

What's Your Real Name?

Sex Work in America's Heartland

Thirst

You can't see my personality through the g-string
covering my splayed runner's ass brushing
a sweaty beer belly clad in a cotton t-shirt that says
ORGASM DONOR in bold, three-inch block,
but I don't give a fuck anymore.

Slurp up, you knobby-headed man,
lick the brine off my summer skin
where there are no freckles
but instead the thousand fingerprints,
breasts furtively fogged as though
they're twin glass doors.

Your starched jeans are turning my lips to hamburger meat,
cooked in tropical pussy sweat,
my cocaine compass carefully calibrated so
I grind harder, mashing my
delicates, planning my fix,
you cum and the stickiness seeps through your jeans
my masked gag a squander of the dopamine fleeing.

It was never going to be like this,
this stereotype a surreal, duplicitous act of
tinkering with rolled hundreds like ballers at three a.m. in a coupe
and stacking blocks with my blonde nephew in the afternoon,
pupils only barely returned to daylight diameter.

Waking to inner, plaguing soliloquies of my failures
in a king bed meant for two
sickened by sunshine and sobriety,
but please, god, tell me I am still corporeal
with your fingers again tonight.

Robinhood

His money is thicker than blood and
as he slips bank-banded restitution in my garter
I discount the ancient rape of his ex-wife,
bale the internal culpability of appeasing his
insatiable lust for approval,
deposit my guilt into checking
and pay taxes on it.

Whiskey dilutes the habitual hours he drones
of online gaming and fleeing to fiction,
other girls he calls,
and callow, self-injurious attempts
to find empathy, to fill up a void in
his stiffened arteries with acceptance
but not of himself.

He is a wolf tone to my violin body,
our identical output of loneliness
clashing in artless, stuttering resonance
in which he offers me a cat
and a voluminous inheritance to wed
but Fluffy is old and pees when she sits and
legal tender isn't soft romance.
I decline again, again.

For eight years I have attended his solitude,
pairing him in my own internal wilderness
swallowing his savings
in the incandescence of the fish tank in black light,
waiting on my own rapture
from silent mornings and a barren bed
where I thumb-scroll through feeds to shush the uneasy dread
that I am not my own to consign
while I am underwritten.

Entertainers

The woof woof woof of hackneyed classic rock
barks in time with a rotation of thoroughbred bodies on stage
as if on a carousel to bassy calliope that rattles the emergency exit doors,
a rip in bubbled purple-hued tint on the door the only free peek for voyeurs
or the waxing night light bouncing off the lake.

Cinderella herself (the crazy bitch has her name tattooed over her left tit),
enchants portmanteaus of fifty-somethings in polos and slacks
and a row of first-timers with flushed cheeks sporting *Affliction* shirts;
opposite her, down the dog-bone shaped stage,
a preschool teacher moonlights as a goth dominatrix, clacks her heels
and then motorboats a tissue paper-skinned man who guzzles her scent —
absolutely just fucking drinks it in like he's not seen boobs since 1994.

The DJ mumbles over the top of the end of kitschy lyrics and they retreat to a swampy,
fluorescent foxhole of:

banquet-style armless chairs with buttpprints of concealer
messages tacked to mirrors about tardiness and swindling
locker coffers of Benjamins dumped upon heaps of g-strings and ramen
amateur cobblers dribbling super glue on flappy rubber soles and
chicken nugget stuffed cheeks video-chatting a kindergartener goodnight.

I offer nips of illicit Crown Royal from a thermos to incoming women
weary of being displayed as though in a lobster tank at the grocery store
with looks that could kill the next hay-bellied John or Steve that asks,

“Hey what's your *real name*?”

“Want to come to my hotel room?”

“How much money do you make in a night?”

“Can I get your number baby?”

but never

“Are you happy?”

Groundskeepers

Dougie's trailer is fifty yards east of the strip club on the lake by the ENTER sign.
A long and a short side are all stripped away to plastic and tarps and insulation.
When college boys drunk drove their new F-250 on the ice and it sunk, he got it out.
He makes biting moonshine from sweet feed and bottles it in mason jars for ten dollars.
For three dollars you can get soggy, half-white strawberries floating in it.
He don't talk much with stiff cheeks but I guess it's probably that his teeth are mud.
The kind of beard he got points up and sideways and down at the girls who crash on his couch.

Skeet lives between the maples and the river and his bedroom window faces Clearwater Beach.
There's never any people on the sand except hot late afternoons when nude girls take a break.
He taught me that milk jugs sink when the catfish bite the line and how to fish with no pole.
Nobody really knows his name and I've never seen him bent over a mirror doing cocaine.
Sometimes at midnight he will come in and rest his hip on the wall and talk to the door girl.
When the snow covers the gravel road, he makes the plow lines straight.
He cruises around the forgotten still water on his ATV and likes to sit on the broken dock.

For three years I mixed them up because old white guys look the same night after night.
Then one hot day I was on the sand erasing tan lines and Skeet pulled up on the four wheeler.
He taught me when the fish fill the lake after the floods and my boobs flopped while we talked.
I didn't mind because he's seen me naked for years in the club but the sun was still high.
In the daytime, tits are awkward and supposed to be covered but the lake is closed to outsiders.
Sometimes I get confused about whether my body is for looking or not for looking.
Skeet didn't zoom in between my legs and only glanced quick and we stayed friends.

All the out of town girls sleep on Dougie's couch for free but I've never been in his trailer.
Ten years I've known him and he's never offered but I make up guesses about its contents.
Is it a hoard of cats or a meth lab or moonshine stills or microwave dinner boxes or just TV?
Traveling dogs sleep at Dougie's too and the absent owner's goats sleep in his dog run.
He can fix anything and smiled only with his eyes when I told him my car was rattling.
I never meet his knowing eyes when he comes in because he doesn't want anything from me.
Nakedness is the only way I know to say *help me* and *like me* but it won't work on him.

Security

Mic-cropped ears of polo-clad dobermans
eavesdrop, fixtures on the wood paneled walls
finely tuned to the sounds of sneaky lips smacking
between men's zippers, whispered negotiations, one nostril inhales

(interrupted by calls to stage and apathetic appeals to remove the unruly)

and lie in wait for their cut off the top of strippers' tips.
Henchman with dual allegiance, collecting ten bucks an hour
on paper and defaced fives and twenties, sweaty money.

A beefy pinscher named Tiny
and one with a chain necklace, dog tag and all,
stand guard of girls guiding their Marks to velvet booths
staggering themselves as men do urinals, alternating,
the scent of fungal berber carpet and balls and
unsheathed feet from lucite heels
and distinct man-sweats pumping into the air from
anxiety, booze, friction, and *need*.

Muzzles intact, they offer few words to
cliché girls named for luxury cars and spices and cities,
instead scanning for thirty-somethings who
won't take no for an answer.

Waiting.

Waiting.

When finally, they reanimate,
pounce with phony exasperation as
testosterone floods their egos like the addicts they
stripped of speed from duffels and pockets at the door.