A

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I know what you are.

You, with your eyes and that intense luminosity of a soul shining through. The brightness is sharp and when I try to ignore it I can still see the afterimages of the look on your face. Were you surprised I noticed you? I can get into your head just as much as you might be able to read into mine.

I always know when you are here. I can feel you lurking.

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If you are so interested, I suppose I will tell you what my existence consists of.

When you so clumsily intruded-

You really have no grace, you know. Honestly. You couldn’t even look on for a few minutes before blinding me half to death?

I was awake anyway. When you poked your nose into my life, I was lying under the covers enjoying that kind of warmth that can only be felt when the only living thing to lend heat is my own beating heart. Don’t even get me started on the blankets. Those damned layers scratching at my face and the rest of me because they know I need them.

Once upon a time I fought with those wily pieces of cloth. I tried to smooth the layers and remove all the little pieces of fuzz. I awoke later that night is a worse state than I could have dreamed. My feet were freezing, with one foot completely exposed—exposed!! – and the other had at least three toes in cold misery. I was outraged. What a fool I had been to imagine blankets would simply lie down when I did. Regardless, I managed to arrange to a compromise with the rascals. They would keep me warm and
make me feel safe as long as I dealt with the scratchy texture so that I will never forget what a service they are doing me.

I would have wagered harder if I had known they could not keep me shielded from the likes of you. You won’t change anything, you know. I know what I am and where I belong. I can even remember the sound of voices. I won’t speak now, of course. That would be incredibly rude to the velvet quiet. Who would I be to throw something like that at my closest companion?

I remember when we first met. I was so surprised to find how different real silence is. I thought I had known the nature of it before, but I finally realized how wrong I had been. The imposter had seemed almost eerie because of the ringing in my ears. With that gone, the lack of sound was like… well it was like the combined sensations of deep-sea pressure and hands in a bowl of custard. I was completely shut off from everything. The quiet took hold somewhere deep inside, and it lives there now- happily, I hope.

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Oh, but I do recall the sounds from before…
My mother used to delight in explaining at great length how severe I was as a child.

“I was in labor for fifteen hours.” Her eyes would widen dramatically. “With each contraction I begged any god that might listen to force you to just give up and slide out.” At this moment in the performance she would stand up and gesture wildly from her abdomen towards the floor, her face flushed and a mask of indignant, large eyed, agony. She would continue her story in deliberate, strangled tones “And then. When you finally transitioned from a parasite to a human being the doctor held you out to me, and do you know what you did? You just looked at me. With slime all over you and your skin bright pink you looked at me as if I needed to answer for something I had done to you.” She would slowly shake her head. “It was from that first quiet stare that I knew you would be difficult.”

Throughout the event anyone listening would nod sympathetically, glancing at me from time to time. I would sit to the side wearing innocence like a gown, and always made a point to offer mother some form of a piece offering. “Mother, those roses on your cheeks are so beautiful when you tell this story.” Or “I found a snail in your garden. Would you like it?”

Childhood was a daze of summer heat and tinkling chimes, punctuated by the ridged spines on alligator lizards, the relentless little hairs on peaches, and the constant affirmation of a friend close at hand.
My sister would tug me out of the house, and we would disappear in the midst of the long weeds with their delicate little flowers. We would pretend at great lengths all sorts of things. We were rulers commanding rollie pollies and dragonflies from treetop thrones. Another day, we would flee from malevolent creatures, barely managing to survive on what food we could salvage from the evil queen’s secret supply.

We never were more than seven minutes from home, but we created entire worlds composed entirely of rippling warmth flaking scabs, and the tiny things between.

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We were very different, she and I. Those differences were made more acute when she began all those messy changes. For two years we were at odds with each other. I was still the wild thing hanging from trees. From time to time I would catch a glimpse of mother as she taught sister the ways to change her shape.

I will never forget how intricately mother’s hands moved in those moments. I watched as the little strings stood up on the backs of them as she moved her fingers meticulously through sister’s hair. How can little pieces of bone be so strong?

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It is funny… The things remembered and the details that slip away. Things like the structure of my mother’s hands- sturdy even after her breath was pulled right out of her lips as she died.

She just lay there all wrinkled up and quiet. Her eyes were left open and the reflection was of sister shrouded in long, glossy tresses. For the first time in my life she made no sound.

Nothing.
B

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Am I boring you?

You could at least pretend to listen to what I have to say. If I recall correctly, it was you who showed so much interest in me in the first place. Why would someone just barge in and get my attention only to pretend to care? It seems a little impersonal, and I intend to take that personally.

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I see the way your glances slide over and around me. You are looking but not paying attention! I do not know what you see in those drapes. Or the ugly wallpaper for that matter. Just boring lines on top of other boring lines. But I suppose that is what everything and everyone is made up of. Lines and shapes overlapping to create some sort of whole to be perceived by the mind as something worthy of a name.

I wonder if I should write some of this down.

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I am not crazy, you know. You are the one ignoring completely decent conversation. There have been studies, you know, that prove that those lacking interpersonal skills are the most likely to be insane and very potentially dangerous to society and decent people.

So I guess I don’t need to worry then. HA!

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You are still here, I see. Even if you are pretending not to see me. I am inclined to finish just for the sake of seeing things through. I know how to do a job right. I know how to look it in the eye and see it to the damned end.
Now, let’s see…
I did not have many friends once I left the grass and the lizards behind. The sun was not as faithful and the fruits came by the under ripe dozens to sit under the false glares of ceilings. They were often squeezed and prodded, but not very often eaten right away.

My first interaction with such an event was filled with calm dismay. I was not so surprised because so many other factors were different, but I was sure the taste would be satisfying. I went home contemplating how sad an existence it would be to grow under the vastness of the brilliant sky only to be removed before ready and then placed with other miserable members of the same dilemma at which point no one would be appreciated and nothing would come of anything except for the ultimate, rotten end.

I wondered at that moment what I would become. I did not know how to evolve as my sister had. I never learned. More than that I had refused to learn. I had stared at my mothers perfectly painted lips as she pursed and pleaded that I give up being difficult. Why was I not like my sister?

It didn’t interest me. I liked not being the same. We both did for that matter, it allowed us to be strong in our own ways, and it helped keep us together.

I knew I would find something. People told me from time to time that it is something youth experiences. Youth, as in those thousands of people before they hit the magical precipice of adulthood? Why, then, are we all not medicated?

I was terrified.
I survived, of course. I would not be able to remember these things if I had not. I got a job doing joblike things. It was not incredibly interesting, but I was not bored either. I used my money on important things like… whiskey. And cigarettes. Generally the two led up to a reasonable amount of sex with reasonably nice people.

I could never stick with one romantic habit for more than a year or so. There was no adventure after a certain point. They all just grew lax and seemed almost content to stay the way they were. How can anyone just decide to stay the same without trying new things or bettering themselves or even worsening themselves, for that matter? Basically, I would learn and experience as much as I could and then I would set them free- ideally into a situation where they might another of equal or lesser aptitude for change.

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After playing the dating tango for a good chunk of my adult life I ended up settling alone. That way, I could hold on to my own things in my own place and do things in my own way. I was attractive by many means, so I never got lonely.

It was so quiet, and I really enjoyed it.

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Perhaps because of the calm at home, the outside world became a great deal more chaotic. I was lost, surrounded by the outcry of steel and the artificial environments. I could hardly navigate across a street, let alone the grocery store and the potential conversations people always tried to engage me in. Why was it not apparent that the only reason I ever went outside was certainly not so that I could have my shopping basket blocked by some jowl jumping human asking me if I had seen the most recent cinema?

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After a particularly cruel dosage of the nonsense I managed to escape the madhouse complete with my funds and my wits still about me. I headed straight for home. I stepped into the street with purpose. One foot. Two. One. Two.

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And then they were both out from under me quite suddenly.
What are you doing? Why do you insist on touching my head? It does not hurt, it is just heavy.

Now you decide to look at me, is that it? After you have humiliated me? My hair has never been beautiful but you did not have to remove it.

And STOP rewrapping that ugly thing over my head! The scabs will not be able to flake off if they cannot breathe.

You. You are trying to do it, aren’t you? You cannot meet my eyes because you are ashamed. Try to take it if you want. I wont let you; I’ll hold my breath!! I will go when I am damn well ready. Look, look me in the eye, you absurd excuse for a human being! I can see you. You are reflected in my eyes. I will not go easily.

Stop it! Do not wrap anymore.

So typical. When I want dark you give me light. When I want light, you give me…

The nurse finishes wrapping the bandage from the top of the head to the tip of the nose. She sees the patient’s mouth moving and removes her headphones just in case the patient is trying to speak to her. As usual, there is no sound. The nurse replaces her headphones and pulls the blanket up to the patient’s chin.

As she heads for the door she calls behind her, “See you next time.” She flips off the light and closes the door.