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THE AFFAIR: I—His Version

*As she slowly slid the silk scarf from her neck,
brushed it against my nipples, leaning herself
over me, hair like a waterfall, overflowing the
brim of desire, slotting it through the bedposts,
around my wrists, torso struggling, a field
of concentration beneath her, whipping
a rower's rhythm, I fell backwards beneath,
her image glaring like a sunspot before my eyes,
and the film stopped a moment, and I held it there,
the trauma, it was connected then to every other
moment of my life, it would not let go, like
filament after filament flung out to the dark,
catching somewhere, oh my soul . . . Who do
you think you are? Who let you in? Why are you here?
Oh I was a serious man devising complexions
of risk, canonizing what I knew to canonize,
drawing strength from whatever it was I was
whimpering over, cries unbraiding themselves,
loosening from a long strand that never seemed
to end, the infinite rope of desire and death,
witherings of human solitude. And always
she was reading this book, not one I wrote,
but interpretations, dreams and vexations,
curses, howls from the migrant wind, unsettled
but claiming everything about us. It was the truth,
she said. As I was her son, her boy. Golden,
brown, darker than exhaustion, cheeks smooth,
chest smooth, fingers delicate as slivers
of mown grass, as dry, brittle leaves, crackling
to the touch. She bent down, bit one off. Then
another. Sweet, fragrant. Tongue, lips tasting,*

salt flourishings, brilliant blossoms. Feeling
 her beside me, speaking, I was choking in silence,
 and the smells of shoyu and chrysanthemums,
 of grilled squid sifted about us, settling our skin,
 faint and musky as her incessant whisper—

. . . And then there was only this room, and her voice
 speaking, and the image of her feet at the bottom
 of the bed, the nails beaten and gnarled, slate
 colored like beach stones, and glimmering pubic hair,
 wisps of blondness I would comb and comb
 with my tongue, digging deeper in the furrow,
 saying words I barely knew, outliving myself as prayer
 and rain and the long slow descent towards despair.
 In Tokyo or the Mekong. New York, St. Paul, Paris.
 I was seeking abasement. I was seeking whiteness.
 I was the native pouring myself into her light.
 I was the jungle, compelling transmogrification.
 Bright blossoms. Screeches. Comfort in a complicated house. . . .
 And so, I was standing in grey light, thinking
 this must be finished, forgetting how the rushes
 of surf collect and re-collect grain after grain. .
 How I was bigger and emptier than anything
 she could hold; how I ended it between us,
 seeking this refuge, here . . . And still in memory
 come the bodies ready to perform their bodily
 music of forgetting this, this thing called whiteness,
 consciousness, called you're leaving me all the same;
 called I made you suffer too much, called I cry out
 for a leg, a lip, a leveling of hip to hip,
 wheeling us out of one hell into another, progenitor,
 little biscuit of flesh to nibble in the night. Called
 something taking its course here. Something in you . . .



It's not so easy to start such things, the telling I mean,
 not the deed. Let's try this: Did you ever enter anything
 so vile, so revealing of your own darkness you can't
 quite believe it ever occurred? Or found the course
 of certain events in your life so clichéd and improbable
 they might as well be mere fiction? Of course
 you have. If you have reached anywhere near
 a certain age, of course you have . . .

We met at this party. Instantly, I hated her, hated
 her husband too, she in a black cocktail dress
 and string of pearls, her eyes blue and furtive,
 that I would catch gazing up at me as she bent down,
 took a sip from her wine, while he stood beside her,
 hand at her back, silver hair slicked back,
 black jacket, shirt, pants, his face a craggy ruddiness,
 the artsy version of say Jack Palance.

It was the way they talked about Tokyo, Paris, Berlin,
 New York; the light Matisse loved in Morocco;
 a restaurant they adored in Venice, her girlhood
 on a Montana ranch, their words filtered through
 the Gauloise they smoked and an assurance
 resting so comfortably on the verge of caricature,
 as if they knew they were protected not from criticism
 or jealousy or spite, but from ever failing to
 elicit in their listener an expected interest, captivation,
 their singularity fused indelibly in memory.
 For me it seemed more a class thing than race,
 though at the time I was still trying to sort out the two.
 I'd come to accept my presence in a room of whites
 as completely natural, unremarkable as the presence
 of delphinium or flight in your dreams. (No,
 even more than that. It was, except for holidays with relatives,
 all I experienced, all I knew.) And yet, not far from

the lintel of my awareness, there was no getting around the fact that they were white, that what captivated and enraged me were the compensations they were unaware of in their beauty, in their so calmly entering the center of my attention, in the correct proportion of their presence together. And as each wave of compulsion, comparison hit me, I hated them more, filled with a *ressentiment* so textbook classic, you would have thought it would have toppled me over in my tracks, or even turned me around, walked me straight back out the door to check the apartment number, the address, the building, suddenly certain I was in the wrong place. But of course I stood there, listening, nodding politely; asking question after question. And all the while, as she brushed her hair from her face, as he slipped the cigarette from his mouth, exhaling a white cloud; as my questions flowed the conversation across continents, worlds beyond me—I saw myself as a midwestern provincial, like Charles Bovary, a bit oafish and subdued, using whatever slickness I could muster from the garb of art as camouflage—

I wanted her. I wanted her.



On a familiar ledge in my life I began to fashion a language for desire, for the soft caving inside me at the presence of sexual want, for my own weakness and loathing and shame, for the revenges I felt I needed against women, their impenetrable otherness, their beauty, their remoteness, and their skin, the whiteness of skin spread before me like a map of the ramparts. It was, I realize now, a type of madness, an ancient cruelty, and the guises I slipped on in my assuming seem so transparent now, though they somehow did the trick. And it was a trick really, those revanchist seductions, openings I sought for in the other with the cloak of tenderness, concern, a way of questioning which, as I remember, seemed to say to them—I am the listener you've always dreamed of, the one unencumbered by the need to place myself, my story, my observations and neuroses at the center, the one who will provide you the attention and basking you always desired in the affections of men . . .

In other words, reader beware. I was hardly as innocent or naive as I may make myself seem. Still, in this case, let me spare you the cobra and mouse game of the chase, trying to equivocate who was the cobra, who the mouse—I was the mouse. And as I moved in there was this constant hissing, this yes, no, yes, no, moving her words, her legs, the way she bent down to pick up her glass, a toss of her head, a smile. In the early stages the obligatory homage to certain modernist giants sifted through our conversations, mixed with gossip

about various artists we knew, or rather, she knew and I had read about. From time to time, there'd be a phrase she'd let drop, about her husband, about being with me, though nothing had happened yet. Of course, we were both aware something *was* happening. Is it fair to say she knew more than me? Certainly, this was a state of affairs I'd arranged so many times before it inevitably brings to mind the repetition compulsion. But what initial trauma was I repeating? Where did it begin? Such threads may unravel in so many directions, backwards and forward, lingering in time. So what I offer now, I offer as speculation, perhaps a theory that simply puts a more human spin on my giving in to my baser, self-destructive desires (I know such casual connections, sociological and crude, can't possibly be substantiated): Wasn't what I sought, suffered, desperately needed, something more than merely personal, more than the inevitable longings for the other, or if merely such longings, couldn't they have been fashioned, or imprinted, or self-concocted as some odd reenactment of the fascination and seduction of my father, of Japanese America, by the all white American dream (I almost wrote "whore")? I mean not so much in the later years, when Nisei after Nisei settled into a comfortable, seemingly colorless bliss of suburbia; but in those years just before and after the war, wasn't there this eagerness inside my father, his generation, to be let in, this hypnotic trance before the flag, patriotism, the Constitution, that allowed them to wander, like ghosts, four years in the desert, pursuing America's bright cheap promise. But perhaps it's better to let go such specious musings: For when I finally got her in bed, when she finally

lay beneath me, still beyond me, but not beyond my rage, I know for certain I fucked her with all the fury of a slave run amok, or Macbeth in the battlefield, transmogrified to a face twisted like a demon, showing how hard it is to be evil, punishing her being, her sins, her whiteness adored. And of course, in an instant, horrified, thrilled beyond belief, I saw it:

She loved it. She truly loved it.



Almost immediately it began to break down.

Or rather, she began to break me. Or rather, I asked her by simply waiting, being there, lying there beside her, as light slipped through the Venetian blinds, strips of brightness across her body, as I shuttled my hand across, and she began to talk, first dreamily, about nothing, about the monumental heat of New York in July, about that high mountain country where she learned to ride horses, a vast plain rescued from savages; about Mardi Gras in New Orleans, the silken delta, crawfish and jazz, Faulkner's octoroons, and then it was her photographs, at one stage swimmers, lovers, moving in fluorescent waters, and later children, caught in poses where desires, not quite raw or sexual, but sexual nevertheless, seemed to seep in from under the surface, a ghost image of adult seduction and want, provoking, revolting the critics (they'd catapulted her, at least for now, to a plane in the pantheon). Only occasionally would she talk about her husband; he'd been writing this monumental novel for years, fabulous in its rumors, his genius flourishing larger, bolder, the longer it took. Only after months did I learn his family connections,

vague allusions to a trust fund that kept them unfettered, moving like gypsies; or how this movement suited her, connected to the uprootings of her childhood, her father a stray hand, moving from ranch to ranch, moving finally out of her life (now she had no idea where he was, or if he were alive, it didn't matter).

But the breaking, that was there from the beginning, from when I first showed her my poems, and she lay back against the headboard, smoking her Gauloise, stubbing it in the ashtray, pausing in a long silence after she finished, a slight sigh in her voice. And what she said, I realize now,

had this steady directness, though at the time it struck me as some age-old gentility, some patrician air that came not from her childhood or the worlds she'd escaped to since then, but simply from the inherent superiority of being born the being that she was, as if the survival and specialization of the species had led to these moments of discernment, intelligence, a lucidity that could only be mustered in leisure, exposures to a more luminous world.

She looked at me: "You don't really know that much yet, do you? You're still groping. Oh, it's there, you have something, but it hasn't surfaced. I'm not really talking about technique or education,

though those things matter. You can learn those. It's something else, you're just too wrapped up. You're still trying to figure out what's interesting and what's not. And what you think is interesting . . ."

The afternoons were unmoving, dense with heat, the washes of traffic.

I listened. I sat transfixed.

Later, it became cruder. Unbelievably crude.

"No one wants to read about your minority background.

No one wants these little stories about Japanese people."

That was near the end, and, I see now,

from desperation, flinging razor after razor,

as if something might slit us open. As if she sensed

I too needed some abasement more blunt,

more penetrating, more raging to match the rage

and humiliation I felt before her, now that I loved her,

now that she'd infected my psyche, all the while knowing

how impossible that was. She, of course, never even bothered

to dangle it before me: "I'm not leaving Mark. You know that.

I've never lied to you." It was night when she told me this,

the sky cobalt, stretched over us like a tarp, mountains

like great ships moored about us, a wall of pines.

We were lying on the porch of a cabin, naked, sweating, chilled.

I pretended I was falling asleep. "It doesn't matter if you're not

listening.

Sleep for all I care." She was telling me the story

of meeting Mark, how she left her first husband.

How she fled to Morocco trying to sort it all out.

One day she stumbled on this rug dealer who looked like Hendrix;

he drove her on his motorbike to a stone house outside the city.

They smoked hashish, and another man appeared. The men

started painting her with saffron, her face, her arms, legs,

until she started screaming, kicking, flinging the dirt floor in their

faces.

"At that moment, I don't know why, I knew I would go with

Mark."

She never knew why they let her go; she suspected they suspected

she would be too much trouble. "They were wrong.

If they had shot me with heroin, I would have made a great addict.

I would have never left. . . ." Suddenly

she got up, went inside, put on Mahler full blast,

the orchestra crashing like a wave over my body, up the mountain.

I yelled at her to turn it off. She pretended she didn't hear.

Later, after the tape ended, as I was really falling asleep, casually

she made this remark about my wife, I don't even remember what

she said.

And that was it. I got dressed without a word, walked out the door,

and began walking down the road to Montpelier.

I never saw her again. Or spoke to her. Not that I still can't see her

face.

Or hear her words. And for two, three years afterwards,

I hardly wrote at all. Squibbles. And I read everything I wrote

with that voice, that face, standing over the page, shaking her head—

"No, no, that's not it at all."



None of this quite happened this way, just as the self I've written
 here
 isn't quite the self who writes. There was never the one remark,
 just as there was never that man at the grocery, insulting my father,
 in that first poem of desire, though the memory of each burns
 within me just the same. How I needed the aftermath. Her lack of
 praise.
 At the end, it's not her I think about, but this image from mere
 fiction,
 only with the narrative perspective reversed—Recall the native on
 the shore,
 running with the current, glancing madly at Marlowe's steamer,
 somewhere in the heart of his darkness, unaware still of how the
 puffing engine
 and the pale ghostly face at the stern will send his gods up in vapo
 how soon one of his descendents will pore over some schoolbook,
 find in configurations of natives and the masks of skin a mirror for
 self;
 how the student turns his gaze upwards to the master, who smiles
 back,
 friendly for a moment, pulsing with certainties, self-knowledge,
 a semblance like love.

THE AFFAIR: II—Her Version

You never know how long these things last, though at times you
 want them to go on
 forever. It is like a quietness that descends, of rooms with immense
 ceilings, and marble
 floors echoing footsteps. The light is northern, as up in the
 mountains, cerulean sky
 and a sun shaft angled on our legs. A few beads of sweat, though it is
 late winter,
 the caps on the lake frothed and curling, slapping stones. That is the
 sound we made,
 the slapping of stones, of water on stones. I wanted it to stop, that
 instant, that instant
 he entered me with the motions of cold fervency and desperation,
 the precision
 of the abattoir. Or simply, a bedroom. Every bedroom that ever was.
 Every passion.

Sometimes I imagine I have a brother, who stumbles home from a
 night of dancing.
 His hair is dark. Perhaps he's of a different father, a father who elicits
 from him
 arias just as false as mine, but more fleeting. This is because my
 brother is a man
 and even in his absence—for surely his father too left mother long
 ago—knows his father
 as I know mother. And I do know her, her predictable silences and
 despair;
 also something deeper, the blank emotions of those who watch and
 who are watched in turn,
 the ungovernable, mute black rage that hollows her cheek like mine
 and makes her
 in her beauty, uninhabitable, like the great stretches of the desert that
 astonish
 with their sheer hostility to life. My brother, I suspect, knows
 nothing of her, me.
 He is still in love with all women. His shirt drenched with sweat, his
 eyes bleared.
 And though he's been drinking, though he's hobbled home alone, I
 can't tell if he holds
 the same desperation inside. He's weaker than me. He's a man. He
 must keep trying.
 He kisses me on the cheek, a little too close, asks me what I am
 reading. Leaves
 before I can answer. I hear him whistling down the dark of the hall,
 and I can't
 quite make out the tune, though I know his body has paid
 everything for it,
 each fiber and muscle, bone, blood, as I have paid for mine. This
 singing I mean.

That man. He was writing about me the moment he entered the
 room, found me
 repeating one of those speeches at one of those parties you can never
 leave;
 as I glanced up from my wine glass, something slipped back in like a
 memory,
 and the room was buoyant and familiar and utterly cold.
 It was my brother. It was clear we would rent each other. Clear the
 entrails, quietly pulsing, would show.



In my dream last night, I take him in my arms, the way you would a
 child,
 cradling his head. He moans softly. Or I think I hear him moan.
 He's afraid I'm abandoning him, like a baby pushed out on the river.
 And the current flows past us, carrying the faces we wear this instant
 and the next.



All the incitements to desire are nothing to the witness we bring to
 our bodies.
 My mother knew this, in the slips of insulting violence she let me
 see, the impulse to kill
 or be killed she found in the last candid throes of her demeaning
 with man after man.
 How she would turn so amiable, so trusting, when the next came
 along, keeping
 herself quiet, finding miraculously some unused portion to trot out
 before him.
 It was, for me, like watching a freak show. And so I left. Again and
 again.
 And put myself beyond her, her men, the vague fragmented
 memories of my father
 who suddenly returned one summer when I was ten, with two day's
 growth,
 and this uncannily familiar liquor on his breath. And of course,
 mother took him in.
 And ten days later threw him out. At sixteen, he came back again, in
 the morning
 as I was leaving, my knapsack strapped to my back, about to set out
 hitching again.
 We nodded at each other. Didn't say a word. I don't know what
 happened.
 By the time I came back mother was selling her trailer, moving in
 with this retired colonel she'd met in the lounge at the bowling alley.
 I used to tell people my father was one of the first Green Berets
 killed in Vietnam.
 (I liked to watch the look on their faces.) I don't know how I got
 from there
 to here. I suppose the moment I stepped inside the bedroom of a
 man twenty years older.

And for a long time they were all like that, like my husband. Then,
 occasionally, younger.
 But this poet, I'd never seen anyone so occupied with rancor and
 rawness, so much
 wayward self-intoxication, all of it unformed, younger than any man
 I've ever been with
 not in age, but as if he'd wandered in an instant as a spirit into his
 body, so alien
 to his sensibility, he lived in terror of ever finding delight in it, his
 dark, rain softened skin.



What occurred between us remains an enigma. Think of the deserts
 where interrogations
 and ablutions of the soul proceed into memory, chants, words on the
 page.
 Or the way a woman might dilate her nostrils in amusement, seated
 at a long table
 with dozens of other diners, each of them distinguished in their own
 way,
 and she an attachment, like a bracelet or ring, or an afterthought, or
 thinking
 of herself as an afterthought, which amounts to the same. Think
 of a lacquered box of licorice, which a child raids in an empty house,
 all the servants
 at their chores, oblivious to the theft. Or the sympathy you suddenly
 feel
 for someone you have always despised, from the very first moment of
 meeting.
 One day, in the near future, in some cabin, laying out my prints, I
 shall become
 in an instant this incredibly old woman, my skin sagging as if to be
 shed.
 Then, in the pilings and sea oiled stones abstracted in black and
 white before me,
 brushing away the ashes of my cigarette that have fallen on the print,
 his face, for a moment, will click into focus. And I will think of
 him. Like this. Like this.



He had this habit of inserting his finger and vibrating it very rapidly.
 It was sometimes pleasurable. Most often not.
 I never told him either way. Either way it didn't matter.



He was, I am sure, constantly conscious of his beauty. Any
 declinations he makes
 are the gaps obscured by his cold, implacable fascination with race.
 Color.
 What he called the imperial age. But all this had nothing to do with
 him,
 his absorption in himself, matching mine, demands we made on the
 mirror, so equal
 only a vast gulf could have separated us enough to see the other,
 dreaming from end
 to end, intermeshing our despairs. And whatever he might have said
 about class,
 no one was more unsuited by temperament to empathize with those
 at the bottom.
 Even if you stripped him, like Job, of wife, job, house, money, car,
 clothes, all
 the material necessities of a being so thoroughly American of his
 time and means,
 his doubts and denials that would sputter forth in frustration, in rage,
 even
 in hopelessness, would be tinged with a certain airy smugness, an
 imperious assurance
 he attributed to everything about me he could label whiteness,
 beauty, privilege.



I saw him last month, by chance, at an opening. I did not panic, I
 said nothing.
 And then, as if truly an apparition, I turned again to find only my
 own photograph,
 a child running low to the ground, scooping pigeons in a park,
 flinging them
 toward pleasures that come from flight, fear, the first sweet fervencies
 of power.



In the bath, he would wash my legs, urging frothy smears of suds
 back and forth.
 I thought of a horse, exhausted after miles of hills, lathered and
 shuddering, the bit
 still cold in its teeth. I think I was always running those hills, jawing
 the bit pulled tight.
 And when I arrived at the stable, out of the darkness, he was there
 waiting, like a stableboy.
 He smiled as he did this. And was enormously happy. "Your ankles
 are delicate,"
 he said, "like a child's. But everywhere else. . . ." Unflinching was
 how he saw me.
 And so what he worshipped was his own flight, nightmares roiled in
 humiliation
 and scoured with ablations. I made no sound when he did this. And
 he smiled back.



I thought his whole notion of genealogy so infantile, like his clinging
to vague,
somewhat fascist notions of ethnic identity. God, think of the cobbles
of Sarajevo,
and the rooms where the women are herded and overcome and left
to their now
shameful, riven bodies. Or the wild searches afterwards for water, the
ablutions
and thirsts that will not end. Or the trenches, spackled with limbs
and oblivious faces,
staring up at spaces between the clouds. Or whatever opposing
soldiers mutter
casually, with such force, over the handiwork of the day, so in love
with cleansing,
with the purities they perceive in their own faces, in their hands and
open mouths,
and whatever babbling nonsense with which they proceed to
recognize their own.
He loved what was scandalous about us. That is what intrigues him,
keeps him alive.
Not the present he constructs, hauling out the garbage of white
trash, of which I am a part.



We used to smoke a bit before. Once, it was hash, mainly grass. A
ritual of sorts.
He liked undressing me slowly. Rarely was it quick or forceful,
though it has been
with others and not without pleasure. I see us in a small white room,
linen
curtains, a white chenille bedspread, stone tile floors, that flatten your
feet with cold.
Cheap artificial flowers on the bedstand. The black hands of the
clock, as I slip off
my watch, jerk towards the next moment, the next hour. His hands
clamp my breasts
like an adolescent, a fascination with the layers of cloth beneath
touch. We kiss.
A questioning, delicate tongue, then harder, more insistent. Beneath
black silk pants
I feel him, he is small, delicate there too, this is who he is.
Something larger
would be too gross for the clarity and coldness of his sensibility, great
oceanic depths
where creatures writhe and thrive on the floor without sight. It was
like that with him,
like searing through layer after layer of brine, without the need of
breath. . . .



Dissolved in his directions—"you are so wet"—or "louder, call out my name."

I felt silly and abandoned, interrupted. This was part of the chase scene. A pile up, the metal careening and crumpling, the smell of spilled oil, a hiss of steam, no flames.

The roads we drove to arrive were twisted as a birthcord. Yet whatever drew us was pushed with a tenderness. He was right in that. I am a great addict.



His hands move to my face, which he cradles, as if he believes in tenderness.

I know differently. I play along. How shall I say this? There is always this stiff

remoteness, even in his most fluid motions, as if he were looking at me

from the wrong end of a telescope, seemingly so far distant I am barely visible

beneath him, as he slips so decidedly, so dutifully downwards, nuzzling cuneal hairs, the tongue re-creating those motions that have just left my mouth.

And then, then I know it will go on, and on, and I am to go on and on, and only

when he knows, in the grotesque and athletic convulsions that erupt from the chakra of my body, flowing outwards, only when he knows the first

of my pleasures has broken—it's the sheen he's pressing himself to, that color

and salt fragrance and humus, glistening with interior smells, his own drug—

only when the opalescent moisture flowing there is already mine and his,

with my fingers gripping and guiding, almost inserted as an afterthought,

he enters me, expanded somehow beyond what I have gripped, enormous, unrecognizable

as body or face or man, but this presence I want to be rid of immediately after—

To be secure, possessed of solitude once more, washing him from me in a hot spray . . .



—When I wake it is hours, he's breathing in my ear, and I turn
 away. The room
 is black, cold, I can barely make out the shape of the dresser, the
 lamps, clothes
 slipped over chairs like sheets of escape. I've been dreaming of a
 photo, one
 that's afflicted me ever since I saw it. It's of a Chinese, being
 executed, saved,
 said the caption, by order of the emperor from the ghastlier burning
 at the stake
 for the Ten Thousand Cuts. And so, stripped by a surgeon without
 fanaticism or religion,
 in precise layers and joints, the flesh is eased from the body, and the
 Chinese,
 already limbless, perhaps flurried towards some other state by
 injections of opium,
 or the body's virile, afflicted narcotic, or now without consciousness
 yet
 with open eyes, he looks up towards heaven with a look a voice
 inside me
 hesitates to name as ecstasy, though the suspicion arises nonetheless,
 and is,
 like the photo, never quite banished from my consciousness. And so,
 in my dream
 collage, working in my studio, all their faces are meshed, the
 Chinese, the crowd,
 the Japanese, dozens of darker others, and in the tiny spaces between
 each body or face,
 I paste sea anemone, various dark, smooth, oval stones. Who
 understands such things?
 Sometimes at night I have these premonitions within my body, and I
 wonder

who it is will next take over, adulterating, misrepresenting me, inside
 me tonight.

My husband, of course, had little to do with us. He has his own
 wanderings and obsessions,
 engaged with his never-to-be completed masterpiece which has, like
 an assassin,
 tracked him into middle age. An assassin who patiently waits for the
 moment in the study,
 as the victim pores over pages, incessantly scratching out, replacing,
 emending,
 fidgeting towards *le mot juste*. Suddenly the victim feels this pain, first
 in his arm,
 then his chest, and he'll know what has happened, has always known
 it is coming.
 My husband may even think I have sent him, the one who sneaks up
 from behind,
 but were it me the blade would be larger, heavier, axing through the
 skull like butter,
 cleaving those marvelous millions of cells spewing forth word after
 word between us.
 The Japanese was never like that. Despite his airs, he was of this
 world. Even if now,
 in his oblique attacks, in his clumsy ambition, he believes he is
 writing of us, scouring
 for the clues that will lead him to his bounty, his trashy immortality.
 There was no "us."
 That was mere illusion. Like the regions of the soul where sacredness
 takes hold.



There is a way a woman, whatever color, clings to the underbelly of
 privilege,
 camouflaged as it were, by her positioning beneath, as if her less than
 powerful hungers
 made her completely powerless and innocent. Betrayed, bereft,
 unaccountable.
 Seeing that in myself I could see that in him, a current streaming
 beneath the surface
 of our obsession with surface, the guileful beauty of the other that
 eludes us,
 and so, in our jealousy, desire. It was this limbo we played at, who
 could twist lower,
 debase their presence more. At the end, I think, I bowed before the
 master.
 And he, in his bowing, never outdone, never noticed what had fallen
 between us.



When I said no one wanted any more of his Japanese stories, this is what I meant:
 That whatever abrasions suffered by him or those victims he claimed to speak for, had to be imagined with a scrupulously neutral intent, impassioned perhaps, but always alien, a stranger in a strange land speaking to strangers, even if those strangers seemed to be one of your own. (And more so if truly strangers.)
 This made him furious and unforgiving. Racked with unimpeachable righteousness and doubt. And he never seemed to guess that in the annihilating angel he thought he'd encountered, as out of some irrepressible nightmare, I'd only given him back a part of himself he cherished and had elided and erased, so stubbornly eluding his art.



"I know who this person is, this Japanese, this American, and you must never repeat this—

It started with nearly boiling sake, a kotatsu, a wet winter evening in Tokyo when the dampness sears into your bones, and you can never get warm, except for those few minutes emerged from the bath, breathing pores of steam. We were interrogating Foucault, the Pathétique was on the stereo. It was one, two o'clock. He lived nearby, there was no need to think of the last train. But that was merely pretext, his staying meant nothing to me. My husband? He was on sabbatical in America, not a novelist, but a linguist, excavating beneath sentences archaeologies of meaning. I could have waited for him in Berlin (this was before the wall cracked into fifty million pieces tearing towards the West). A Noh mask on the shelf above us, one of those ethereal, unreadable beauties who later recoils to a wraith so measured and predictable you might think its purpose to elicit the laughter of pastiche, and never terror. I saw his hand fall, ashes tapped from my cigarette.

I had met other Americans but he was not like them, he was like no one at all.

I talked to him of Noh, the gentle charm of Canetti, reading Broch. I told him once, through the hills that were Prussia, my mother rode horses. Now she dines out and attends, with assiduous regularity, the opera and mass. I haven't seen her in years . . .



*"In Japan, where I found myself was not where I thought I would be.
And, in many ways, I am still looking for whatever it was I lost. It was
never him, though,*

*and though I understand why, in the perambulations of his poses,
I was transposed in spirit, like the shifts of reincarnation, into another body,
all the while, the body that emanates so dark and aggressively from his lines,
despite her blondness, resembles me so little my inspiration seems utterly
fantastical.*

*I could have never managed all that sturm und drang despair. Odd that he
could be*

*so American and write so Germanically. (Or perhaps that's my own
ethnocentrism?)*

*I remember when he left the last time, and you know, we never, never ever
touched,*

*I caught this look on his face that was really quite remarkable, as if I'd
deceived him.*

*After he had insulted me like that—"I don't want to have a petite
affaire."*

*What was he talking about? And yet, in the glow of the balcony light from
the dark*

of my apartment, his face seemed opalescent, quiet and cold as the moon.

*And in the last of this series of moon hills, I can sometimes see him, slanting
out*

*from the shadows, then vanishing as quickly as he came. Perhaps in a small
way*

*that evens things out a bit, after all he has written, sentence after sentence of
lies."*