

## Selene

Every dream I have about a man conducts itself in the same fashion. I am there, unveiled and melting, my encumbrance wafting off of me. They all turn their nose up at the scent—my desires are too trite—I want to be known and they want a vessel. I let them pour their disdain all over me, then smile and ask for more. I cling, they shake, I won't budge. They accept this miserable fate, put into action by the misdemeanors of a past life.

I peer at him through a curtain. His neck cranes, jaw over shoulder, eyes flitting towards my direction. I become skittish, pull the fabric and duck down so he can't see me. He thinks nothing of it and carries on. The curtains are a pale yellow, transparent enough for me to see the outline of his torso as he works in the garden. The distance is what fuels the fire. When the gap closes, I dissipate, whatever is left of me to the wind.

Of course the less he cares about me, the more I want him, the more captivated I am with my constructed image of him. I have no idea who he is, never felt his gaze and yet I yearn for him in a way I am simultaneously loud and hushed about. He is not real and therefore he is perfect; moldable putty in my hands. I caress his sweet head, my fingers tangled in thick hair, cooing him into a deep sleep. *Stay here, stay here tonight, stay here every night.* The moon washes over him. Every evening I practice my little ritual, in a dreamscape where he is devoted to me through imagination and I his benevolent maker. I ride my chariot over the sky, his limbs buried in lush grass, cast amongst the sheep.

The dream shifts. Now we are half-machine-half-beast, our muscles a cool silver, flexing in the light. Gears pump. Fumes cough. The clanging of our bones is loud and industrial, fissures moving with a booming hiss; I need an oil change. He submits. Ravished neanderthals dwelling in the garden of Eden, searching for primordial meaning before the shame eats us alive. The shame, the guilt, the burning—it gorges on us until there is nothing left—WE COULD NOT EXIST ANY OTHER WAY. Everything is rotten, nothing I taste remains un-cursed. I am messy to the touch. *Won't you come clean me up?*

I feel myself disconnect completely. I don't have butterflies. Instead there's a stake driving through my chest repeatedly. Heat rushes to my torso, like there's going to be blood, but there isn't, just the deceptive sibilate of a gas pump. Nothing comes out and it burns all over. My soul leaves my body, I'm unnerved. I'm so uncomfortable I get a compulsive urge to peel my skin off, as if it were a suit and step out, baring ribbons of muscle and beating organs. I feel better like this.

He comes by my apartment unannounced. There is nothing but dirty, moth-eaten mattresses and overflowing sinks and moldy, greenish food. I am sprawled out amongst the chaos. I love the garbage. I fraternize with the rats. I am a broken record asking the same question over and over again: *do you want me? Do you desire me? Do you find this beautiful? Does someone want to take me home and make me theirs?* I am just avoiding the questions that matter: *what do I want? What are my desires?* I just wallow in the filth and come up once a day for a glimpse

of the sun. I am a dog living off scraps, a covert alien mimicking the girl down the block, a robot pretending it can cry. I don't like what I see in the mirror. I don't understand it.

I'm a snake basking in the sun on scalding cement, its rays beating down into my scales. It feels good like that. I see the mouse before me. I flick my tongue, bare my fangs, I think about all the angles and ways I could strike, sink my white blades into its plump, furry skin, but it squeaks meekly, reminding me that it's real. Just like me, it breathes. I become sickened with myself—what kind of heartless savage am I to feast on such innocence? I lose my appetite. In my careless nausea an owl swings down, clutches my limbless body into its claws, carrying me off to my death.

The dream morphs again. I'm submerged in the ocean, swimming in tandem with her, golden skin shimmering in the light. Our bodies circling around one another like a dance, like a set of choreographed sharks. Her arm brushes against my arm, the fuzz erect and my eyes fully open. I reach out to touch her hair—the cut is cropped and boyish—I gather it in my fingers and bring it to my mouth. I move my lips back and forth on the tendril, my eyes now closed, the stone in my chest softened. Her nose grazes mine, our eyelashes tangled together and there is no distance left at all. We move with the rhythm of the sea.

We wash up on the shore. The water has made my skin sticky, my naked body collecting sand. It is so quiet. So quiet I can hear our hearts beat and my thirst creeps up on me like a slow fever. Then it takes hold of me, possesses me, puts me on leash. I move on top of her with a jolt. I press my brow to hers, I kiss her with fervor, I do lots of reassuring, I tell her that no matter what happens next, it will be okay. I drag my lip to her cheek to her ear, moving sunkissed strands aside, down to her neck, where I pull back.

I hover before my siege. I laboriously exhale, then bite. She screeches, the sound swallowed by crashing waves. I bite, I tear, I chew, I drink, I consume.

I'm so sorry I can't stop myself, my teeth digging and ripping up her flesh. The blood is everywhere—I'm so sorry—I can't help it—I'm just so hungry—I need it—her organs still thumping in my mouth—rich liquid pouring out of my orifices—out of her—out of me—she loves it—she gasps asking me to eat more—I claw and excavate her insides—wrapping intestines around my waist like an embrace—it makes us hot—it brings her back to life.

There is no one around, nary a soul witness to our screams, except the moon. Night has fallen and Selene watches once more.