

***Illicit love Or The Malady of Venus***

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## 1. That which is not singular

She may have a strong demeanour, but I can tell by the soft grasp of her hand that she hides a vulnerable interior; my guess is that she is a masochistic in bed. Her hands are aging rapidly, prey to decay. She wears tasteless gold rings with colourful stones that strangle her fingers like an insecure murderer doomed to be caught. The crudeness of her jewellery reveal that she was not born into money, her family experienced upward mobility as she was coming of age. An unwavering constricted orb. Jet black like the rosary that adorns the pale throat of a Victorian widow, with a periphery that begins to pulse the slightest fraction, but does not dilate. It cannot dilate. Subject's pupils have stopped responding to light. Latex gloves guide the underside of the eyelid down to reveal a fleshy interior. The blaring white light of a small torch is guided past the irises, then absorbed in an all-encompassing blackness.

A disease has decayed the pretectal nuclei region of the midbrain; subject now has no conception of how near this light blazes, they cannot distinguish between the beam of light that probes their lashes at an uncomfortable closeness and a far flung celestial body.

It is clear to me because anyone that wears something that ugly by choice is desperately trying to communicate anxieties about wealth...her type is common among occult enthusiasts. I like to call them New Witches. Conflicted about their social position—a.k.a. being rich—they stay in touch with 'important issues' and oddly enough, the paranormal. I bet she drinks faux Chinese tea because she has bad digestion.

## 2. A mnemonic penitentiary.

Her philanthropy is shrouded in a selfless veil to hide a selfish drive: re-connecting with the memory of her father. Most nights I toss restlessly in oily, recalcitrant sheets that tie my limbs to one another. Only my body inhabits this bed, trying and failing to lie still as my mind heaves in nauseous waves, dragged through the vast halls of time. Memories bubbling to the surface, spilling over and trickling away...

The once safe realm of sleep has become corrupted; thoughts converge in a perplexing haze as memories are ripped from the safety of the past. Torn from their orderly storage, they have begun to run wild: wreaking havoc and delighting in their own destructive capacity.

Am I being judgemental? No. When we met, I told her my father used to sell bread on the streets to support his younger siblings (a harmless lie), her eyes widened with a discharge of empathy and she hired me for the séance. They call out in this new and inscrutable manner and, somehow, it is clear that something else responds with an unknowable call of its own. People call this phenomenon 'human connection', I call it The Law of the Cashing Mirror, because the medium mirrors the client to create a reflective surface that seduces with its narcissism.

It is a moonlit night and yet darkness descends—gradually eating at my vision so that each moment of clarity taunts me mercilessly. As image and meaning is corrupted, and shadows eat the air, I imagine a tenebrous figure that comes to rob me of my sight...They stand waiting at the ends of time, watching, as my thoughts traverse in all directions at once.

My client saw a faint phantasm of her own image in me, projected her own narrative onto this social spectre, giving it full form. Interpersonal magic is cunning like a demon that prays on wanderers and seekers.

### 3. Microcosmic altercations

Now that we are holding hands in a necromantic circle to communicate with a poltergeist that haunts my client's home, I realise how comfortable she is with my presence. The door from one to another is slammed open in an unholy surrendering, an unnatural alliance. I press her hand slightly to test her nerves. I get a tighter grip in response and I notice the wetness of her palms. There is a neediness dripping from her sweat that irritates me. As I sensed earlier, she hides her weak character with the loudness of her voice and the assertiveness of her gaze. I doubt her children visit her often...I entertain myself for a moment by imagining that one child is a lawyer with a self-annihilating cocaine habit; and the other is a hunched, literary type with a thirst for kombucha. In my fantasy, the only thing they have in common is their dysfunctional upbringing.

#### Slide One

The rhythm of the multiplying pair has degenerated. A macrophage reaches out a tendril to consume the other in a merciless devouring. For of course, it could not be stopped: like lovers who cannot commune under the same sphere of language, their alliance is doomed to fail.

Her husband is on my left, and I find his presence unbearable. His heavy breathing is intensely unpleasant...I think to myself he must be trying to exhale the fat out of his morbidly obese body. The pain of foresight, anticipating a transformation never visible, until it is perilously late.

#### Slide Two

Here, the fragile husk of a cell wavers, tremors and convulses with a start: a thread divides this globe, a violent divergence because what was once singular is now many.

Two ostensibly incompatible languages somehow marry to find a new coherence, not by simulating the syntax of the other, but by existing in a dialogue without words—a haven from the relentless tyranny of voice.

### 4. The horror of being, without a name

A colossal stone monolith that evokes the same melancholic miasma as the House of Lady Deadlock: what unknown artifacts are interred here? By what deceitful means were they acquired? On the recalled visit, the gallery was overcome with a survey of Baroque painting. I recall this day with a contemptuous smile for the absurd grandiosity of each portrait; so laden with the accoutrements of institutional power that each image was rendered ludicrous.

As the séance unfolds, it becomes harder to reconcile the strange fact that my client's husband resembles the dog in their backyard: a fat Labrador with the stench of a dragon's yawn. It is as if both dog and man had swallowed a medieval knight for dinner, shreds of which are now putrefying in between their teeth. Baroque portraits are known for their static tableaux, but perhaps this sickness eats at my memory, as now the edges have begun to bleed: light floods into shadow and detail begins to slip away. Their hair shares the same yellow tone that is so scarcely seen in a human being; they both hold themselves with a domineering stand that seeks to conceal their weakness. Typical of a 'family head', his gentle voice reveals the need to be needed. I imagine him barking in a stormy night, divorced and horribly lonely.

Faces blur into one another with a waxy, monstrous sheen. A proud, shrewd gaze diffuses into something less recognizable: it's like the painting is fleeing backwards and I trip and fall

in my hopeless pursuit. Every time I get a foothold, I reach out to steady myself in this optically undulating territory, images shimmer and evade me once more.

He must secretly resent his wife for coercing him into running her father's company. Smart with practical matters, stupid like a dog in most other areas.