

A Slave of Evil

by

James Brittain

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To Una, for protecting us from monsters

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CHAPTER 1

I kneeled before my master's tomb, ten thousand possibilities in perfect opposition before me. I think I was swaying slightly. I can't remember.

“Obedience is water. Obedience is food. Obedience is water. Obedience is food.”

I did not believe it I only thought it. I was not some giddy young slut, lapping at my master's favor. The motherfucker was dead and I did not care. Was I free? What was freedom? I could stand, I could stand and walk into the world and dress myself in red robes. Whore myself among filthy men. Fuck sailors for my bread and spread the clap throughout the world. An empire of my loins. My colonies of microbes, the genital embrace their sacred passage.

But why? Why not climb the mountains? And in that cold wasteland sink deep into my soul and chant and sing with the monks and stars? The Frost Giants be my guide. Oneness with the all thing. A mind wrecked upon the reef of insipid non-humanity. Deny my loins and my servitude, scream no at the world and yes to the trite and empty moment. And why? No reason. A billion reasons without criterion, all of them arbitrary, none better or worse than any other.

“Obedience is water. Obedience is food. Obedience is water. Obedience is food.”

A holding pattern. A constant loop of meaninglessness. A chant from my childhood. When the priests would check our virginity. Obey obey obey. Check it with their cocks. Motherfuckers. Nothing to think, obey obey obey, nothing to think, nothing to be, obey obey. La da la da. Nothing No One Nothing No One.

There were people around me. I hadn't seen them come in. They were ignoring me. Was I here? They ignore me and I am not here. Bah. They regarded my master's body. Cold cold dead dead. The motherfucker is dead! The motherfucker is dead! Obedience is water. Obedience is food. Obedience is water. Obedience is food. They were talking, I hadn't realized. “..devastated by it.”

They were looking at me. Was I naked? I was.

“...the best, love a master like that...”

Nude naked nude naked. Did I care? I couldn't tell. Did they like my body? They were stealing glances at my tits. Did they like them? Did I care? Was their opinion valid? Does an idiot reading Homer make Homer idiotic? La da, la da. Does it exist outside the mind of the simpleton? Greatness humbled in the mind of an idiot. La la la. Obedience is water. Obedience is food. Obedience is water. Obedience is food. Ta da ta de.

“...waiting for the flames”

“...could take her now, they re-imprint you know?”

“flames fire black dry cracking flesh flesh flesh.”

Would they rape me? Was my body mine to rape? Was it mine to care if they took it? The motherfucker's body. The motherfucker is dead. I could walk out. I could walk out. A billion places to go, a billion possibilities. I was all and none. None none none. Let me be a cautionary tale for you. Child, believe in one thing, or many things, or nothing. But do not believe in all things. La la la.

I shall storm the heavens! Heave my mighty sword into the eye of God and the motherfucker will bleed and bleed and bleed. Ha! Some billions of neurons, some genius exploding colors bright beyond stars and galaxies yet no will to propel them, to guide their rudder. Mired in a too gullible mind, too ready to believe everything and no self to choose among them. A slave then, wanting a master's will to know to wipe my ass. Ha!

We were walking. I didn't remember starting but we were walking. Down down down. To the

funeral pyre. What nonsense. Burn a man's objects with his body. So I could suck his cock in the afterlife? Was it suicide that I followed? To limply stumble into the flames when a few hundred steps would easily save me? Well, then I shall be a suicide. Not giddy, like the young suicide I longed to be in my youth, when I would bleed my veins in that cold stone school, a mature suicide now. I shall make no resistance. I will let them lead me to the flames and I will cry out to the universe: Why not!

I stumbled along. Outside now, we were walking down a huge stone stair towards the funeral pyre. The jungle pressed in on three gray pyramids, crumbling and half green with vines. Between the three were piled huge logs, the trunks of whole trees. On top of them robes and carts, the carcasses of horses, a hundred other objects, The motherfucker's objects. They were going to burn the motherfucker's objects. Objects, Objects. Was that what I was? My obedience, my surrender of my will, the surrender of myself as well? What was myself? The will, the mind, the body, vague abstractions of a horny shitting beast. Lack a master's will to know to wipe my ass.

A man was staring at me. I squinted; he seemed to be behind a thick veil of milk. He was a new man. My vision cleared a little as I blinked rapidly. He wore a green and black robe. His face shifted beneath the cowl, shifted between many faces. A face like water, rippling and distorting light, no real face but the refraction of many. He kept looking at me. Had he spoken? He struck me with a wooden stick I had not seen before. He struck me in the knee and I fell, then turned to a crowd of people who had been concealed by the cliff before. They were far below us.

“Oh my flock!” He shouted, his voice booming through the clearing. “Deep, deep in my heart, I feel a great love for you!” His voice was nasal and piercing, his face a mask of many colors with a tall hat of feathers and bugs.

“In my heart and in my gut lives my faith. A thousand armed tree twisting deep inside me. Strutting out like His perfect will! His great spirit shall move through you as it has moved through me! He shall lift thy limbs, and move thy soul! I, Archmagio, arch priest of His great will, He summoned me unto Him. Yea! And I believed I was a sleeping man lost in mad and feverish dreams. And I believed I had gone mad and was raving, naked and savage. And He led that frightened creature, me, that frightened creature, He led me through a great and dark wood! Yes, His perfect will led me through corridors of stone and damp moss until trees, yes mighty trees, they rose up and cracked the stone and like huge pillars of His perfect love they bore me erect into the heavens! And from there, from His kingdom of light, He revealed unto me these true and pure things. The ten laws!”

Here the crowd cheered wildly. I shivered.

“Ten laws to govern our kind and bring law and justice to all men!” The odd man distracted by his oratory, I crept closer to the edge of the great stone slab we stood on. An updraft of wind chilled my naked body and I shivered. My skin tightened into gooseflesh.

The people were cheering wildly and saluting the insipid madman next to me. Thousands of them, but not tens of thousands.

“What is the first law?” He demanded, his voice the shifting of sand. I realized he had turned towards me. The first law? Fucking backwards kingdom. He struck me again, crashing his stick onto my prone back. I felt no pain but felt my body jerk with the impact.

“What is the first law?” His voice rose in a nasally crescendo, full of petty self importance. He struck me again and hissed, quietly so the crowd would not hear, “the first law is obedience.”

“Obedience is water, obedience is life” I muttered, short of breath and sounding more weak and frightened than I felt. His face shifted until he almost seemed blonde and chiseled and stern,

then fell back into its vague meanderings.

“The first law is obedience in all actions, that his perfect will shall guide us. The second law is obedience in all thoughts, for impure thoughts rebel against him as sure as actions.”

Below us men, they seemed little more than toy men so high were we, brought lit torches and set fire to the logs. It lit up in a huge tower of flame for a few moments, then died down to a slow flame that hovered about the logs.

The strange man grasped my shoulder and pushed me back. His face did not make sense, at once pudgy and gaunt.

“Will you obey me in all things? For I am the perfect vessel of His perfect will!” His voice was nasal and irritating. He was clearly a lunatic. The shifting face of madness, a thousand identities bent towards the servitude of some imaginary friend. Shit. Why hadn't the old motherfucker died in a civilized land. I'd be in a harem or whorehouse by now. Not naked and shivering before a fanatical lunatic in some rotting jungle.

“Will you obey?” His voice at once a shriek and the sound of rocks grinding each other down. His face flitted frantically between likenesses, so that it seemed he had no face at all. Would I obey? I could think of a lot of reasons not to. He was clearly a buffoon. Faces of a thousand men yet he could not pick one, contorting himself to please his master. None of them, I bet, the stupid drooling ape he was. And what master? His perfect will he said. Perfect at what? Bah.

Yet, who of us are not imbeciles? How many times has my own brain tumbled through these meaningless balances? To obey or not to obey? What cared the cold indifferent universe? Why not follow a buffoon? Lend my limbs to his petty will. Was it excessive nihilism? To obey or not? Arbitrary either way. To move with the tide or against it? He struck me again and I collapsed.

“Will you obey?”

“Obedience is water.” I heard myself speak and was startled by it. His face rifled through a few aspects, ending in the stern blonde again. He turned back towards the clearing where the logs had started burning in earnest. My suicide to obey. He stretched out his hands towards the mass of tiny toy men below us.

“My people!” He exclaimed, waving his hands in the air, “My people I shall summon him!” He gesticulated wildly, sweeping his arms in great circles and wiggling his fingers.

“A FALSIS PRINCIPIIS PROFICISCI!” He cried it loudly and his voice echoed and boomed like shrill sonic daggers.

The flame about the logs flared up into a huge tower, sparks exploding like great firecrackers. And in the flames flared an enormous beast, a hundred feet high. I staggered backwards and stumbled, so great was the image. Great burning eyes, two dozen horns danced with the flame, intermixing so I could not tell where began one or ended the other. Ears like a tiger, a great sharp beak like a vulture's, clicked and clucked. The monstrosity stood erect like a man. Great feathered wings flapped back and forth slowly, and striped skin like a zebra or tiger pulled tightly over enormous muscles. Two hooved feet, jointed backwards like a goat's, stamped about the logs and spread them asunder. Two great arms, men's arms, flexed as a tongue, long and slender like a snake's, flicked greedily.

“Oh Great Lord! The one and only Child of the Godhead, hear our humble worship!”

The demon, for I supposed that is what it was, who a moment before seemed confused, flames dancing uncertainly about its great form, relaxed and even swaggard, adjusting its flowing horns with its hand as it fixed an expression of haughty godhood to its face. As the great eyes landed on the strange man beside me, huge flames shot from them and the great beak clicked excitedly.

Below, the people were ecstatic. Women bared their breasts and men held up their wives and daughters, gleefully flinging them towards the beast. They were wild, overflowing with religious zeal. The great beast, seeing the woman stripping and dancing naked before him, grew excited, his massive sex, bigger than a tree, grew hard and rigid, great veins of sickly green and yellow blood throbbing upon it.

“Behold thy master!” Shrieked the man, voice booming, driving the crowd into a mad fury. Many of the women below were naked now, and the beast regarded them, its tongue flicking about. It crouched suddenly and picked up a woman, who shrieked in fear and in delight.

“For the lord hath give us the one true way!” Shrieked the man. The demon looked at him. Its gaze fell on me. His voice assaulted my mind.

“BLUE FIRE”

It wasn't speech, rather it's odd, reptilian voice echoed through my thoughts with the force of a feverish compulsion.

“BLUE FIRE AND GREAT SHIPS, BITS OF SAND AND MOUNTAINS AND THEY ALL GRIND AWAY GRIND AWAY GRIND AWAY”

The strange man's voice was distant, prattling on, except I did not now understand him. I hardly heard him and the great echoing thought replaced him.

“MOUNTAINS! GROUND AWAY MOUNTAINS. BLUE SILK, A PETTY MAN, A GREAT HORDE OF HORSES AND OPEN PLAINS, ALL DEAD DEAD DEAD.”

The demon's thoughts were deafening in my mind, pain throbbed through my skull. The demon crushed the woman and rubbed himself with the gore, flicking his tongue and squinting his swollen eyes in a grotesque juvenile taunt.

My mind, I suppose, had been overwhelmed with the sight before me, began to move forwards again. The whole thing was deeply absurd, some deranged pre-pubescent's fantasy. The man's face was a formless gray, features only occasionally rippling to the surface. It didn't make sense that it was real. Did my senses deceive me? Did they always deceive me? What matters to me if I follow an illusion or a reality? Does mask wear face? If illusion, did it reveal more truth than the reality underlying it?

“YOU WILL UNDERSTAND ONLY BECAUSE I WISH IT.” The thought was deafening in my mind, and totally foreign. The beast leaned towards me and the illusion broke. I was cold and naked on an exposed rock. The demon, quite real, was only four feet tall, hunchbacked, and snapped two lobster's claws at me.

“QUIET YOUR MIND!” One of its claws pummeled my shoulder and I fell. “YOU MAY ONLY THINK TO ANSWER ME.”

My thoughts could not coalesce. My mind was still but not peaceful, rather it was the silence of a deafening roar, screaming at a roaring ocean that drowns your voice completely. A thick sharp pain, a thousand needles pricking at my brain. I retched and rolled, a tranquilized swollen hand clutching at a needle to pull it from my skin.

Dimly, through the pain and oppression of my non-thought, images floated in from the world. The strange man was now an overfed aristocrat, with ill fitting hoes that bunched at his ankles. An obvious erection bulged from his well fed gut.

“Stupid motherfuckers!” He cried in a flat nasally tone. “I am your master now! The one true power! The one true power!”

The demon crawled on top of him. My vision blurred, the great loudness of my non-thought throbbed through my temples. Images, suspended from time, drifted through. The demon had knocked the man to the ground, crawled onto his chest and was pinching his cheeks with its

pincers. The people cheered and screamed in unintelligible rapture. A great fervor of religious excitement, a swirling unthinking mass, the enormous demon some holy light in their vision, flames and bright light and hope, a hansom young man, bathed in holy light, purified by flame. And then the illusion broke, and they were a filthy mob of toothless and ill fed rabble, diseased as they limped about, the gone.

The demon cooed "My pretty pretty pansy, my pretty pretty mum, my pretty pretty daisy, all dried up and done." He had shifted now, sitting on the man's face and pinching, but not cutting, his fat legs. The man was struggling desperately for air.

"YOU ARE OF THE WILLESS ONES." My head split from the noise and I had no other perception except it's deformed body pinning me, it's claws clamping my wrists.

"THE WILLESS ONES THE WILLESS ONES THE SLAVES OF LORDS AND GENTLEMEN THE HAPPY SLAVES HE HAW HE HAW." The donkey howling in my mind drove all perception from me and I saw nothing but white, heard nothing after it until the roaring of my blood in my ear returned.

"DRINK OF ME AND HAVE MY WILL" It's erection pressed against my thigh. It's beak rent flesh from its arm and thick black blood dripped from the wound.

"DRINK!" I made no decision to obey but had already swallowed. The ritual was done, I was bound.

"STAY." The deafening roar ended abruptly but I could not move. My head ached badly.

The man groveled on his hands and knees. "Please master, please! I only wish to serve you!"

"SOME GOLDEN LIGHT FETTER AND BRANDED WITH METAL LIKE ROCKS AND SHARP DEAD THINGS. A ROTTING MOUSE. A ROTTING CAT A ROTTING MAN, VILE VILE VILE."

"I serve you master, please!"

"FIVE MORE FUCKING YEARS." The demon hissed at him. The man's face, swollen and smeared with filth, showed nothing but terror. He trembled and pissed himself.

The demon was gone. I lost consciousness.

CHAPTER 2

In my troubled dream I stumbled naked down a dark tunnel, stink and sewage to my waist, slime gushing between my toes. A man stood amongst the shit and filth. In his hand he held a pigeon, sickly and missing feathers, squirming to break free of his grasp. The man drowned it in the filth. I walked past him.

A man held a young woman who screamed and panicked, kicked and writhed. He tore at her clothes and beat her. Knocked her against the wall. She blubbered in panicked terror. He slammed her and cut her and blood and pink tissue fell from her. And the man beat her, but instead of hands there were knives and they cut and cut and still she screamed and screamed, even though there wasn't enough of her left she screamed.

Then the man's head was a bull's head and he dropped the ribbons of gore and turned to me.

“I also serve your master”

The voice was mine but I wasn't sure I had spoken. The man-bull paused, bowed, and turned to walk down the tunnel. I followed for a ways and then the bull-man left me. I was alone. I missed him. My heart sank in the way of dreams; my only friend had left me. Me, a speck drifting through the cosmos, alone now. And my master used me for sex and my trader used me for money and the world used me as a piece of art, but deep in my soul, a soul I don't believe in, it was dark, bits of dust suspended briefly in sunlight, floating, isolated, then settling back into the dark.

The old motherfucker, my master, was in the sludge before me. He laid me on a chair, knees on the seat and my stomach crushed by the back. Old, decaying and impotent, he penetrated me with rods of wood and glass. Cut thin shallow lines into my back. Square lines, boxes to hold my soul, which I didn't believe in. I was not bound. I clutched the chair and grit my teeth against the pain. A slow trickle of blood wet my hair and dripped from my down turned nose.

Obedience is life. What shit. The old motherfucker was dead and I was glad. Yet I clung there, stupidly, a mad compulsion. Acid filled my veins when I thought of murdering him, a deep upset, a frantic madness deep in my bones. Quelled only by clinging to the chair, letting the motherfucker rape and cut me. The motherfucker is dead. The motherfucker is dead. I wish only I had murdered him. He was gone and the chair fell and toppled me into the muck. I came up drenched in sewage. I vomited over and over, until my stomach was empty, and still I retched.

Next I found the demon. He was clothed in the raw hides of people and sat on a mound of guts and entrails. The sewage poured onto him from the dark above him.

“Slut” is hissed at me, “I am your master.” My deep insides twisted for I knew this as a dream then, but also knew the demon was real.

The dream was gone. I lay horizontal though I lay in nothing. A dozen people, eyes, glowing with fire, forced their hands into my mouth, a dozen hands, my jaw ached, my lips tore. “I am your master now. You will find yourself a slave and you must fain obedience. And at night you must sneak from his house, and on the streets you must murder. For I love terror, and terror is good. And you must carve into their flesh my sign, and you must spread their viscera from their bodies, and make signs of my children in blood. And you must murder men and you must murder women and you must murder children.”

As he spoke he made each of the four signs, all arbitrary nonsense. And then I woke.

I was naked still, bound kneeling so that I could breathe but could not move. Always naked. I suppose the idiots thought it demeaned me or made me vulnerable. Two vague abstractions for

vague and shallow minds. I who have no self to expose, who's body belongs not to me but to my master. Now that vile obscenity.

“What a blessing to you man, to have your daughter chosen by the god thing.” The accent was thick and rustic. I couldn't see the speaker as my head was bound.

“Yes neighbor, the baby god thing smiles on me with great streams of light.” I heard coins clink. Before me I saw a wall of wooden planks.

“Thank ye sir” said the second voice. The door creaked and a new set of footsteps stomped close to me. The wood grain in the panels before me was rough. A cheap house.

“My, mighty fine thing ye got here William,” said a new voice, and I felt a greasy hand grope by boob. Fucking provincials. “Shame about yer daughter, but baby god thing gots her in the sky now with naked signin' angels and all.” More coins clinked and jingled.

There were many more interactions like that, I paid little attention. Later we were alone. The second voice, my fake master I supposed, spoke.

“God hates us motherfuckers. Fucking baby god fucking shit.”

He stepped before me and was holding a very short knife. He touched it lightly to the ropes that bound me and they split before it. A very sharp knife.

“Stand slut.”

I didn't have a reason not to, I supposed. I wondered vaguely what I was supposed to be feeling. My mind had slowed. How should I react to this change in circumstance?

“Turn slut.”

I did so. A demon's slave. A slave of evil. Whatever. Did I believe in evil? I wasn't sure but didn't think so. A filth demon? Obscenely filthy. Did I care? My gorge rose as I thought of it and wasn't sure. Did I care? There were upholstered chairs and a large table, but no decorations. My faux master was studying me. He was short and gaunt, a ridiculous waxed mustache and pointed goatee.

“All fucking wrong, you. Scrawny hips. Tiny little tits. A man want's something to see, his vision along the smooth and holy curve, the baby god has said it, the holy ratio!”

What bullshit. It was chilly standing there. I hoped he would get me clothes. But, should I care if I was chilly? Certainly it meant by body reacted in certain way, my flesh tightened into bumps, I shivered, I grew numb. But should I mind being numb, or shivering? One of my masters had been an old old man. I had wiped his ass. How different was that than this filth demon? Shit all over me. Shit all over me. Obedience is water, obedience is food. In the school we were always naked. A hundred little naked girls, learning to please a school master.

My faux master entered the room leading a beautiful naked woman. I hadn't noticed him leaving. She was wonderfully proportioned, full but not gigantic breasts, lush hips, skinny waist and tapered thighs. A full head of cascading blonde hair. But her eyes. But her eyes. Black, black holes, like the eyeballs were gone and her brain was just a void. Black pits. La da la da.

She spoke: “There was a cold space and it was made of black and yarn and I crawled inside and I crawled inside and the only thing there was black and cold black cold.” She shivered and fell silent.

“I am not a cruel man” said my faux master. “I do not enjoy watching pain.” He lifted a syringe from the table and came over to me.

“Arm” he said.

“Yes I have one.” He hit me. Not hard but quick.

“Hold it out slut,” and I did. He tied some string about my bicep and, veins popping out of the inside of my elbow, he injected me.

I fell away from the world and was floating in a warm black thing. Only not separated, for the world came back, but stood at a far distance from me. I felt like I was grasping reality through thick gloves, feeling it through rubber, seeing a vague gray relief.

I was a black bug and I was crawling through a long dark hole or tunnel. It cut straight but I wasn't sure through what. I was lost lost. Somewhere in a strange dream the girl with pits for eyes was dying. The man cut her throat open with his knife and she was bleeding and convulsing on the floor. The horror of it reached me dully, I felt disgust writhe inside me as a vague and distant thing. The red of her blood drowned the light and I realized he had thrust me down into her blood, and I was caught in it writhing; it was sticky, red sticky and I drank and drank, and he was butchering the dying woman. He cut off her breasts, her buttocks and thighs. He cut the cheeks from her face and her nose. Inside her brain was shriveled and dried up. And my grip on the world slipped and I was falling and then floating. An awesome black around me. An awesome black through me.

And then he stepped to me and cut me. There was pain but it was far away. I was in a great sea, and off in the horizon a billion people churned like meat into a great sea of gore. Always the ocean, my default metaphor, thought some distant part of me. That core of bitter faithlessness, what bullshit my ungoverned mind believes. Obedience obedience obedience obedience. Over and over. The idle turning of the world. Obedience obedience.

He cut open my breasts and stuffed the dying woman's inside. He cut open my hips and put the dying woman's inside. Then he cracked open my ribs and laid into me her heart. And then he placed smooth stones among my organs. And then he filled me with the dying woman's veins, and filled those veins with sand, and set her dying heart beating in my chest.

And I swam in the great black, and a thousand thousand years passed me by, and mountains ground away and rivers cut deep chasms in the stone beneath me and still the dying heart beat the sand about my dying body, and still I watched the rock die.

I woke in pain. A long steel rail through my body. Pain everywhere. My mind faltered under it. A faint chant of obedience pulsed from my subconscious, my mind a dull and imprecise thing. The man, my faux master, crouched over me, spattered with blood and organs.

“You are beautiful now, my little slut. Sleep now. Tomorrow we travel.” His face flickered between the faces of several men. He injected me again with his syringe, and I fell back into sleep.

CHAPTER 3

That strange heart beat in me. Thunk, thunk, thunk. Not the double beat of my heart. A single alien thunk. I couldn't stand. I rocked back and forth, back and forth. In the dark I rocked. I was nowhere. My body ached. Dully, though, through a thick skin of rubber, every bit of me hurt.

I felt a need in me. Not strong, a vague unrest. A thousand blasted things, things crumbled into nothing. A million miles away. A million miles and I was lost lost, thunk, thunk this strange heart, this vague need, thunk, thunk,.

I was outside, though I did not remember how. Was I naked still? No, I wore a heavy red robe. A whore's robe. White walls stretched above me to the heavens. Walls made of white sand that brushed away beneath my fingers. A giant maze of undifferentiated walls, all paths branching out at random into an infinite and impossible series of decisions. And as I turned among them I grew dizzy, and then fell against a wall under a terrible vertigo. The walls spun around me until I could not tell which was up or down. Walls of white, walls of white, thunk, thunk, this alien heart, and I clutched at the wall to keep myself from the earth, and they seemed to pull away and twist beneath my grasp.

There was a man there, colorful purple garments, tight hose, a plumed ridiculous hat, and he was staring at me in total astonishment, as if I were an octopus he found casually strolling the street. I threw up on him and fell forward, but my feet were under me somehow and I was stumbling on, rushing to keep myself above them. There were more men. Staring. Bright oranges and red, some holding hands, others alone, all staring as if struck dumb by the sight of me. I smashed headlong into a wall and braced myself against it.

Only men. Where were the women? I threw up again and was less dizzy. Thunk, thunk. A group had formed that was staring at me. One grew bold and stepped forwards, saying something that I did not comprehend.

And then I understood the need in me. The vague unease in my bones. I saw a vision of my master's, my real master's, symbols smeared in blood across the sandstone walls, and I understood my need. I had come here to kill.

I lurched towards the man before me and he backed away quickly, skittish. His heeled boots echoed on the cobblestone. The lot of them jabbered but I could not understand them. They spoke in words I knew, but could not then comprehend. I stumbled forwards and they cleared a path for me, but I turned from it suddenly and caught one by the sleeve. The world spinning uncomfortably around me, I jerked the surprised man to the ground and was on top of him, hands wrapped about his neck, staring into his clean shaven face. Then I was falling up and back with hands all about me. I screamed and flailed and they fell away, scurrying from my snatching hands until, alone within their ring, I stood panting in the street.

I had felt relief as my hands were yanked from the man's throat. I didn't want to kill, but there had been no hesitation in my hands. They were yelling to each other now and some were pointing at me, a few ran up the street shouting.

"I am not a killer" I shrieked. My voice startled me and I felt the vertigo return, and I seemed not to know which way to place my feet, but somehow I lurched forwards and those before me stepped back, so that I was still the center. I was sobbing then, how long had I been sobbing? It seemed a long time. Thunk, thunk, the strange heart inside me. I fell against a wall and was barely able to hold myself up.

"I am not a killer" I screamed again and I was falling forwards, catching one off guard as I fell over him and my hands, seemingly of their own volition, were about his neck, squeezing the life

from him. He had a finely groomed beard and oil slicked curls on his head. I screamed and shoved him away, falling over myself and rolling across the cobblestone. Then I threw up, and, heaving, fled twisting and stumbling into that white maze. It was if they had all vanished. They must have parted to let me through, but I had no memory of it. Once my back was turned I lost all track of them. Some distant part of me wondered if they followed. But it was deep, far away and drowned.

All I remember next is falling into walls and turning and turning until I was certain I was turning circles in the same small courtyard. The doors here were only curtains. I fell into a wall and in trying to prop my dizzy body up, I fell through a ragged curtain into a small dark room. I fell to my hands and knees and spent some time retching, my stomach too empty now to vomit more.

And then someone was patting my back and I fell onto my side. It was a man. Alone. My hands were choking him before I knew what I was doing and I threw him down. He stared lightly at me, his expression completely incongruous with the situation. His cheeks sunk in; he was very thin and he was very pale. Clean shaven. More corpse like than human. His expression was mild.

"I am not killer" I whimpered.

I didn't understand him when he spoke, but his voice was gentle. He laid back and stared distantly, eyes half vacant. The moment crept slowly. We stared at each other and the thunk, thunk of the alien heart beat in my ears. He smiled at me in a distracted way.

"You speak?" His accent was thick; he spoke as if his tongue were swollen.

"I must murder; I am no killer." It startled me. The voice was mine, strained, weak and frightened. I stared at the man, who seemed to have forgotten I was there. He noticed me dreamily and smiled politely and nodded, as if he had caught my eye in a crowd and wished not to give offense. His face fell as he looked away. My mind boggled and the silence of the moment seemed to deafen me. He was staring at his finger nails with a look of mild awe.

I fell back against the wall opposite him. The room was very dark and very plain. There were a few wooden chairs and a painting I could not see. I chased my breath and stared down at the floor before me. Undecorated white tiles.

I was no killer; I must murder. A succinct contradiction to paralyze me. An ennui as complete as that which led me docile to a demon master. Why this reticence? It would be no difficulty to fasten my hands about this man's neck. A physical act. A simpler nerve impulse. I, who's future was my masters and not my own, must think of no consequence. His will, my obedience. For me it was only to lift my hands and clench them shut. It was my master's will that would place a man's neck between them.

And thunk, thunk beat this strange heart. Its alienness nauseated me. I felt its sand scrape through my veins. My veins? Her veins? All my body hurt and I felt the scrape of sand inside me. Thunk, thunk. I am no killer. I am no killer. Thunk, Thunk. Yet beneath that my own heart. Tha-thunk, tha-thunk, Obey, obey, obey. My mind spasmed at the twin pulses. Sand and blood, tight veins stretched and squeezed, an unbearable pressure. I was retching, scratching at my skin. Get it out get it out screamed my mind, and from a wound my nails gouged into my arm spilled sand. Gray and black sand. The pressure eased and I fell back, crouched against the wall.

The man was eating something black and sticky.

"We walk rivers and the sand fills us as rocks decay. The light like silver or dark like bones." He crawled, graceful and off balance at once, to me and toyed with the sand spilling from my arm. He put into my mouth some black tar. It tasted of flowers, but sour and thick. It seemed to clog my mouth and throat and for a moment I could not breath.

And as the sand poured from me my master's will pulsed stronger in my blood. Murder, murder, I must murder. Acid in my veins. I had fallen on my back although I do not remember when. The room was gray and far away. The man's sallow face was above me again and more tar was in my mouth and the room retreated further. The room that was full of warm darkness. A great sea of black. I floated gently into it. Precision was far away.

And in that warmth my need floated with me. I must murder. I am not a cheap slave. I am bred and born to it, and feel my master's will deep in my bones, beating through my veins.

"It takes away pain." The man spoke. He looked at me across a great gulf of black, his sunken cheeks soft with distant pain. His eyes tumbled backwards into that great sea. We were the same then, two lost people floating together. I, who by my nature must always be alone, was not alone.

"I must murder," I said aloud. My voice was distant, almost distorted. A million miles away he looked mildly at me. Suspended in the same great blackness as I. Those deep deep eyes. "Come" he said and we were falling forwards through a ragged curtained door, though I do not recall rising.

The room was very dim, and I could see only where the light from the last room illuminated. There was a tank of some kind from which a woman's crotch thrust. Her legs had been neatly amputated. The man led me to her and I stared down into a vat of thick, viscous gel. Her face was completely obscured by a mask, from which a thick hose extended into the ceiling.

The man reached into the slime and pulled her body up, unlatched her mask and pulled it from her. She blinked and teared at the light, and began rambling at once.

"Flowers and rocks, flowers and rocks. Jagged bits of flame, cracked fire splitting, spilling the sky, the sky, jagged jagged sky, sharp sky, like a knife, cuts and cuts and cuts. Blasted red stone fire stone broken blasted trees, finished. Broken blasted flesh and gore and gore and fire consuming gore and blistered, blistered, blistered."

Vertigo overcame me again, her soft and terrible voice rambling in my ear, my pulse beating violently in me, a distant violence, a distant violence. A terrible slaughter just at the horizon. I stumbled backwards but the man steadied me. I stared down at her. She had no arms or legs. She was naked, a long steel rod stuck from her brain and a viscous liquid dripped from her cunt.

"It is a mercy to murder her," the man said gently. He was sitting in a corner of the room, warm and distant. When had he sat? How much time had passed? I tried to think but my mind was thick and useless. Vertigo overcame me again and I fell forwards and caught myself on the edges of the vat. I reached my hands to her throat. The goo was thick and warm. Her mad eyes stared into mine, wide with terror and empty of any intelligence. She flitted about me, as if unable to recognize me as a human, seeing a curve here, white there amongst a brown blob, but unable to comprehend what she saw.

I fixed my hands about her neck and choked. And choked. It seemed to last forever, her limbless body convulsing in the fluid, her wild eyes full of terror, but somehow not of me, terror of the world. She did not know she was dying for she did not know she was alive. And I was floating in a black sea, and a million miles from me she flopped as some primordial fish drowning in the air, and a million miles from me I murdered her. It seemed as if nothing had happened. Her eyes stilled, stopped blinking, but that was all. That lifeless face held the same uncomprehending terror in its lines, a grotesque and inhuman mask. There was no peace in death, no comprehension of the end of suffering.

Tears heaved themselves from my eyes, though I hardly knew why. I stumbled backwards and the man was holding me, though I had not seen him rise. Time was out of joint like that, all moments with no transitions. Why was I weeping? Sand poured from my veins and I cried, but it

was so far away, through a thick black fog. The man feed me more black tar and I was weeping over him but hardly knew where I was or what I was doing, and then we were kissing and sand kept pouring from me and he covered the little pile on the floor with his hand.

“A knife a knife a knife” I mumbled, my blood tearing my veins apart, the pain incredible and distant. I was gutting her and I was shaking. Where had I gotten the knife? Another displacement of time. Some thing had happened but the memory of it was gone. Her skin parted easily before the knife, it seemed too easy, and her guts were spilling out. The gel she was suspended in kept the blood contained somehow, so that her organs were a soupy mess.

Pleasure and horror mixed together inside me, the monster and the child embraced; I was shocked and thrilled as I buried my hands in her. The organs were warm in my fingers and I shuttered and trembled. I hardly remember scattering them about the room. I was a giddy, manic disaster, all tears and laughter, so that the room was a gory horror before I knew what I had done.

The man was sitting, now covered in sand and blood. He looked vacantly at a corner and hummed a sad song beneath his breath. The woman's desecrated and bloody body lay before me then, and I was drinking from her, drinking her blood and bile, warm inside me. The logic for this escapes me but I did it. My robe was wet and heavy so I pulled it off and lay naked on the tiled floor before her so that her blood poured down onto me. It was warm and thick and I felt comfort from it, and I rubbed it in my hair, and I rubbed it about my body and thighs and breasts.

And the sand that leaked from me grew wet and clogged shut my alien veins, and, softly at first, then growing, the thunk, thunk, of this strange heart in me, and then my mouth filled with the taste of bile and I vomited, raw acid cutting my throat, but it was so far away, it seemed a performance more than reality. Buckled down blood and bile poured from my mouth and splattered my skin. And the black tar, thick and greasy, came up and stained black my skin, and still I retched and thunk, thunk in my ears. All strength drained from me. Weak and wet, cold and naked, I shivered. My head ached.

The once far distant world was back, and I suffered for it. The strange man sat giggling, curling up then flexing his hands over and over, watching his hands curl and stretch. His lips were stained black and his hair was thin. There was blood everywhere, and organs lay haphazardly about. I retched again but my stomach was empty.

Slowly, numbly, without thought, I drew my master's signs upon the walls in blood. They were the signs of one of his children, remembered from my dream, but I know nothing of the theology of it. And then I sat. I wasn't waiting, rather I had stopped functioning. My duty done, there was no need in me. That strange heart beat but brought no compulsion with it. I just sat.

There were two other women in the room. My eyes now had grown used to the dark and I could see them, though they still seemed more relief than fully sculpted. Both, like my victim, were amputees suspended in a thick gel. Only their genitals and their stumps of legs protruded from the gel. They were obscene, monstrous things. The vats in which they were suspended were adjustable by a large lever besides them. Presumably so a man might fit himself into them without discomfort. Their arms too had been removed, and hoses, attached by needles, protruded from their necks and beneath their arms. Their faces were covered by black eyeless masks, with long tubes extending from them.

I could have gone, simply stood and wandered back to my faux master. The idea simply never occurred to me. The strange man still sat staring at his fingers, by turns giggling and staring vacantly at them. I sat, unthinking, until soldiers came, picked me up, and, after I ignored their jabbering, carried me away.

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