see

head, but she appeared to be all stuck and no procedure.

someone else, someone serious and intense. Intense her pretty
character and from time to time I thought that there must be a

In fact, her writing personality was nothing more than a

stroking my hair was strangely out of character.

help me completely at arms length, saying what she said and
sit with lots of people, but she never got serious, and she

was a very kind and private person. She was elderly, even

I realized later that Meade had never touched me before, she

pleased me. It didn't strike me as strange at the time, but

way. The compassion in her huge blue eyes embarrassed and

It was the first time Meade had reached out to me in any

remembered.

protected, she held me for a long time, until I was calm and

soothingly introduced me and comforted me and I felt safe and

gathered me into her arms. Her warm, sweet smell and her

"Oh, God. I'm sorry. We hit you?" I nodded and she

"Don't!" I said. "We broke up." I stood and trembled.

and took my hands. I couldn't look her in the eyes.

Finally.

instantly.

I turned to see the handwriting on my face, but she saw it.
I got this ticket for you. I really don’t understand why you wanted it. I was hoping we could talk. We aren’t as close as we were when you were a little girl, and I miss that. I want to know what’s going on in your life. I love you very much and I want you to be happy. I hope this is what you wanted.

Love,
Daddy

I read it twice. If he had any idea what was going on in my life he would have a heart attack. I smiled a little thinking about it. Meade was watching me closely and saw the edges of my smile.

"Is it something good?" She asked.

"Yes. Just a note." I said, dropping it on my desk. I noticed my clothes lying on the floor and the memory came rushing back. I picked them up and threw them in the closet.

"Are you all right? You don’t seem well." She had a suspicious look on her face.

"I’m fine. I’m just upset. We had a bad argument, that’s all." I got into bed. She sat down next to me.

"Do you want to talk about it? Are you going to see him anymore?"

She held my hand and ran her fingers through my hair to smooth it.

"I told him I didn’t want to see him anymore and he got angry. I really don’t want to talk about it. Thank you for caring. It means a lot to me."

"You can count on me. I promise. Is there anything you need?"
"Can I borrow your car?"

"Sure. To go where?"

"Cincinnati."

She started to laugh, running her fingers through her short brown curly locks.

"What are you going to do in Cincinnati?"

"Go to Jessica Mast's concert this weekend."

She looked confused. "I didn't even know you liked Jessica Mast."

I blushed crimson. She noticed. "My dad got me a ticket."

"I suppose you can. You're going to drive there all by yourself? Why don't I go with you?"

"But I only have one ticket. You wouldn't have anything to do."

"Oh, I have friends in Cincinnati that I visit all the time. I'd find something to do."

The tickets my father had gotten for me were in the third row, so close to the stage that I could have reached out and touched it if I had wanted to.

I realized as I was sitting down that if I had a single ticket that either the group next to me had an odd number in it, or there was another person next to me who was alone. It turned out to be the latter.
The woman who stood next to me had long blonde hair that cascaded down her back. She had a sharp pointed chin, perfect skin, and large, beautiful brown eyes. Her nose was unusual; it was normal sized and shaped, but rather than pointing up it seemed to drop off at the end. It took nothing from her beauty, but it lent her an air of reserve and unapproachability, and reminded me distinctly of an eagle.

Her style of dress was reserved too, but expensive and in excellent taste. She wore khaki-colored cotton pants that showed her slim waist, a white cotton shirt buttoned up with a brooch at the neck, and a peach cardigan sweater, all under a long dark overcoat which she removed when she sat down.

She sat with her back straight and her shoulders back, almost at attention; never casual or even relaxed. She looked me over when I stood next to her, and gave me smile and nod in greeting then turned back to an intense scrutiny of the stage.

She inspired in me from the first a little awe and a great deal of respect, and she made me nervous. Meade had left with the promise to pick me up in three hours, and for the first time, I was alone. I sat down and looked around me, and I realized that almost all of the audience was composed of women. It gave me a feeling of safety and tranquility that I had never know before.

The lights dimmed a little and the stage was flooded with light. The back-up band took the stage, and the drummer
used to live here. She showed me the place where she got a
mystery, the place where she answered me.

unexpectedly, for she smiled when she answered me.

May, examined the contents of It. She must have found
I left as her gaze expanded my soul, and, in an instant,
she turned around to me, and her drooping down eyes met mine.

Jessica marvelled I replied in surprise.

I turned to look at the woman next to me. "You know
addressing..."

look, and then she walked back to the microphone and stared
looked at me questioningly for a second, then nodded to me, and
nodded, and waved, welcoming the woman, "Alphie." She
left. Then she looked at the woman next to me, intrigued,
live audience, and the group behind with people in the crowd
she walked to the edge of the stage amid the cheers from
her translation of how my eyes had traveled to my thought.
Dream, the experience was so close that I made me believe in
my face and felt across her shoulders exactly as I had in my
Twelve-Stilting Acoustic Gallows, her spiders had leaped her
blue jeans and black cowboy boots, and she carried her backpack.
Frightened, I had imagined her to be, she wore a pasture shirt and vest,
with which she walked on stage. She was spectating as I entered.

The show was the audience, the people around us, went

Jessica marvelled. "I gave a very simple introduction, tantalised and

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I was really a question, because she knew the answer.

"You're in love with her, aren't you?" she asked. It

watching my reaction to the song and singer.

When I turned to her, Astrid was looking at me, and I had been

surrounded. Realizing there was a hand on my Jeff shoulder,

looked away, and I suddenly regretted my awareness of self and

her face. It appeared to be one of recognition. Then she

sang it, her voice dropped to meet mine. A look crossed

the song ended with a vocal, loud, searing cry, and as

breath, while she sang, all seemed, to me,

I stood swivelled to the spot, unable to move, unable to

was patented to hear. I go so caught up in her emotions that

the song was a complete hearing of soul, so human, that it

was the pain.

one about a bar and friends and loneliness and alcohol drunk

back in the bar..." she began a song I had never heard before.

huge arena and there are 20,000 in the audience, then I'm

and singing. It seems, counting back here, even though I'm in a

in a bar here every Friday night. The people there were warm

I used to live here in Connecticut, and I used to play

atmosphere as if she had heard our conversation, she said,

feeling familiar with the microphone, then, and

significant to me that I wondered if she knew...

been dropped casually, almost accidentally, but it was so

"She's not seeing anyone." The sentence seemed to have

slated, then added,

major record contract." She turned back to look at the
if she hadn't, my blush would have given me away.

"She'll be visiting me at my apartment later. Would you like to meet her?"

I blushed deeper than before, and she said, "I'll consider that a 'yes.'"

I protested, "My roommate, Meade, is supposed to meet me afterwards..."

"Meade?" Athena turned completely around to face me. She was taken aback, and the carefully guarded reserve dropped like a discarded mask, revealing surprise and interest. "As in Meade Simonson? A pretty college girl with short dark hair and blue eyes?"

Her reaction surprised me, too, and I said only, "Yes, how do you know Meade?"

The mask went up again, and the only thing I could tell was that she was giving me a very thoughtful look.

"We've been introduced. I'll think she won't mind meeting Jessica, too. Meade is your roommate. That's interesting," she turned around to face the stage again, just as Jessica began another song.

. . . . . . . . . . . . .

We walked out to where I was supposed to meet Meade, who was sitting on the hood of the car with her back to us and her feet propped up on the windshield, all carelessness and light.
"Don't be afraid, Miss Meade, she's a very kind person."

"Were separate, but connected to the same building."

I looked at my car and led me to the door of her apartment, which

the bar with strict instructions not to get lost. Then she

when we parked the car. Athena directed me to

... ... ... ... ...

the knew Athena was right.

"The knows, Meade, "I looked at my roommate and smiled, and

then Athena and shaking her head.

"But... Meade started, then stopped, looking at me and

gently but not-to-be-thought-repeatedly.

decided to be responsive to everyone. Athena said to

perhaps we should take my car to the bar, since you've

expressed with her mouth what she was thinking with her head.

Meade was speechless, at least she was unable to

express you've just now gotten back from the bar, didn't

expect you want to meet her, so you're coming with, but then I

diana wants to meet her, so you're coming with, and then I

Meade will be at my apartment this evening, and

she, too, fell for the extraordinarily woman.

"And then..." The way she said the name betrayed the same

Meade's life, it was one of the most amazing for us.

together will be connected among the most shocking moments of

see who was addressing her, I think that seeing as standing

Athena said to me, and Meade whipped her shoulders around to

"You really shouldn't drive around intoxicated, Meade."

Moreover? 2e
he helped me out of my coat. She took her own and Jessica's,

"You've spent too much time with Jessica," she said, and

her, and she took her head.

with a good-natured but suspicious look at me. I glared at
Jessica laughing and looked at Athena, who took the job

thing to ever happen to me.

minutes and I was dozed from then on. The room was

"Athena," I agreed. "I examined my soul within these

must have been torture," Jessica said to me, smiling.

ended up sitting next to me."

"I met her today," she said to your conscious alone, too, and

"This is strange," she took my arm and pulled me forward,

front of a stranger.

deteriorated not noticing her dressing gown as being huddled in

"Not at all," Athena replied, waiting over to hug her,

"In," she said.

got here before you. I hope you don't mind me telling my

I sneaked out without changing or seeing anyone, so I

played nervously with her keys.

her stage clothes, but wore a long, heavy, dark overcoat, and

Jessica walked into the room. She hadn't changed out of

"I'm already here. If you mean me, then Jo."

"I'm already here. If you mean me, then Jo.,"

she shouted, but a voice came from the other room.

"I shouldn't be long before she gets here," she said,

paying more attention to her keys instead.

her expecting her to explain that remark, but she didn't, she

she said, "very tickety, she'll be waked by you." I looked at

left.
too, and walked back to a closet.

"Why don’t we sit down and have a drink?" Jessica asked, and led the way to Athena’s living room, which was simply but elegantly furnished. I sat and she went to the bar.

"What would you like?"

"I’ve no idea. I really don’t drink." She considered that for a moment and poured two of what she was drinking and handed one glass to me.

"I promised I’d go out and check on the bar, and I need to talk to some people. I’ll leave you two alone," Athena said when she came back, and she left, exiting through a hallway that must have led directly into the bar.

The silence was awkward, for having just met, we had nothing in common to say. Jessica made a valiant effort:

"She’s an interesting woman, isn’t she?" she said, referring to Athena. She was refusing to look me in the eye, and seemed to be speaking to her glass, which made it easy for me to look directly at her.

"I don’t know, really; I just met her a few hours ago. She seems quite....reserved."

"Some people have used worse words. She’s wonderful, actually; she just doesn’t want to let anyone in. Some say she’s afraid, but I don’t think so. I think it’s self-inflicted pain."

I turned that over in my mind for a moment, then said,
Into my face.

"Are you still angry with me?

One...

and I really need me, taking my cold shocking hands into her warm

drink all at once and set down the glass. She watched over

but my body began to tremble. I muttered the rest of my

around to look at me in shock. I looked back at her calmly,

rapped by my boyfriend. "She dropped her glass, and with

At this time Wednesday I was in my dorm room, waiting

plane waiting to fly here.,

At this time yesterday I was in California sitting on a

again trying to fill the gap in conversation.

Jesus and strained her, she got up to rest it, once

I had barely stepped from the drunk I was holding, but

"Yes, I'm not quite that naïve."

this last

realized the significance, "Do you know what kind of a bar

If you only just met her a few hours ago..." she

on stage, and then away.

looking straight into my eyes for the first time since she was

you seem to have peaked up pretty well," she said

compared to hers now.

the phases I felt earlier in the evening were nothing

of the whole world and under your feet. emphatically.

seems to fuel her inner self to furiously: you stand in front

but directly in your eyes; you seem to look anywhere but, she

"You are an odd pair of friends. She never looks anywhere

Hilton" 29
agitated tears in our eyes, an elevation of voice.

for several minutes. Then I leaned forward to push my lips
nose and forehead together, etching into each other's eyes
through her sticky, autumn hair, we moved forward and touched
I put my arms on her shoulders and ran my fingers
can her fingers down my chin.

guitar strings, the beauty traced the outline of my lips and
my skin the caressses on the lips of her fingers made by her
My face not wanting it now for the lesser time. I could feel on
raised her hand and traced her fingertips over the bridge of

I am you," I whispered back, she understood, she

who are you," she whispered in her tough, rough voice.

my eyes to rest on my eyes.

searching for what it was that made me screw so. Her gaze
she leaned close to me, examining my face and hands,

you look so familiar, as though I met you years ago.

didn't seem so awkward, this time.

"I'm fine, now." The longsilence after my answer

M 10
I'd noticed her from the first night she came into my bar. It wasn't just how she looked but her spirit. There was something incandescent about her personality that showed in her eyes and her smile and her actions, a fascinating light that attracted everyone to it. She was silly and irresponsible, and as intoxicating as expensive champagne. But when she wasn't the center of attention, which was rarely, she looked off into space with a wistful thoughtfulness that betrayed deeper thoughts. She was far more beautiful at those times than ever; a strong, classic, ageless beauty that showed in her strong chin, her high cheek bones and her shining short, curly dark hair. The intelligence in her pale blue eyes showed through the giddiness she usually projected.

She was incessantly pursued, but she rebuffed women gently, kindly, one by one, finally selecting as a lover one intelligent but superficial young woman who was fascinated by her light but made no attempt to see into her shadows. I was pleased by her thoughtful way of selecting a lover. Unlike so many, she didn't glide vapidly from the arms of one woman to another, uncaring, and helping to creating the vast emotional and social tangle of former lovers that seemed to be the norm in the bar.

Her choice, although thoughtfully made, wasn't
appropriate, and didn’t satisfy her emotionally at all. I could have told her it wouldn’t be. It wasn’t long before they were fighting openly in the bar and her choice had made one of her own; the young woman brought her new affair into the bar to brandish her in front of Meade, who did her valiant best to appear not to care. Most would have snatched the first available woman and made a show of being happy, but Meade wasn’t that simple.

I must say that I watched all this with an objective eye at first, through the not-quite-ethical mirrors that projected the main part of the bar’s activities into my living room. It was interesting to watch the women’s actions and gestures without hearing their speech. It usually wasn’t difficult to figure out what they were saying to each other.

On my rare trips into my own bar, I picked up information from my bartenders on Meade and her background. She was a student at a college four hours away, and she spent her weekends here. I thought of her as an interesting addition to the social dynamics, mainly, rather than as an interest of my own.

She glided along on the roller coaster of attention that she got, carefully choosing another lover that wouldn’t suit her, and then remaining single after that affair ended in disaster, too.

I was amazed at the resourcefulness that her rejected suitors had, and her tolerance of them. I would have been irritated to violence at being constantly propositioned by
those I'd turned down, but she kept them as friends.

My interest changed the more she was in the bar, and the more I realized that she had depth as a person than most did not, and that I was the only one that saw it. She was looking for someone with as much depth, someone I doubted she'd find. She began to have an effect on me, awakening feelings that I thought were long dead. Feelings I thought I had killed off, and that alarmed me.

On one occasion, my bartender introduced her to me while I was standing at the bar. She greeted me with awe at first -- I suspected my employees have embellished stories about me enough to elevate me to the status of a myth -- and then her characteristic irreverence. I think she was disarmed by my unusual reaction (I smiled but didn't laugh) and by my direct gaze.

I was shocked to learn that I was sitting next to her roommate, Diana, at my friend Jessica's concert; shocked enough that I dropped my guard enough to the girl to let her know that I found Meade interesting. Here too, was a girl with depth, although she had a need too great for Meade to fill; but one that I instantly knew could be filled by Jessica's longing.

Jessica has been a wonderful friend, and once, ages ago, an attentive lover. But she needs to protect, and it hurt her that I wouldn't let her through my reserve. I could never be the lover she needed, and recognized that Diana
could, so I threw them together that night. I was surprised that Meade didn’t know her roommate well enough to know she was in love with Jessica, or at least what she knew of Jessica through her music.

I left Diana and Jessica alone in my apartment, and went out to the bar to find her; we had an interesting dilemma, if Diana stayed, Meade couldn’t return home and needed a place to stay.

"Meade." She turned around to look at me, "Could you come talk with me for a minute?" She looked surprised as she walked behind me to an empty table, and her friends did, too. I could tell they were trying to figure out whether she was privileged or in trouble.

"Hello. I thought you’d be hanging out with my roommate and that singer chick." She gestured back to the hallway I’d just come from. Meade’s speech was slurred; she’d been drunk already earlier had another rum and Coke in her hand.

"They’re pretty deep in conversation, so I thought I’d leave them alone. Hmmm.... do you really think you need to be drinking another?"

"Probably not, but I seem to be anyway." She said brightly, then she looked at her drink and then set it down away from her. "If you don’t want me to drink it, I won’t."

"I’m not your mother. Do whatever you want."

"Yes, but what impression will you have of me if I do?"

"Does my opinion really matter to you?"

She shrugged, "I guess not...."
"I just wanted to tell you that I can arrange for you to stay here tonight; I think Diana will want to and it’s a long drive. And I certainly wouldn’t want you to be driving home alone in your condition." I said it lightly, without disapproval.

She blushed, and said, "I do have responsibility, really, it’s around her somewhere. I think I put it in my pocket...." She started to dig in her jeans pockets, and then looked up at me from under her long lashes with an "Aren’t I clever" grin on her face that I couldn’t help but smile at.

"I got you to smile! Amazing. I heard you never did that. I must be good for something."

"I didn’t mean to smile," I shook my head, "It must have slipped out. Are you ever serious?"

"Why, do I have to be? If I do, I’m sure I could manage it."

"Yes, that might be helpful for a few minutes," I said, smiling again, "I have several guest bedrooms; you could stay here, or if you’d like, I can get you a hotel room."

"I’d like to stay here. I’m curious about your apartment. I’ve heard stories about it. I’d like to know if they’re true." She grinned.

"Sometime you’ll have to tell me all the stories you’ve heard. I’d be interested to know how much the people here really know about me. Once you see my apartment, please don’t tell the whole world. I do like my privacy. In fact,
please don't mention to your friends that you're staying."

"I wouldn't." She said it earnestly, and wanted me to understand that she was trustworthy.

"I really didn't believe that you would."

The serious tone caused a lull in our conversation -- Meade's humor had carried through small talk, but when we had to be serious, we didn't know what to say.

"If you're done with that, I could get you a soda." I pointed to her empty glass.

"That's all right. I'll get one later. I will get a soda," she grinned, "I wouldn't want to pass out; that would be embarrassing."

"You never know, it could be funny."

"For you. Humiliating for me."

"Afraid of appearing weak?"

"Always."

"Why?"

"I might get taken advantage of."

"I'd think that appearing vulnerable without actually being would be a good defense."

"Possibly. But it's not my style. Is that something you find attractive?"

"I don't know. I never thought about it. Who hit your roommate? She has a hand print on the side of her face."

"Her boyfriend. I guess she told him she didn't want to see him anymore and they had a big fight. I'm glad she did; he's a real ass. She was never happy with him."
"I think she's going to fall in love with Jessica."
She thought about this for a minute. "It never occurred to me before that Diana might be gay, but know that I think about it, it seems right. How long have you known Jessica Mast?"

"Years."

"Good. Then she won't hurt Diana."

"You're right, but how do you know that for sure?"

"If you've known her for years and she's a friend of yours, then she must be a good person."

"That's interesting logic." I took another sip of my drink. It amazed me how much this girl was able to make me smile.

"Well, you wouldn't be friends with someone who'd hurt her."

"How do you know that? I could be an evil fiend. I might murder children and eat them for breakfast."

"I know you're not."

"How?"

"Instinct."
I laughed. "You're full of it."

"Probably. But I'm always right."

"Always?"

"Absolutely."

"Then why haven't you been able to find a satisfying lover?" She looked hurt, and I instantly regretted the remark. Something in me wanted to have the upper hand, and
she was so confident that I reacted by hurting her. "I'm sorry. That was rude."

"But true, I suppose. I thought I'd done a good job so far."

"You have. I'm just teasing you, please don't get upset." But I knew I'd hit a vulnerable area, and even though I felt a little guilty, I knew that I knew something very personal about her. Her vivacity seemed as much of a mask of her true feelings as my coldness was of mine. I wondered whether that was a natural instinct, or the result of a long-ago hurt.

"You sure don't seem to have any lovers. No that didn't come out right. I mean, we never hear of you being with anyone."

"I'm not, and I haven't been for a long time. It's not what I want. I enjoy being alone."

"Don't you ever get lonely?"

"I have friends."

"Yes, but you can't sleep with them. Don't you ever get sexually frustrated?" She raised her eyebrows and grinned, looking at me coyly, and I realized that she had managed to steer the conversation around to something humorous and safe. I laughed.

"That's none of your business. I wouldn't tell you something like that here where everyone can overhear."

"Then let's go somewhere where you can tell me." she raised her eyebrows and grinned.
I turned and walked down the hallway to my apartment, beckoning her to follow, and she did. I had been growing steadily uncomfortable with holding conversation out in the bar, and the subject matter was taking an unusual and not quite comfortable turn. I realized our leaving together would cause comment, but I decided not to worry about it.

Jessica was stretched out on the couch in the study when we entered, holding a sleeping Diana in her arms and stroking her hair. It took her a few moments to realize we were there; she was entranced with watching the young woman whose head lay against her breast.

"How are you two?" I whispered, walking over to the couch.

"We seem to be fine. She fell asleep on me." She said with a smile, and only the hint of a complaint.

"And you are completely charmed, admit it. You should put her in bed."

"But I don't want to let go of her."

"So put her in your bed."

"There's an idea...."

I shook Diana and she raised her head to look at me wearily. "What?"

"Time for you to go to bed, sleepy. Where do you want to sleep?"

"With Jessica." We all laughed.

"I guess that settles that."

Jessica helped her up and guided her out of the room,
and I fixed a rum and soda to give to Meade, who didn’t notice; she was looking avidly around the room.

"So what do you think of my study?"

"It’s beautiful – and what I expected."

"So what you’ve heard seems to be true?" The thought alarmed me somewhat – I hated the idea that someone I trusted might be talking about me to people I couldn’t defend myself to.

"No, actually, it doesn’t. It looks like I imagined it would look; conservative without being staid, contemporary without being trendy, simple without being stark, elegant without being ostentatious, attractive without being overwhelming."

"But why did you imagine it this way?"

"Because that’s the impression I have of you; I just assumed your apartment would be an extension."

I ran those thoughts around in my head for a minute.

"So you think I’m attractive without being overwhelming?" She blushed, but wouldn’t look at me and wouldn’t answer. I had forced her to drop her mask a second time.

"Do you? I pressed.

"Among other things, yes."

"Why won’t you look me in the eye?" She rose to the challenge and held my gaze, putting on her mask again.

"So what exactly do people say about my apartment?"

"Some of the wildest things. I’ve heard that your
apartment is so lavish and expensive that you could feed Ethiopia, and then I've heard it's so stark that it's sterile and cold. Obviously neither is true. And then there are other things...." She seemed unwilling to elaborate.

"Other things?"

"People say that you have two-way mirrors and microphones in the bar so that you can spy on people and hear their conversations from your apartment," she hesitated for a moment, embarrassed to be telling me what she believed was untrue, "and they say you have cameras in the bathroom stalls."

"Cameras in the stalls? What kind of a pervert do they think I am?" Someone had actually gotten some information and elaborated outrageously on it.

"I told you people think the wildest things. No one really believes all that though - or no one would use the restrooms. They just like to talk; it makes them feel better about themselves. Besides since it isn't true, you needn't worry about it."

"I wouldn't necessarily say it isn't true."

"What do you mean?"

I motioned for her to follow me, and I walked into the living room where the mirror into the main area of the bar was.

"Oh, my God! You can see what's going on in the bar. This is the mirror right behind the main bar, isn't it? You can see the whole dance floor and the whole lounge area."
"And I can see the bartenders while they're working, too, which is important. I can tell if they're dishonest. For example, I know that Jonathan always gives you free drinks, but not to anyone else." She looked guilty and a little afraid, but I smiled at her, so she relaxed. "If we have any problems with fights in the lounge or armed robbers, I can call the police immediately. It is mainly for security, although it can be amusing to watch the people, too."

"So that's how you know who my lovers have been, and so much about me."

"And how much your drinking has steadily increased since you began coming here. I know quite a bit about everyone just by watching them. It's quite an amusing sport, actually, to see who will be with whom on any given evening."

"Can you hear the bar?"

"Good Lord, no! Do you really think I want all that racket in here?"

"What, you don't like dance music?"

"The only music I listen to is classical."

"Why?"

We were standing side by side, looking out into the bar, and without quite realizing what I was saying or even where I was, the words of a girl long dead slipped out of my mouth; "because it feels like a caress...."

The memories of a spring afternoon came flooding back; the thoughts I had held in so long hit me in a rush and the
words of Byron danced in my head; "and on that cheek and o'er that brow/ so soft, so calm, yet eloquent/ the smiles that win, the tints that glow/ but tell of days in goodness spent./ A mind at peace with all below/ a heart whose love is innocent!"

And then I saw the face that had been etched into my heart; the blood flowing into her blue, blue eyes and the agony she felt as her life slipped away. I realized there was a girl standing next to me, watching me, and I forced the thoughts back into their places, and picked up my mask and put it on before turning to her.

I could see in her pale, knowing eyes that she had read my face and seen my pain, but that she was withdrawing as though she hadn't. She looked out into the bar again, gesturing towards her first lover, who was with her girlfriend on the dance floor. And she dropped her mask.

"So you think I've made some mistakes."

"No. I think you made wise choices. I think that circumstance has been against you. That isn't bad. You'll find someone who will be right for you."

"You seemed awfully cynical about all this." She gestured outward.

"Not entirely, just about those who don't know what they want, but blindly grasp at anyone, thinking it will work out. They desperately need to be with someone, anyone and they don't care who, as long as it's another human body. They can't stand alone and be happy. There are quite a few people
out there who do find happiness, though."

"And you think I will."

"I'm certain of it."

"I think you're wrong. There's no one there that I can love the way I need to love. The way I need to be loved. I've not met anyone with that much depth. And my drinking worries me, too, but I don't want to be sober. I don't want to think that this might be all that's left for me."

She thought about it for a long time, then picked up her mask and put it back on, turning to me with a smile.

"You know, The topic we were discussing in the bar seems to have gotten lost."

"Oh, really? What topic were we on?" I had hoped she'd forgotten it; aside from bringing up dangerous feelings, it was also embarrassing to me.

"Sexual frustration, and if you're a victim of it."

"How did we end up on that topic?"

"Very carefully. Don't avoid the question."

"I'm not sure you need to know the answer. I don't normally engage in this type of witty repartee, especially not at the volume that we've been doing, so I'm not sure how to respond."

"The idea is that we both have the same thing on our minds, but neither of us is sure that we do, so we dance around the issue for a long while, pretending not to be thinking anything in particular, and yet hoping that the other will be bold enough to reveal what they are thinking so
that we won’t have to. Those are the rules. So far, you’ve done a wonderful job."

"Oh. So what exactly are you thinking?"

"I can’t remember now. I am intoxicated, you realize. I can’t always follow these things. The topic was your sexual frustration, or lack of it, by the way."

"Oh, yes, well. The answer is yes."

"And what exactly do you do about it?"

"Nothing. It goes away."

"Goes away?" she shook her head, "I don’t believe it. Don’t you ever get so frustrated you feel you’ll explode?"

She was whispering the last part, her eyes filled with mischief, because she could tell I was embarrassed.

"No."

"I don’t believe you."

"Why would I lie to you?" The shock of being so exposed to her earlier was affecting me and I said it sharply, defensively, because I was lying to her. In saying it, I relinquished control of the conversation and our situation to her. I looked in her eyes for a moment, and for the first time in my life, I looked away. I couldn’t hold her gaze, because she could see inside me.

I thought I was clever in trying to see her real self, but I was blind in not realizing she’d be doing the same to me.

She said softly, gently and full of understanding, "because you don’t want to admit that you need anyone. You
don't want anyone to know that sometimes you need a woman so much that you shake with lust, with naked desire. That you feel that desire shooting through your body every time you move, that your hands tremble to touch her skin, and you want the taste of her in your mouth, on your lips. Not because you don't want to admit you need a woman, but because you don't want to admit that you need at all."

She wasn't attacking me, and she was telling the truth, but the world I'd built would fall if I let her know that. "You don't know me, or anything about me. I don't need anyone. I'm happy here, and I'm happy alone. Sex is not so important to me that I feel that way. It's a passing desire."

"Is it really? I believe that you're happy alone, but I think you'd be much happier you would be if you were with someone. I know you're a strong person, I can see it. But you're not invincible. I know you feel pain."

She was slowly peeling away my layers of protectiveness, taking the mask gently from my hands.

"Stop, Meade. I can't let go. It frightens me."

"I want you. You, for ever and ever. I may not be that woman that you're so in love with. I may never make you feel that you'll die of love of me. But I won't make you feel the pain you feel for her. I would never be jealous of her. I can learn to love her as you do. I can be your confidante, your friend, your lover, your wife. I can be the place where you go to be vulnerable and to hide from the world. You can
protect me when I'm hurt and understand me when I'm lonely. I know I can't take her place. Let me make a place of my own. I wouldn't hurt you," she echoed my words of long ago.

She was beautiful and fragile in her own strong way, innocent and worldly at the same time. And I fell in love with her then, before her words were finished, and I gave her her own place, and all she said was true. She came to love a girl she never knew in the same way I did, and that girl became not human, but a symbol of our love and what it could be.

And when we left the room, our masks lay on the floor, side by side.