

Carly (part 2)

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Desire so volatile. So violent. So delicate. Desire, hides, alone, in dreams. Dreams. Desire sleeps. Seeks realms. Sleeps. Hides. Waits until the wounds heal.... Carly climbs from the wreckage of childhood memories and adult accusations. She seeks some kind of truth and explores her sexuality.

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Chapter 1: Surviving Pain.

My period arrives. After every monthly pain I forget. I forget the backache. I forget the sickness and the shooting pains. Lying awake at night, a hand clamped over my constricting womb. That intense, crippling cramp in my stomach. This is the physical pain. Yet there is the tension in my head the week before, annoyance and snapping at trivialities, depressed and down and floating in the mundane. A time for suicidal and murderous thoughts. A time when I feel most horny and need to touch myself, relieve my tension through orgasms. Then a monthly concentration of pain on the first day. Blood seeps, drips, then rolls down my inner thighs; a concentration of agony. Sometimes the blood is so thick it is black. Sometimes bright, oxygenated red. It chafes, wet between my thighs and makes my skin sore. Then, the following days, the pain is dispersed. And the weeks in between, still nervousness, sadness, fear and anger. The neurosis is there, dispersed into fleeting clouds and transformations of mood. My emotions changeable, a microcosm of the fluxing skies above, changes of mood, moon and universe.

After every monthly pain I forget. I forget how I lie doubled-up and cursing. The anguish is sometimes almost too much to bear. I curse. I curse at this woman's curse. I ask myself, *Why is life so hard? How can I carry on? For how many more years can I endure this pain? The pain of life, of the first concentration, agony. How can I endure life's agony? Is it all pain? Will it always be pain? If only I could desensitise myself just to carry on.*

I lie doubled up and cursing. How dare men complain about their ills? How dare they complain at all? Like, ever. They can never feel, never understand this monthly torment. They only feel it when we lash out at them. How can they understand? They just think we are crazy. Society ignores the menstrual cycle. Ignores and disrespects our monthly pain. I am bleeding, wrapped up in a bubble, floating in menstrual consciousness and painkillers. This is a different level from ordinary, everyday consciousness, a female dimension. After every monthly pain we forget.

Days pass. Pain is dispersed yet Carly still feels cursed. Men have put a curse on her. Bad men. She sees faces of ex-lovers in the crowds. The kick boxer, his face appears in the city crowds. She sees him working behind a bar, driving a bus, and looking at her among the crowd. Aaron, she smells leather, sees him driving past in a pimpy car. The client that came to her door: now the sight of any bald-headed man sends a chill down her spine. The smell of massage oil, almond oil. Makes her sick to the stomach. It is a spell; a wicked spell.

Her father haunts her, taunts her. She sees him walking past her, hears echoes of his voice. She is mourning. She is grieving for the death of her parents; her previous perception of them. Usually a death means a death, the end. But not this kind of death. She is grieving for lots of things, most of them still alive. She knows that her father still lives. He still sits in the same armchair watching television.

There would still be a frown shielding the expression in his eyes. What was he thinking? Would there be a slap, a spark of anger next? Or would he want to play? She was eleven when it finally stopped. Then he hardly touched her at all. Apart from making up after a row. A hug. A kiss. And he would say, "You are just like me." At other times, like her mother, she would pull away. Like her sister, would walk from the room when she was left alone with him.

Now he is older. He is ill. The blood clot in his leg is back and threatening to travel up to the veins in his heart. Her mother does not stay with him for love. They are bound by their co-dependence; their low self-worth; her masochistic tendencies and his sadism. As the years have passed he has sapped her youth and vigour, until she is too weak, too guilty, too frightened to leave. Her mother gets older, thinner and tired whilst her father grows fatter and spoilt in a guilt-free comfort zone where he can get his clothes washed and

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his meals cooked. Carly has never seen her mother show affection towards her father, their marriage is dead of love. Yet her brother, her sister, could they not see that? She has not seen her brother since she drifted in the snow on the first day. When she drifted from her family, alone, in the cold.

She wants to forget her family, her childhood. They hurt too much. Hurt too much. In the night, humid clouds surround her bed. Loneliness. Bad memories. Anger. The unfairness of it all. Poor Carly.

I am wearing a long, light trench coat. It blows around in the wind. A wind so harsh that it burns my head. I am walking across grey, barren land towards a tree. Everything is grey except for the black tree that is leafless and stark as if it had been struck by lightning. Its branches are withered and twisted. There is a bird. A big black bird. A crow. It flies around the tree then lands upon a branch. I reach out my arm and the crow flutters then balances upon my hand, flaps its dark wings and sits upon my shoulder. My face is a scowl. There are lines on my face. I am bitter. No family, few friends. Instead, a wasteland. For many years I have been lonely.

Later, she lies, surrounded by newspaper, wishing for the storm to come. She draws circles, in blue biro, around the ads for suitable accommodation. She wants to run from this bad place. Run from these hauntings. Run from the clouds of condensed pain that float around this tiny, claustrophobic flat. Escape.

Carly feels like refugee, lying on the floor, washed up in an empty room, surrounded by her cargo. She is a survivor, a soldier, weary and battered. She fights each lover. In between fighting she is alone. Isolated from her family. Laura, the 'experiment' (when she was a child she thought that she must have been developed in a test tube) now has a family of her own. Carly has photographs of her nephew and niece, red-cheeked, laughing; her nephew running with a red flower in his hand.

Carly is a survivor, but at what cost? Bullets of anger have massacred her family. Among the wreckage lie family values, crushed, all respect broken up and splintered, the decrepit foundations of her parents' marriage exposed. In the aftermath of her accusation, fragments of blame flew dangerously and she choked on the particles of confusion. She fell, and her spirit was held, oppressed and weary beneath rocks of guilt. Her mother said that the family would never be the same again.

She opens her eyes. She has washed up on a bright place, a new place. A place to rest and heal. She listens to the big droplets of July rain on the skylight. A safe place, a shelter. She decorates the new flat with cushions, drapes, potpourri and vases. Carefully tapping into her savings to invest in her haven. Now, she savours her solitude. The skylight gives the impression of space in the small room; she can see the clouds passing beneath the stars.

She bathes. The colours of her snake tattoo, yellow eyes, red tongue, emphasised in the water. After a scented bath she massages luxuriant creamy lotion over her skin and across her tattoo until the colours shine. She wraps her smooth skin in a large, soft towelling dressing gown, makes a cup of black tea with milk and dips her favourite chocolate biscuits into the homely brew. She turns on the radio and sings in harmony to Nina Simone's 'Mood Indigo'. She sounds young, high and pure. A strange sense of well-being surrounds her. No fear, no past, no future, no regret, no grief.

They are sacrificing children in India for Kali. The newsreader's composed English accent informs her that the children are poor, unwanted, homeless. They are taken to a temple and sacrificed.

A flash of lightning. A low growl of thunder, followed by an unexpected clap of sound. Only one clap of thunder? As if in answer, there is another flash of light across the sky, a deceptive silence, followed by a low rumble then a climax like a bomb blast which makes her jump. The room shakes with the power of the storm. The raindrops sound like voices, whispering.

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It is my turn to feel less lonely. I love storms. They make me feel alive. I survive. My heartbeat. My instincts. My self.

Chapter 2: Damage.

Her secret....shifts....murky....murky past....hidden beneath false sparkles of polite conversation.....a secret....burns.....festers.....nerve endings singed....her secret....shifts....then hides.....

All these changes, yet Carole seems to notice no change in me. I, who glance suspiciously at the barman who briefly, very briefly, becomes the image of an ex-lover in the dim lights.

I have discarded my red lipstick. I now wear no makeup to hide behind, yet I have a lot to hide. I do not belong here. I am misplaced, alone. I am acting whilst standing with Carole, smiling, sipping at the bar. Her laugh is cold. I suck on an ice cube from my glass of martini. Rob joins us, her friend from work. His hair is short like a skinhead boy. He is wearing a blue suit. He asks me what I do. What I *do*? I am misplaced. I do not really do anything since I dropped out of college. I hate it.

What do you want to be when you grow up? A pop star, an airline pilot, an actress. In childhood the future is a dream, an expectation, is swirling within hope and ambition. The future is a weeping willow made of gold, real yet also an illusion, something intriguing and unknown, waiting, waiting to be touched and caressed. The future is always there, rustling, beyond sight, like leaves in the darkness. I told my father that I wanted to be a nurse when I grew up. "*Be a doctor,*" he said, "*they get paid more.*" He seemed pleased when I told him I wanted to be a vet, a judge. In the bathroom I would peel off my clothes slowly in front of an imaginary, male audience. I wanted to be a stripper or a model like the girls in the magazines.

Carole and Rob are looking at me. "Well?" Carole is asking. I accept Rob's offer to take me out.

Sex was not mentioned. Not the word, *sex*. It was spoken, throughout the evening, though, non-verbally, eyes, smiles. No touches though. But it was expected, by both of us, I think...

A bit nervous; perhaps it is Rob's grass. Skunk, one of the strongest. "*One more coffee? I'll make it.*" Stomach jittery. Perhaps it is the coffee, caffeine is bad for the nerves. Nervous in my stomach, yet not the warm tingling of excitement- that fear mingled with heady suspense followed by the high of sexual pleasure and joy. No, not that. Nervous in my stomach but dull in my head. Flirting all evening, my eyes bright, inviting windows into the warm rooms of my house inside; my private rooms that I tempt you to explore. But now, here, at Rob's place, my shutters are down. I am cold- demons, dark skeletons shiver inside. They chatter: *slut, prostitute. He wants sex.* And my mother's voice: *men only want you for one thing.* All the hurt. All the invasions into my body. It is my body, yet why do I feel that I should let him in? Oh, I know that there is more to sex than just that, just sticking it in. There is foreplay- caressing, stroking- but I will not enjoy that. I will be tense, ready to intercept, ready for him to fuck, to ejaculate. All this whilst I make the coffee. I feel so icy that I am surprised it is still warm when I bring it over.

I did want it. I did want it. I had a long bath and put on my best underwear; I wonder if he chose his best underwear too. It is too contrived. I do find him attractive, too. A laid-back, mellow personality, yet hard. He can stick up for himself but he is not too nasty or vainly macho. But now...is it me? Am I ruining the evening? Icing over and evasive coffee making. My sexuality and my ability to enjoy it, lost somewhere in a psychological labyrinth. And I did not realise how damaged I was; too fragile and afraid of breaking again for a flippant one night stand.

Ok, it might be more than that. I know. But I may have ruined it. All or nothing. I will say no. Yet sex has not yet been mentioned.

We smoke another joint.

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Silence.

A smile.

He reaches over and kisses my neck. Softly. Although I feel afraid, he suddenly sends electric pulses around my head; I can see them like twinkling lights when I close my eyes. He puts his hand on my breast. Kissing is one thing. I feel afraid. I cannot respond. I suddenly slouch down into the chair like a child avoiding molestation. "I'm scared," I say.

"What of?" he asks me quietly. *Sex....I try to explain....things in my past....my secrets haunt my words with bitterness....I find it hard to communicate...I can't....I try to keep quiet or I will taint the evening with hostility....*

He seems so innocent; he looks at me, confused. He feels my frost. He turns away and I feel a demon chattering inside. No, no, not already. My chill already killing the hope of maturation for any new romantic seeds, now no roses will grow. Barren. I am not the same after working at the massage parlour. It was a sacrifice. And it was doubt. That was how men treated me anyway, like a prostitute. Perhaps all this is part of my sacrifice. Perhaps this is the unwritten law of the prostitute. But I cannot tell him any of this.

He triggered electric pulses in my head, I enjoyed kissing him, I felt, I felt, something. But now my mind contains old wounds, old flames, old enemies, dirty bastards taking advantage of me, meathead masculinity-that ugly phallic-centric insensitivity that sickens me to the core.....

...but I can say none of this to him. If I did I would only shout and scream the words that I find hard to express, so that he would not even hear and only taste bitterness.

I tell him that I walked out in front of a car. Then the evening dies.

"When? Why?"

"Don't know. Couple of months ago."

Silence. He is depressed. I have depressed him.

He walks me home. We do not mention it. A bit stoned. I did not have to tell him. It was probably fear. Shock tactics to scare him away. Suddenly revealing a nasty wound and saying, "Look, I'm bleeding, I'm hurting." Things too deep to say. Not now. Not so early on. I get a feeling that it is over, whatever it was. He stops outside my flat. He might tell Carole. I keep so much of myself hidden from her. I am isolated. She does not know that I was abused. Why should she know? I hide the abuse from others, yet wonder, *do they know? Can they tell?* Sometimes I think that they know, that it must seem so obvious. I tell him that I will ring him. "No, I'll ring you," he says, walks off, cool. I did want him. I just could not have him.

I wake up late. Still stoned and groggy. I will lie in bed today. All day. My telephone rings. I let it ring. The last ring ends, echoing in the silence. The sound lingers, vulnerable, calling, a little sad, like an animal or something pitiful.

Chapter 3: Alone.

Her delicate libido runs and hides. It is pure, round, simple like the seed of a flower. Her delicate libido runs and hides, sheltered by defences old and fears a-new. Her delicate bud, which only she now touches, is afraid, shy of men. Fears pain. Her petals close, protecting her.

Carly still has desire. Want, yearning. The sheets entwine her body, trail behind her, as she gets out of bed, lies upon the couch beneath the skylight. Alone, she asks, "Where is my home?" Under the sky, blue, harsh, exposed. A sweet fragrance, mown grass, cool air, drifts within the sunlight and intermingles with her yearning for the sea and valleys. The heavy, hairy body of a wasp flies haphazardly through the half-opened window. After a jagged, dangerous journey surveying the contours of her body it rests on the window ledge, clamps its iron jaws together and runs a tough limb across its mask-like face. The wasp incites fear with its sting, a fear disproportionate to a creature of such size. How can she fear such a small thing? Yet, Carly feels anxious as she looks towards where the creature is buzzing. The wasp is her enemy. An unknown enemy force, come to taunt, to scare, to bully. The abdomen is pumping, breathing. A sickly yellow, the hard little creature waits with its weapon at the ready, acting like the mechanism of a hypodermic needle. The wasp will penetrate its weapon on a whim, sometimes without provocation. It flies upwards in psychopathic movements, bashing its steely head painlessly yet noisily against the glass until it finds its outlet and is free. She feels that she has no one to protect her. No one to protect her from this wasp. This stupid little wasp. No father, no man. Sometimes she wishes so much to have someone to protect her. An angel-an omnipresent invisible angel. Oh, my, what is she doing now?

Soft. Hard. Porn. Soft porn. Hard porn. Hard. Soft. I place the magazines in a circle around me. Each one open. Open on my favourite page. Each way I turn, the image of a naked woman before me. A dark woman dressed in leather lies on fur. She is different. Dominant, defiant. A mistress. She refuses to be degraded. She will never be degraded.

I am dry. Stinging. Something twisted, twisted up inside, stinging. A mental block. A knot. Connections. *They only want me for one thing.* Connected nerve endings. I stroke the small bud and its massive, hidden nervous system sends pulses around my body and brain. Pounding against the blockage in my mind until juices, erotic imagery, flows, liquid. Soft. Hard. I am centre of the circle, being drawn deeper into a sphere. I am wearing nothing but the high sandals that I wore in the massage parlour. When I was Suzanne.

And I enter alone. A private place of fantasy. I enter. I go deep. Really deep. On my knees, stroking my thighs. Then I am straining, contorting. My body is held safe within the circle yet bound with straps and chains. Straps and chains of guilt, of pain. I am dirty. I go deep, really low, to heighten my pleasure. I am growling, face down. A bitch. A dirty bitch. I feel good. I feel so bad. I feel nothing but the power of the orgasm. The perspiration between my breasts, on the nape of my neck. I am strong. Power of my orgasm, my ego rising. My feminine ego. I am a mistress. A queen. This is my sanctuary. I am voyeur. Mastermind of plots. Dangerous.

No manly ego have I. No, a feminine ego- spiteful, lustful, revengeful, jealous- with a self-righteousness borne of rage. It is hot. Oh, yes it is hot. My feminine ego thrives, selfish, feline, self-serving.

I light the candles that I have placed in four parts of the circle, four corners, lying just externally to the circle of the magazines. Then I stand naked, peering through ancient flame. I am as invulnerable as a statue, my tattoo winding around my arm, a vine, a serpent. Here, alone, I am strong. A sexual woman. Perfect. Out there, they will try to claim me, pull me down, destroy me. I am perfect because I am imperfect. I am imperfect and I am sexy. Wide hips, small upturned breasts, a few blue veins on my calves. Out there, they will draw attention to my imperfections, criticise me, crush me.

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Something twisted deep inside, has unravelled, drawn its way to the surface. Sharp, sour. Now I carry a string. A prostitute: an outlaw status that incites intrigue, fear and even envy. I may carry the sting of disease. I am exempt, feral and dangerous. I am a scapegoat for hypocrisies, stereotypes and inherited Victorian morals. I am a victim. I am persecuted. I am weak. A good body with damaged insides. I am cold. A cold heart. A hot pussy. A wet pussy. Wild eyes. A Romany spirit. Wild and free. Naked limbs, strong muscles. Burning flame. Fire. Woman in flame.

I feel light-headed. A force beginning with an itch inside my head, which makes me feel so excited, like I am high on adrenalin and pain, which must be dispersed before I erupt. An unstoppable flow of energy, which turns into the rumbling of a life-long rage. The yearning for revenge. A rage that has always been there, even before this life.

Anger is a pure, solid force and when it has no target it disperses like molecules, turns to frustration, something she needs to scratch but she cannot quite reach, it is all over, unseen and beneath her skin. And what beautiful skin. I can see her now. Milky white, smooth in the candlelight. I hover for a moment, watch her as I flit passed a flame and it flickers for a moment but does not go out. But then she blows out the candles. The itch inside cools, melting into a dark pool of self-blame and shame. Yet the original force of that outrage, if captured and focused, will kill.

Tears fall onto my skin. I am back on my knees. Collapsed, howling. I am insane. Yet there is no one here to judge me or label me insane. Animal-like, secret and subhuman. I am snarling, with clenched teeth and taut neck. Words hiss from my teeth. I sound like a demon. A savage growl. Anger and frustration hold my neck and shoulders tense. There is nowhere for me to direct that anger. Just sheer frustration. After a release, I am left with this, after such a rush, such a high, such freedom. It is like never getting what you want because you do not deserve it. I do not deserve it. Love. Respect. I growl, face contorting and skin stretched tightly over the bones. Face down on the floor. "My darkness," I hiss, "my darkness." I am no longer human. I shed a skin. I emerge in the dark, on all fours, growling, snarling.

Chapter 4: Corrosion.

Desire is obsession. Desire is yearning. Desire is rejection. Desire is sex. Is hurt. Desire hides, waits until the wounds heal. Desire resides alone in dreams.

The scaled creature's colours are beautiful yet sickly. A warning, reptilian, poisonous as it writhes and hisses. It looks and sounds so acidic that it would burn anything that came into contact with it.

When I wake, it is still night. I know that this animal in my dream world is made of my anger, my spite and my hate. It is corrosive and deadly.

I sit curled in shadow, my shoulder blades arched up like the sprouting of wings. It is strange how the world of night and the world of day differ, how sight is altered with the rise and fall of the sun and the demise into darkness. How butterflies turn to moths and birds to bats. In the dark, imagination and reality merge. Naked beneath my plumage of smoke and black shadow, I smoke my cigarette, crouching over the city. I still sometimes wish I could kill my father, swoop down to his sleeping body, dig claws into his chest, get to his heart. Inside my heart and mind are still the hard bullets of rage and revenge waiting silently to destruct. I remember how he reacted to my out-of-place accusation. I feel a trembling of outrage. A slight tremor. Exhaling the cigarette smoke, my downbeat fumes condense into clouds, melt away into the night until I see them drifting in a tiny thunderstorm many miles away, beyond the church spires, the lights on the hill, the three granite tower blocks. Clouds shift, sifting across the moon. Is it full? I do not know. But it is glowing. A strange halo circles it in shades of purple, green and white. It looks like a pearl sewn onto the gown of a goddess.

Desire so volatile. So violent. So delicate. Desire, hides, alone, in dreams. Dreams. Desire sleeps. Seeks realms. Sleeps. Hides. Waits until the wounds heal.

Chapter 5: Inked and Pierced.

The needle buzzes yet it does not scare me. It does not scare me like the buzzing of a wasp. The hum of the tattooist's needle excites me. Lying on my stomach, I get high as the needle leaves a new line beneath my skin. The tattooist, Dan, says that tattoos are becoming more and more acceptable to mainstream, western society but he thinks it is just another phase in the history of the tattoo. Tattooing was fashionable before, among Victorian society ladies who hid their illicit scribbles from the world. Even now, too many tattoos are still a sign of rebellion. Dan concentrates on small lines of yellow; he cleverly knows the movement of the skin. He says that I took good care of my first tattoo.

The tattoos on my skin are my pain, seeped through my epidermis, to the surface where others can see. I am exposed.

....Mark my exposed skin; make me an outcast, an outlaw, like the criminals of the past that were marked on their forehead. I want to take a different path. Make me a rebel. Make me primitive. Make me sane. My tattoos are permanent, colourful and powerful. They are beautiful. They are disfiguring. They elicit love and hate. They are fashion and anti-fashion. They are a permanent recognition of a painful past.....

I am different. I am different from you.

I look into the tattooist's mirror at the yellow, striped wasp inked on my buttock. I was stung there once, as a child. The psychopathic wasp stings for no reason. A sting like the pain of the needle. A sting like the stroke of a belt upon skin.

I look up at the tiles on the ceiling, playing a mental game of noughts and crosses. There is a cold kiss of antiseptic on my stomach, a quick sharp pain. Looking down I receive instant pleasure: the glint of a silver ring on my naval. Then I pull off my t-shirt. Unclip my bra. My nipples are pierced with rings and moonstone.

I am sorry for all the bad things I have said. My mouth, my throat, are numb as I stick out my tongue. The needle passes between two thick muscles. A thick, silver bar obscures my speech.

The tattooist presses the button on the camera as I pose for him, naked and unsmiling. Proud of his artwork, he exhibits photographs of it on his studio wall. The artist has a new canvas with each customer, his designs shining through the top layer of skin until death. Or even after death. Irezumi museums display the inked hides of the dead.

Chapter 6: Primitive.

Thunder growls slowly across the rooftops. Lightening follows with its violent whip-crack. The air is tingling and alive. I am high. I AM ALIVE. High. On pain. Adrenalin. Endorphin. Vibrations in the air react with my body and mind. Sparks, quivers of energy. I have passed a test, a test of mind and nerve. I am brave. Some people would say stupid, silly. They would not understand. They would say it was shameful. What a shame that I should ruin my body in this way.

Who cares? Who cares what they think?

So much mental anguish, subconsciously followed by the pain of the needle. Like a tribal headhunter, tattooed after proving himself a warrior, I AM WARRIOR. Yes, an urban warrior. These trophies on my skin prove that I have fought. That I survive. I will continue to fight. Fighting what, though? Negative thoughts, an abused inner child, my family?

The sky grows darker. Sifting through the dusky silhouette world, on either side of the pathway through the park, are the fingers of bushes, their leaves exploring the twilight and sensing the electricity of the passing storm. Shadows seem to change from dark muggers and rapists lurking to people holding hands, a parent and child. Now, no cruel kidnappers here. No bogeyman of childhood nightmares. Thunder growls slowly. I begin to run, a primeval instinct for safety, past the shadows. I am a city savage. I am running, air cools my rage, my guilt-red rage, for now. The breeze flows onto me, into me. I pick up vibrations of courage and new energy in its flow. The current lifts my grievances, pulls them, sucks them out from a soul grown mournful and old, carrying them up, up into the storm.

This is an interconnection. My tattoo, my piercings, are followed by a thunderstorm. A god, a god of the sky, can sense the vibration of the needle. When the needle touches the thin skin on the inside of my arm, the pain emerges down my side. Connected nerve endings. Primitive connections. Primitive laws. The God of the skies thunders approval; the flash of lightening is recognition of my pain and survival.

My burdens are carried, swirling, within the storm cloud, picked up lightly, caught within the tempest across the city. I am rejuvenated, lighter, younger, always young. My troubles are lifted, swirling within the stormy skies. I am prickling and alive. I want to live forever, never want to die.

Lightening cracks its whip and jolts me back into consciousness.

I realise that I have been running fast, my thigh muscles are aching; the unhealed wasp design stings me. I am standing in the middle of the road, cars parked silently on either side. I stand strong in the dark, prickling air. Sharp, alive.

Chapter 7: Running.

The storm has passed. Clouds, light and wispy, except one dark cloud high up. It almost disappears in the twilight. It changes shape from angel to ghost. This is where my problems are. In that cloud. It is far away now yet I know that one day it will be above me, closer and larger. Looming and grey. It will hang until every mistake that I have made, every insult that has ever wounded me, every problem that I possess will thunder and rain about me until I can do nothing but scream. Scream into the storm.

I keep running. Running from the cloud. Running from the spectres of lovers, phantoms of memory, my childhood and my father. Running from evil stalkers within sexual shadows, illusions and former weak delusions of my self.

I keep, keep running...

Chapter 8: Night Transforms.

Desire is need, is searching. Is fear? Is rejection? Desire is hurt. Wounds heal yet the scars remain. Desire mutates. Desire mutates to survive. Desire changes from innocence to cruelty. From love to hate. From kisses to pain. From sex to rape. Desire is power. Desire is want, is greed, is obsession. Desire abuses power. Desire seeks rejection. Desire seeks hurt, seeks pain.

Now I am desire. The night transforms. In the darkness my reflection is unfamiliar, flickeringly lit by candlelight. My eyes are lined with black kohl and I have painted the lids a deep turquoise. My lips are red. I am wearing a magical mask. A childish pout replaced by disdainful, arrogant glare. A good body and a raw deal. My skin adorned with metal and ink. I will go to a club alone tonight, in the dark where dangerous creatures crawl.

The club used to be called 'The House'; a white building with an unusual pointed, black-tiled roof, in the shape of a mock house. The dance room was 'The Kitchen' where cool underground DJs played house music whilst the chill-out room was 'The Bedroom', kitsch red-satin and cat-print fur walls, with a bed in the centre. The club has changed. There are rumours that it will be shut down for having full nudity inside, that the club encourages the so-called less respectable crowd. The neon sign beneath the triangular roof has now been changed. It is now 'The Voodoo Lounge'. As I approach it I realise that it looks less like a house and more like some kind of eerie church.

In red, a dark-haired woman dances, strips, stretches her body across a high stool placed in the centre of the dance floor. Her breasts are globes above the lines of her ribcage. Her skin is smooth and oiled. Two more brunettes in black, with whips, drag a man from the crowd, pull down his trousers. One sits on his face, the other above his crotch, circling him with her pelvis. Muscular, oiled dancers hold torches of fire in their hands like medieval slaves dancing for our entertainment in leather, bondage, studs. They threaten to burn. One slave boy gets down on hands and knees, doing press ups like a simulated fuck to the music, showing the strength he has in his arms, his buttocks. They dance, bodies up close to the women who watch, unafraid, who scream, gyrate, hold onto the oiled muscles, who will follow them to their hotel room, another club, wherever. A skinhead bouncer in a black suit stands by, still, staring straight ahead at all times. Excitement rises to my throat, lust permeates the atmosphere.

He is standing in the corner, in a long coat, by the bar. He pays for me and we go into a booth. The skirt of my dress glows. A tutu of yellow, orange, blurs of light. White and reds glow, brightly catching ultra-violet rays. We could be anywhere. Underwater. "This is like magic, this isn't real," he says over and over. He has dark hair, dark pornographic eyes. He sits down. I stand above him.

"So, you like my dress?" A ballerina. A tattooed circus girl.

"I like what's underneath better." He kisses my underwear, my pubis, then kisses beneath. I undress beneath a strange, purple light; folds of fabric like landscapes, sheer stockings, floating fibres. A cold wind blows harshly between each brain hemisphere, touching raw nerve endings. He cannot see my loneliness, only a sexy body in the purple light. Skin, deep pink, mauve.

"You're so cool," he says, later, at my flat, reading erotic magazines with hungry, empty, dark pornographic eyes.

And in the morning the purple-light magic is gone. A white-wash, white-grey sky. My clothes in a crumpled, dirty, folded heap. Then as my eye half-closes back into sleep, the heap turns to a million spiders, then fractures as the spiders run, scatter, hide, in a million directions.

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He is beside me. Vague shame and alcohol fumes. Dark hair and awake. I kneel at my mirror and watch his reflection; self-hate and brushing my hair. Who is he? He reminds me of one of the wizards in Aaron's book collection on magic, witches and the unknown. No. He is no one.

"That must've been painful," he says. I touch the tattoo on my arm.

"It was," I laugh, "It hurt like hell." And I laugh again.

In the night, the next night alone, there is a scratching sound on the wall like a scraping of bricks. Carly stares at the wall, at the unknown spirit in the wall. The ghosts are still with her. The ghosts have been summoned by her sexual act, the ancient exchange: sex and money. No, it is nothing. It is just a scratching sound. And I am the only one watching her.

The moon casts a harsh, white light. Everything seems so harsh and evil. A white light burns through my head. I am hungry, longing for another human touch, warm skin, a voice to soothe, a hand to stroke my hair.

I am drawn back to 'The Voodoo Lounge'. Sometimes they pay.

They are in my bed. I am hungry, thirsty. I want everything, to touch, to love, to be fed, to be babied, to be kissed. I am thirsty. I drink them up to fill my harsh void. I am hungry, I kiss them, smell them, bite their flesh, cover their body with my body, hungry eyes stare into theirs. I moan as I soak up the affection they offer me, the hungry scraps I lap up, soak up, lap, their perspiration and flowing juices, which I drink up, greedy, desperate, trying to fill the void. This brief high is followed by a low. It is like a drug. I do not even get pleasure from these bodies, these cocks. It is not pleasure. I am a sexual junkie getting my fix. We touch, pinch each others' skin, bite, groan, stroke softly, voices get louder until we are screaming, crying out, pulling at each others' flesh, tearing into each others' minds, tearing each other apart. Into pieces. I am raw. It hurts so much.

Chapter 9: Tattooed Hands.

I just go back to that place. My secret place. I can howl and cry, tears contorting my savage form. Then each time I emerge, a-new.

The ink is being worked into my skin. Black and grey. Dan's tattooed hands are covered with a pair of sterile gloves and the new, clean needle is drawing the blood to the surface. He wipes across my shoulder blade. The design is complete. A large pair of wings stretch across my upper back. I could be a devil or an angel. Or something in between. If only I could fly. Yet I am earthbound.

Chapter 10: Artemis.

Carly makes herself strong. She feeds herself. She feeds her body. She feeds her hair. She feeds her skin. Oranges. Bananas. Olives. Fish. Seaweed and mud wraps. Lotions and tonics. She paints her nails. Then sleeps in the day. She wakes at night, hungry.

The trees bow over me like guards on duty, protective and knowing. These woodlands are deep and dark and I can only lie still. I am lost and so weak that I cannot move. My spirit is wounded. The trees protect my spirit. In my soul I am waiting, waiting for someone. She is coming. I can hear the baying of dogs. "Remember me?" I open my eyes at the sound of a male voice. He is standing above me, the bald-headed harasser. He takes off his hat, like a gentleman, like he did at my door. Yet, he is not a gentleman. "Suzanne?" he smiles. He is deceptive. At Marie's massage parlour he appeared benevolent. A disguise to make him seem harmless, almost forgettable, almost kind. Then he was at my door. I was so naive. I did not know he would come to my door. I wore a hat and dark glasses so that I would not be recognised coming to and from the massage parlour. I am humiliated. Of course, anyone could have recognised me. He reaches down towards me. A dart lands in his neck. A silver dart deep in the artery. Then a cord pulls him away from me. A silver cord, thick and strong like rope, twisting around him, a young woman is pulling him, as he writhes bloody and wretched and cursing, to a nearby tree. He is base and struggling yet she is pure and proud. A dog licks my hand in friendly welcome. Two more hounds stand around her feet and another sits some distance away, silent, alert, guarding his mistress. She carries a silver bow, her tunic glimmers like a pearl, the inside of a shell, the moon. She is a huntress. Very tall, like a tree.

I lie in the deep, soothing, breathing of the forest.

He is naked, bound with a silver cord to the tree. She is calm. She does not like this violence, yet it is her duty to protect. There is blood on his face, he gargles and chokes. His last few moments, as he loses strength, fill me with a new potency. I can lift my arms now, move my legs and head. As he dies, I am filled with a sense of warm satisfaction, my strength renews and I begin to stand. There is a taste in my throat, drooling, and the savour of meat as if I have devoured a victim that I have been tracking, led by instinct and driven on by hunger.

She strides towards me, away from the limp, noxious corpse, its penis and balls dead white flesh, shrivelled, tied with silver to the tree. She holds out a hand and helps me to stand. Her skin is soft and pale. She holds out her other hand, a closed fist to mine. I take what she offers. It is an acorn.

Carly wakes, her fist clenched where she held the dream gift. Yet in waking reality it has disintegrated. She does not know that I guard her as she sleeps. That I guide her. Or try to.

Chapter 11: Where The Slaves Are.

The tattoo has healed fully. The scabs have withered and dropped away. My skin is shining, young and renewed. My hair has grown; dark roots of bleached, blonde hair that I now hide beneath the sleek, black human-hair wig. I am hungry. Hungry for excitement, life again. Maybe death. Anything. It is a desire, a yin and yang of extremes and calm. A longing to explore, to run, to hide, to know. There is still a fire inside, my anger that will always smoulder. An outrage lies dormant, waiting. I am alone. Yet I am not aloneâ !.

I read somewhere, one in four. Is it true? Nearly one in four women has experienced a childhood sexual encounter with a man. One in four humiliated, confused, angry. One in four whose sex life has been distorted by fear. Whose trust has been severed from any man they can hope to love. Who fear they will in turn abuse their own children, psychologically or otherwise. Whose inner self, inner child, will tell her that it is her fault, that she is bad. Is it true? Ask Kinsey. One in four, disadvantaged to those other women who feel that love and protection is their right. One in four who may learn to sexually react to brutality rather than kindness or cannot react sexually at all. Those who have not been abused can never understand. There is still a fire inside, my feminine ego, revengeful.

Untouchable. I am taboo. I am desire. My mirror holds an apparition. I am desire, strapped, enwrapped in black. I bear a dangerous sting. My sting carries the poison of sexual secrets, violence, rape, sadism and the desires of the abuser. My mind is twisted, breaks all morals. No moral will bind me. The feminine ego is self-righteous and self-serving.

The forbidden: an ingredient to eroticism. Sexual secrets of the mind, secrets of the mind which cannot be controlled by laws and constraints of society. Unethical, taboo fantasies are smothered, stifled. Perhaps these thoughts will force themselves out somehow, become obsessions, cruelly forcing the libido to re-enact them in reality. The base and lascivious need for orgasm becomes shameful. Are these fleeting thoughts immoral, as immoral as action? Those who fantasise of rape do not wish to be raped, do they? Now what was it I heard from someone, somewhere? *The abused grow up to abuse. The abused grow up to abuse.* Do they? Or can they grow up to protect and preserve? To preserve the innocent.

I put on my fake fur jacket over the black leather and check my red lipstick in the taxi driver's mirror as I step into the cab. *Lead me to the freedom in the shadows.* I order the driver to stop outside 'Spank!Spank!'

I wonder if I will see Aaron. His sadism once tore down my defences. I was childish, vulnerable. Now I am harder, yes, and streamlined. There is a squareness, resilience to my jaw. Tough limbs and warning hues.

This is where the slaves are, the sycophants. They stare at me as I slink to the music. I have the power to give these men pleasure. They do not have the power to give me pleasure. Even if they did please me, it would not empower them. I could still dismiss them, emotions detached. I prowl and growl. I could take their money, their pride. I can even take their wives and families if I wanted to. I could take their jobs, their lives. One man wears an eye mask that obscures his features. Yet I see his nose elongate, his nostrils twitch like an animal detecting my scent.

I dress in a sluttish leather skin, which accentuates my body. A zip at the front, which I can pull down as far as I want to go. I offer sex without the promise of comfort or kindness. I offer sex and danger. An exhibition inviting closer inspection. Yet at the same time I am guarded, cold. A whore. I dance for them. My tattoos are evidence of my wild nature. They wonder if I am an angel from hell. I am shady, disreputable. I dance. A red flash of nails; lights flash stripes of yellow across my body. Fire. Sparks of spite. My vampy outward illusion, my female curves, summon their magnetic desire. My hatred attracts them. I sting for nothing. My sting is hidden. The older men like me. A white haired man with straps of leather and chains decorating his weighty

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physique stammers as he offers to buy me a drink. He is wearing white socks and brogues. "If there is anything I can do for you, anything at all," he offers. Older men, the father figures. I will use this slave. He is servile yet I know he has the ability to violate my body. Yet, how can a man this apparently servile have the facility for rape? He is gazing up at me with clear, pale blue eyes.

Here I am safe. Sex and hate empower me. What once poisoned me is now my weapon. I draw from that deep well inside, draw the poison into my sting. The slave is so weak that he disgusts me.

It is easy to hate. So easy, so natural to be the bearer of pain. The slave fetches me a drink. I take a sip; tell him that it is disgusting. Tell him to fetch me another, this time cooler, with ice and lemon. He does as I say. He is grovelling. "Yes, madam, yes, madam," he simpers. I pour the next drink over his chest. Beneath the cold flesh and congealed body hair his libido squirms. I pull open the small pocket of leather covering his crotch, and pop an ice cube into his thong. My hatred is unconcealed. I graze my nails across his chin, his cheek. I spit in his face. My saliva lands next to his mouth. His thin lips move yet there is silence. He reminds me of a tortoise, chewing, crusty. I dance and run my hands across the hidden wasp tattoo. Like the wasp, I incite fear not through threat of death, but the portent of unexpected pain.

I wish to humiliate the patriarch. Dictator of my childhood. Self-appointed ruler of the family home. King of facade and trickery. King of nothing. No one.

The slave will do anything that I say. He will get on his knees for me. Kiss my feet. Ejaculate on my boots. He will take me anywhere. Buy me anything. He will not touch me without my permission; he is forbidden. I am his goddess. He will worship me. He wants me to make him feel small, a pathetic insect. He wants me to be in control so he has no control. He wants me to burn him with cigarettes. He wants me to use him as a toilet. Yet he only wants these things if I do. He is nothing without me. I can discard him. I can dismiss him anytime.

He licks my boots clean. I tell him that he is dismissed, for now.

Chapter 12: Pink Neon Box.

I watch the dancer twist effortlessly around the silver pole. She is dancing to *R and B* and watching herself in the mirrors. She is vain. She is vain like Aaron. From this distance, sometimes, suddenly, she looks very young, a child. She has got money in her mouth, between her painted lips, ten pound notes. This turns the men on. She is wearing a black g-string and P.V.C boots. The music changes. She picks up a whip, snaps it quirkily against her thigh. She wears a diamond bindi on her forehead. Her skin is dark yet her face seems strangely pale. She puts the money down the front of her g-string. She has an impish smile. What secret knowledge does she possess?

I remember how Aaron wrote about this exotic dancer. He loved to write. He loved to write his secrets and his lust for her in his thick, leather-bound book. Old fashioned and elaborate writing, hoping one day, after his death, his journal would be found and published; his criticisms of me written in perfect calligraphy.

I ask my ugly slave about the dancer. He says that he knows her very well. His eyes are alight with mischievous gossip as he tells me how devious she is, how manipulative she can be. He was once her slave until she did not want him anymore. She bound him tight and left him still and ensnared. He would pay for her taxi, her drinks, yet once inside the club she would completely ignore him whilst getting high from the attention of the men and women watching her dance. She would make fun of him, make fun of his small penis whilst enthusing and boasting about the drinks bought for her, the compliments, money and gifts that were given to her. She is as neurotic as her hyperactivity. Her fast mind leads her fleetingly from lover to lover, circumstance to circumstance. She leads a fast life. She is sensitive only to her own feelings, overly so. She is forever rebelling against her strict father. Long, dark natural hair, twinkling eyes- he says that he saw a star shine in them once- with creases where she smiles. Very child-like at times, wearing him out with her high spirits. Yet emotions changeable from one moment to the next, snapping at him, cracking her whip. He says that he wonders if she has magical eastern powers. "You find her attractive," he adds, "I know. Beware, lover, she may devour you."

The slave gives her my message. He soon comes back and tells me that she is doing another show, that I must watch. He gives me the ticket; paper which glows purple. I enter a corridor leading to another room of the club. What is here? Tremulously, rhythm guides me and walls open into a wider chamber; pulsating, rhythm guides.

I am alone. Bathed in pink neon. Pictures flash momentarily on the cave-like walls. A woman with Victorian skirts pulled up and wearing no bloomers, bent forwards over a garden swing; two statuesque androgynous black nudes caressing. A girl shyly holding her hand over her pubis as if ashamed. The neon of an Amsterdam whore's window and the sickly-sweet smell of perfume, cigarette smoke and musk.

A pink neon box, it looks like it is a box carved out of the wall. There is a stage inside where the dancer crouches, dusky skinned, head down and long hair hiding her face and breasts. She is behind glass, illuminated. Yet so tiny, so young. Then she suddenly looks up, a design, like a third eye, has been painted in orange and purple on her forehead. Eyes wide and accentuated by kohl, she rolls her pupils from left to right, closes her lids and dances sensuously, slowly but her movements are constrained. A gold collar attached to a chain binds her neck. Putting her small hands to the glass, moving her slim body to the music, she is calling; she is calling me, unheard. Trapped behind the glass, her body is smooth, hairless, coiling, twisting, dancing for me, calling me. There is the glint of gold. Her clitoris is pierced with a large ring, a jewel glimmers from the gold. Music is hypnotic. Time obscured, irrelevant. I desire her yet my desire seems somehow unlawful. She is forbidden, segregated by the glass. I want to enter the neon box, preserved from time and become lost in an eternal erotic realm, the rest of my existence would be the pleasure of her body, her beauty. I watch her, detailed, unhindered, wanting her to see me watching. In this light it is like magic. Dark eyes, holding

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knowledge of untamed and unknown forces, shine, wild from experience.

Yet she is too, like a child. And trapped. She beats a small fist against the glass.

Then with her hands pressed flat upon the glass. I see her heartline, her lifeline. Gold rings on her slim fingers, bracelets around wrists and ankles. Her neck chained. Hypnotically attractive yet noxious. I am cowardly, safe in front of the glass. I am her audience. She is a performer. If she offered herself to me freely, surely I would not feel so superior. If there were others here, perhaps I would not stare so boldly.

I pull the zip down on my dress until it is open. Then leather folds fall down onto the floor. My eyes are greedy, exploring her body. Her hands are on the glass, she watches as my hands move over my body. She dances, eyes closed and painted, then holds a stance like that of a divine figure from the celestial carvings of an Eastern temple. I yearn for the holiness of divine bliss, a purity I have never known. Instead my lust urges me to touch myself, to release that energy tingling through my mind. My clitoris feels engorged, like a hard-on. I start to stroke it, apply a little pressure.

She is more than a stripper. She is an artist, transcendent, knowing how to move her body to the music, knowing how to entice, as she gets on her hands and knees, moving her lower back, up, down, gyrating her hips and buttocks. She is both sexual and innocent. My arousal is due to her enslavement, her carnal image. I feel the first flow, the rush of orgasm. The deep base of the music seems to overwhelm, its vibrating power pulls me in and down. Onto my knees. Submerged as waves lap, make my skin wet. Close my eyes until the tides of desire change. Until the tears cease.

She is watching me, uninhibited, unashamed.

There. There, crawling across the floor, a black spider. A strange, long, thin abdomen. A prickling of fear. And another, there, crawling across the pink, purple neon glass. The dancer now stands nonchalantly flicking a whip. I pick up my dress and zip it back up. She is laughing, I can hear her now through the glass. A sharp whore's laugh of danger, temptation. "All that glitters is not gold!" she shouts after me.

As I turn to leave she is still laughing, shoulders bent, and for that moment looks like an old woman, a thin hag.

Chapter 13: Blood.

Carole says that Rob has been asking about me. He is willing to try again, another evening. It might work. I wonder what he has told her about me. Carole watches me as I sit quietly with period pain. One hand is smoothing an aching stomach, the other absentmindedly scratching tousled, grown-out bleached hair. Carole is a witch, an ice-cool queen. "Well?" she asks, plucked eyebrows raised passive-aggressively.

"I'm not really interested," I answer, womb constricting. Carole flips open her magazine.

"You really are too inward looking," she says from behind the open pages, "self obsessed."

Carly is hurt, of course, by this sudden criticism, yet remains silent. She sits with her hand on her stomach. She exists in two separate worlds. This is the sacrifice she has made. She keeps it all undercover. Her friend cannot see her tattoos. To Carole she is neither gypsy nor warrior. Nothing special, really. Neither vampire girl, enchantress nor stormy lover. Carly has no power, here in this world. Unknowingly Carole has taken her magic, unintentionally disrespectful of her secret sight, her brave battle.

Now I feel hurt, a misunderstood stranger. In pain. "Your roots need retouching," remarks Carole, brushing back her own, straight waist-length hair, "coffee?"

My womb aches. Heavy with blood. Ovaries engorged, swollen. The pain of my female condition. I taste the blood in my mouth. I swallow. Pain remains. A drop of blood falls onto the bathroom floor, it is thick, dark and clotted like melted chocolate, like the chocolate I have been gorging on, craving for, brighter blood smears the inside of my thighs. Chafes. Blood of my womb, the unfertilised egg swirls around in the flow. Red river...*Bleed bleed bleed bleeding red rivers sink in my skin back black black pain here again here again ache ache ache ache egg in my brain cracks open open open into my womb travelling down travelling down burst me open...*

This monthly madness. These changes of mood, which misogynists do not try to understand, just fear. Which lovers of women masochistically adore as it adds danger, venom to her voice, an exciting bitterness that yields from the secret, exotic world that is woman. Monthly madness, when a woman is more likely to commit murder.

After every monthly pain we forget. A pain unfair, yet we bear injustice well. We survive. Fluxing moods. Cycles. Circles. Connections. Changing moon.

....Lunar goddess, your silver fingers touch a chord within me. Wombs contracts. Distant pearl. Pain ceases for a moment. Your silver touch envelops delicate ovaries....

Carole is sleeping on the sofa. She stayed too late and did not want to risk danger in the dark. She does not realise that Carly is awake in the next room with a pain so intense, so crippling that she thinks it cannot possibly be period pain....face crumples up...a silent scream into the darkness...the room is too small...confined, claustrophobic...gets out of bed....ceiling tumbles...sweating.

I watch her from my dimension, translucent. The one she never sees. I feel her energies, vibrating in ripples. Hot then cold. The room is too small...finds herself on the floor. Sticking. Sinking. Thinks that she is going to die. "Call a doctor," she cries, too quietly, a croaky whisper, somehow shy, ashamed of calling for help. Perhaps she is poisoned, she thinks. Bad milk. Decayed meat. Stomach twists, writhes. Knots. Sweating hot then cold. Wet forehead. Makes her way, hunched, doubled, blind to the bathroom. Sits down, panting, moaning. Dizzy as her bowls empty their loose, liquid content...opens the door to where Carole is

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sleeping...must wake her...needs help....scared. She calls, "I think I need a doctor. Call a doctor." Carole stirs. Sits up, looks around...back in her bedroom writhes on the bed pulling at the neck of her t-shirt. Torment. Confined. Perhaps Carole did not hear her. "Carole?" Doubles up in the doorway of the front room. On her knees. "I need help," Carly says, "I've got period pains."

"Get a hot water bottle," Carole mumbles, lifting her head, then she lies her head back down, indifferent.

"I haven't got one. I haven't got anything," says the curled up figure, loud.....Carole ignores her. Cold blue eyes. Cold. Sweating. Hot...back in her room. A madness is running through her mind. Rejection. Loneliness. The room is too small. Voices, faces. Marie from the massage parlour with her sandy blonde hair. The dancer, laughing at her, poisoned. Stumbles into the bathroom.. Wet with perspiration...blood...shit. A tormenting madness. Deep rejection.

Surely I am dying. Surely I am dying. My family is destroying me with their silence. Crushing. I am not living. Nobody cares. Nobody cares about me.

Two hours, three, I am demented by pain. A savage state. After every monthly pain we forget. Shapes dance in front of me, upon the closed lids of my eyes; every foul memory and repulsion. Invisible forces are dragging me down. I am not free. I cannot fly.

I dream of a gypsy in bright skirts. A Romany spirit sitting by a fire. She is telling a story. There is a bright glint in her brown eyes, a glint of gold in her mouth. She says that gypsies were once birds. Beautiful birds flying freely over the land. Special birds with plumage that other birds envied. One day as they were flying they saw some birds below, geese and hens, calling them. Holding jewels of gold in their beaks. The special gypsy birds flew down to the ground to see the gifts the other birds were offering them. The geese and hens were welcoming and placed the gold around the gypsy birds' necks. Heavy chains bound them. They could no longer fly. They lost their wings yet kept their jewels and became destined to live upon the earth.

Chapter 14: India.

India is someone, had something that Aaron yearned for. I watch her dance and we drink together at the bar. We tease my slave. Laugh at him. Laugh at his socks and slip on shoes. "Don't even go there girlfriend," she holds up her hand up, shielding her eyes from his footwear. Suddenly she kisses me. Her lips are soft. She is exotic, arched eye-brows, a sallow complexion and brown skin.

She goes to dance school. Her work at 'Spank!Spank!' is good pay but she does not want to dance for these men much longer. She does not like men. She says that there is too much corruption here. Her name is India. That is what she says her name is. I have never met anyone like her.

"What do you think of me?" she asks, kissing me again on the lips.

"You are unique," I answer. She is still wearing her stage costume. A gold bra and g-string. She pulls back the g-string to show me her piercing, placing her little finger inside the ring. My attraction to her is intense. I cannot resist when she kisses me. She is twenty, very wise, tainted by working here. She puts her hand on my breast, to feel the ring around my nipple. She is overtly sexual, it is a potion, and it is all on the surface, oozing out at skin level. She is dangerous, untrustworthy, a prostitute. That is how I see her. She does not realise she is tainted this way. Her laugh is tainted. Why does she laugh? Why does she laugh like that?

She says that my tattoos are cool.

....Hanging around. I'm just hanging around. She's hanging around with India....

India shows Carly how to get the most out of her slave. They laugh at him-what a complete prick- as he is on his knees, doing whatever India says, kissing Carly's feet, giving them his money. India orders the slave to worship them. She feeds off of him.

India hands her the whip. She bends over, laughing, slapping her taugt buttock with her thigh, "Spank me....harder." Later they will beat the slave. They hate him. They will beat him and take his money just for fun.

India wears designer shades and funky fur coats.

Every night they go out. Taking things as far as they can. Taking things too far. The slave is their willing chauffer. They treat him like shit. He loves them for it. He loves to watch them together, so nasty. Blowing cigarette smoke in his eyes, twisting his tie tight around his throat. Slapping him, spitting at him when he is most smug and complacent, when he least expects it.

India gave him her panties to put in his mouth. They laughed at him choking on them. He is a sicko and they want to take all they can off of him. India stole his watch and credit cards.

India is Carly's new best friend. They never talk about normal things, or sadness, or relationships. They sleep most of the day. At night they go to the 'Voodoo Lounge' or 'Spank!Spank!' and have fun. India knows all the best people; designers, club owners. They can get in free to most places.

India makes her laugh until she cries.

Chapter 15: Danse Macabre.

Suddenly I am with her. She knows so much. She can just walk up to a guy and somehow will him to give her money. I cannot believe how sexy she is. Lying beside me at night with her nipple peeping out the top of her bra. I would not dare reach over and touch. She practices with her whip in her too-small attic room. The sun shines through the glass roof. Knee high PVC boots, hot pants, red plastic jacket, face devoid of make-up. She looks different without her mask of makeup. She talks to her father on the telephone. Her language is fast, convulsive. Sometimes she sounds like she is laughing with him. Sometimes she sounds like she is arguing. She tells him that she is doing well at college.

She transforms at night. I watch her putting on her mascara. She is a femme fatal.

Bright lights, she whips silhouettes and dances with phantoms of the shade. She is a spider woman weaving, conjuring, from the shadows. She performs a *Danse Macabre*, conjuring up money, fun and danger from the men who watch her. She is conjuring money, fun and danger for us to enjoy. At 'Spank!Spank!' men dress as women and women caress women. We come here at night among the bright lights, relentless rhythm and smell of amyl nitrate.

She knows everyone. The owner of 'Spank!Spank!' has got Sid Vicious spiked hair. Nose rings. He watches me with a psychic affinity and hard dark eyes with a glimmer of survival shining from their depths; Ruby the transvestite, in red feathers and fur, flirting around him and laughing like a devil. India introduces me to Dianna the dominatrix, who smiles with silver-painted lips. Dianna lends me her silver-handled whip. She brings her dogs into the club when it is quiet. They are lanky and long-faced and look like her.

When we drink and dance I feel flames rising higher inside. India gets jealous when the men watch me. India is self-righteous and self-serving. She has a callous ego, spite. Rising inside: I dance to the robotic rhythmic body beat. Not sexual now, but fearsome, a voodoo dancer amongst male thighs in stockings and skin-tight rubber red lesbians touching breasts around me. Sharp angular movements, lowering myself to the ground till crouched upon my haunches and sharp angular movements up again, eyes wide. All I can see is India. Her arched brows and tied-up hair sticking out of each side of her head like antennae; she is a hard survivalist, like an insect. She is potent and overpowering.

Sweating, wet in the heat, in the beat of the other dancers, a wasp's armour shields my feminine vulnerability. I sting. I sting myself with acidic sweat. I could erode anyone who touches me. Do not touch me. Do not touch me. My female form- this flesh, these breasts, these hips-hide an insect's thorn. I have a spike to lance a macho ego. I will sting. Adapt and survive. Focus energy. Target my poison. The wasp does not leave a jagged and bloody weapon behind like the kamikaze bee. One defence and it stumbles to its suicidal end, poor dead bees.

Chapter 16: Whiplashes and Weals.

We could have killed him. The club owner sent the slave away in a taxi. India cracked me hard on the thigh with the whip. She told me not to tell anyone. She left a mark on my skin.

The slave seemed to be spending more on her. He had started to take her to places without me, restaurants, the casino. I did not mind, though. I just liked being with her. She always had money to spend. The slave liked to be called names. He had pale blue eyes like my father. India stood on his chest in her spiky high heels and called him, "the piece of shit on the end of my shoe."

We were drinking whisky shots. The slave paid. More whiskey shots. There were only a few people left in the club. They had already locked the doors. The slave watched us as we got up on the stage, dancing darkly around the pole, teasing each other with the ends of our whips. India told him to get up on stage with us. She tied him to the pole with a leather chord. He was on his knees with his arms behind his back. I laughed as she slapped him across his cheeks. He wrestled one of his hands free and grabbed hold of her, lunging his arm around her small waist. India had to struggle free and kicked him with her pointed toe. He did not take us seriously. Our threat was diminishing.

I pulled his arm back behind him and tied him so that he could not escape. His hairy belly was hanging over his tight leather jockstrap and he still had on his socks and shoes. I whipped him across his face and belly, leaving red weals across pasty flesh. He started struggling and shouting, telling us to stop, so we tied a scarf as a gag around his mouth.

"I AM HELL. I AM FIRE. I AM FAIR. *You will feel my pain you bastard!*" India screamed, sitting on his chest. There was an unfamiliar look in his eyes, an expression of true terror. Blood seeped through fat tissue and white torn flesh. We became adrenalin-fuelled psychological tortures, ego dominated maniacs. We went too far.

Carly vowed to kill the abuser. Kill the abuser. Memory fuelled her thirst for vengeance. Carly, Carly, how many years? For how many years? She just thought they were games. Just games. She told no one. She did not even think that it was wrong. Blood upon blood upon scars. With every drop of blood, Carly's anger flowed red.

I lashed harder. Same pale blue eyes. My savage spirit was released. Blood upon scars, upon scars. He could not feel a thing. He was not even human. A male ego, tough as old gristle, not even feeling my sting. A monster. A monster accepting and unquestioning of the demonic power upon which it feeds. That power which terrorises, poisons the air with diseases, starts wars. He was hypocrisy, mistrust and abuse. Pale blue, alien eyes blind, groping, spurting semen and drowning sensitive feminine desire. A mutated image of my father. Same pale blue eyes. Same betrayal. The epitome of everything that I detest. He was the monster, the monster that fuels my fear. I, willing to fight to the death, fight lovers to the end.

Perhaps I am a doomed bee in defence.

It will never stop. Cary, stop...calm down. You must control your temper. Carly, stop, STOP.

I stopped. India had blood streaked across her cheek. I looked at the limp, lonely man dressed in leather thong, white socks and grey slip-on shoes and watched as India screamed into his face and dug her fingers into his cheeks. I felt a sudden sadness, imagining him going back to his gloomy bedsit. The room smelling of toilets and fish and chips. His wounds weeping. Where was his wife? His daughters? Where was that beautiful house in the suburbs? Why was he so alone? No money left, lacerated by his pretence. We had taken everything

Carly (part 2)

from him.

The club owner sat in a shady corner, drinking a beer. Perhaps with night vision he could sense me eyeing his lean, lone figure, frowning deeply beneath a dark brow, with a self-accepting dominance. He could sense that we had gone too far. "India, India!" he called. "*That's enough!*" he yelled. He dropped, or threw, his glass and vibrations of his aggression waved shivers and cold splinters down my spinal column. I felt frozen, stark, like a lightening-struck tree.

Chapter 17: Something Malevolent.

When performing, the stage lights hide her blemishes. Afterwards, she removes the decoration, the kohl, the gold rings. Closer, she has a round face, a face too old. She has track-marked arms, too dark around her eyes. Limbs thin, unusually small. In the night we touch. She is from some otherworldly plane, somewhere far from home.

She is too young, yet too old, deep lines around her eyes. She makes noises in her sleep like little orgasmic sighs. She asks me in the morning if I heard her making noises. She says that she has always done that ever since she was a little girl. She is silent, sultry, sex, sleep, and then bubbling, irritating chatter and laughter. Volatile and deceptive her mind and moods jerk with an angular unpredictability. Yet somehow her behaviour is not irrational. She skilfully weaves a pattern.

She laughs elfishly when I tell her that Aaron was my lover. She has a book of his Gothic short stories on her bookshelf. His photograph scrutinises me from the dust jacket of the book. Large, green Celtic eyes and dark hair of Heathcliff, of Byron. Always lonely, grieving and evil from the death of his mother. Rings on every finger. I recall his vicious jealousy and my attraction to his aggression. Violence we could feel. My own jealousy and his possessiveness were our equivalent to love. He always wanted this small, exotic dancing girl.

Webs, interconnections.

"You can tell him that you're a whore now," she says, the words are hard, her voice is soft. Like his soft Welsh voice. She reminds me of Aaron. Same vanity, same desire to control others. Like Aaron, her spirit makes her ugly. Something malevolent lurking beyond the hair and the twinkling eyes. Slightly unhinged. She argues with her father on the telephone.

Suddenly she is silent, sulky. She appears to be asleep. Have I upset her? Does she want to hurt me? A fever keeps me awake. Fever. There is a shadow like a web on the wall. She is centre and in control.

I am still alone. Her moods, an illusion, no, she cannot affect me. Alone, detached. She cannot reach me. She is a creature not of this Earth. Deceptive.

I go out alone, there is no reason why I should not. I meet the punky club owner. I go to his white, spacious flat in the rich area of the city. He is raw. Primitive. He has a dark expression. A knowledge of fear. Of confusion. Of repulsion. A firm tattooed stomach. He lives by night. He gives me a prickling of fear and sexual interest under my skin. No searching in his eyes for a sign that he cares for me, that he would want, maybe, 'a relationship'. No emotions. Only desire. I have not even kissed him. I know nothing of his past. I do not know his age. He is dark. Deep eyes. Something threatens inside them. His knowledge.

Not as detached as I thought. Sticky, confined, I hide beneath the bedclothes, drained of energy, avoiding accidental lashes, as the whip crack-cracks against window-pain, bookshelf, low sloping ceiling. She scuttles forth, black spider, danger. Dark eyes pull me under. She ties chords around me, weaving. She feasts upon my time, my spirit, to feed her hyperactivity, to keep herself young. The energy she steals is bad and turns her malignant. I cannot stand her thin fingers. Her sharp nails inside of me, somehow repulsive. She moves quickly. I lose sight of her. She reappears upon me, strange, foreign, making me laugh. Beautiful hair and twinkling eyes. Yet thin. Somehow unhealthy. During her adulthood she has become ill. Corrupt too soon within a corrupt adult world.

Unfair incarceration does something to the senses. Carly lies awake, fearful and restless. Fragments of unresolved problems floating, swirling inside of her, lodge in parts of her brain and behind her eyes; raging,

Carly (part 2)

eddyng, mad, bad particles through her blood. These problems were dismissed a long time ago as irrelevant, untrue, unreal. Yet the mad, bad particles have caused a suffering that is real. Fever. Fever.

Chapter 18: Serum.

India is bad for Carly. I am sure you agree. She is like a drug- giving her kicks, getting her addicted and tangled up in India's world.

He will untangle her; stroke her until she trusts him. No penetration. Just hours of precious fantasy, slow and unhurried. Helping to lessen her fear. No emotion to intervene, only a chemical sexual attraction; her desire, his psychic sexual sight. She sees him as her protector. Watches him take off his t-shirt, a lean muscular torso, a pierced nipple. 'TAKE' - black italic letters tattooed in two crescents above and below his navel like a street gangster- 'CONTROL.'

Her dominator helps cool her fever.

Carly is a city savage; wings on her shoulder blades. He strokes her till she is tame. He watches the veins and muscles on her strong neck as she stretches back her head. He follows the line of her spine down. The snake winds around her bicep. Dipping her lower back, she moans, deeply and low, low, a primal growl of yearning.

On her knees, offering herself to sex, offering herself to him. She is summoning Eros to descend. Eros will guide them from the ordinary tonal realm of existence to that of sexual imagination. She respects him. He is her dominator. She is a slave girl, rings on her nipples. No one dominates him. Her candlelit skin looks smooth, perfect from where he is standing. The heat rises again inside her. Only sometimes she feels whole.

India is jealous. Her jealousy makes her ill, unbalanced. The green monster twists green, slimy fingers around her heart, weakening her. Over this she has no control. India is ill. She is not eating again. She is green and spiteful. India is frightened of her father. He will take her. Take her away from here. The only way she can escape is if she takes pills or cuts her wrists. She moans, like a child alone, stroking her thin fingers over the marks on her arms.

My dominator, chain my neck. Lead me around. Your middle finger is inside of me. You look into my eyes. Something threatens in your eyes. Dominator, try and destroy me. Tell me that I am wrong. Tell me that you are always right. Tell me that I am beautiful. Tell me that I am yours...

He spends the nights running the club. It is something that he knows about. He knows these girls. He knows their games. He spends some time reading, usually biographies of dead rock stars like Cobain, Joplin. He knows a lot; more than people think because he does not speak that much. He understands the power-play between sexual partners. He knows about the psychosexual need for domination and submission, either subtle or overt, which must be dealt with carefully, correctly, sensitively, even if the need is paradoxically pain. He knows that it has to be the right kind of pain at the right time. He understands the brutality of sex. He knows that pain and arousal are not only physical.

Now, he looks down on me, unsmiling. I am on my knees. He makes me want to take him in my mouth....

....But, no, I must return, I must return....

India has become mad with jealousy. She tastes bitter and repellent. She does not like me meeting him like this. Then, when she sees my anger, she runs, crouching, in a dark corner, refusing to speak or listen. She locks herself in her bathroom for hours, crying. I have never heard her cry before.

The door is wide open and I run downstairs.

Carly (part 2)

India waits in the street, lying on the pavement. Someone holds her arm and tells her that the ambulance is coming. India is sick on the concrete. Barfing-up anti-depressants. She is sick.

When I get outside, the ambulance is already there. Some people, passers-by are standing around her. Then she is gone. She did not get in the ambulance, she just disappeared. The paramedics drive off into the city, annoyed that their time has been wasted, again, on this busy Saturday night.

The pain to India is like a serum, an inoculation. She will feel the illness in a mild bout, become ill, then she will regain strength. Get stronger. She will not die, she will just crouch, hide, scuttle, move on.

Chapter 19: Fantasy Figure.

He takes the black studded collar from the inside of the wardrobe door and the leash on the hook next to it. He walks towards her, brushing back her hair. She feels soft, feminine, poison and spikes are hidden beneath curves and smooth skin. He likes her aggression. Now he is oppression. He is her knight in shining leather come to untie her from a small, dark spider's web. He places the collar and chain around her neck.

Beneath, Carly knows little about him.

I can tell you a little of what I know. He is the son of a suicide. Beaten by his stepfather. They made him live in the basement. Starved, stripped down. So stark without love. He got beaten up so badly that he was taken away from them at twelve years old. No shoes on his feet until the age of twelve so his feet have grown wider than usual. When he was twelve he got to learn to read and write. When his mother died he knew that it was his fault. His evil thoughts. She did not want him.

Dominator, Sir, I am your maid. On my knees, Sir. I clean, I cook yet you never thank me. It is not good enough, just not good enough. On my knees I offer to feed you, wipe your hands clean. Lick your fingers clean. I scrub the floor and you spank me, Master. On my knees, I beg you, Sir. I am begging you.

At fifteen he was going to clubs dressed as a girl so the men would buy him drinks. He would take drugs and have visions on the dance floor until he felt stronger than anyone. For years he took pills and potions, danced to survive. On every lonely comedown, he would brood and nurture a dark beast inside; that is what he called it. He could see it sometimes, a dark monster swirling around him on the dance-floor. He has lived with the lowest of the low. He has shared squats with crack heads and prostitutes. One girl he knew showed him a passport photo of a pretty, smiling woman. He could not believe that the sickly waif holding the photo was the same person. In that time he did some bad things, saw some bad things.

When I am aching, when you sense my strong desire, you refuse me and watch me suffer. I am on my knees and you refuse. You turn away with a square set jaw. On my knees I am opening up. Something opening up inside. Wet through my silk. Wet through my lace. Dark dominator. Never weak. Never too kind. Your ego humiliatingly indomitable. Use me. I am yours. Use me.

Later, he went over to Amsterdam and began an apprenticeship in the domination clubs. He learnt the art of acting out fantasies; learnt that sex pays and that high class women got off on him, a punk rock boy. He spent his time earning good money. He respected the women who came to him. They had the courage to tell him what they wanted. He would put on a mask or a hood, gloves, boots. He could alter his hair, his clothes. He was always Master, a fantasy figure. Sometimes they wanted him to be a rapist. A pimp. It was easy like that. No emotions to interfere and money for it too.

Tied up. Face down. Legs apart. You will not release me. I try to free myself. Then I start to pull, to tear away from you. You are at the foot of the bed, hands on hips, watching me struggle. I need to pee. It is not a game anymore. Release me. I arch the small of my back upwards.

One woman in her fifties had her hair done especially for the occasion. Her husband knew. She liked him to rip off all her clothes. Pull her down. "No," she cried, as she fell to the floor. Black mask and leather. No emotions. Emotions are difficult. They make you lose control. So, it was easy. He was young and strong. He knew he was good at it. He held her down. Imagined he was with someone else. Someone attractive. He could visualise her. Brown eyes, not blue like his stepfather's. No, brown eyes, like his. White stockings. Long headdress. His bride. She has been taught that she is only loveable if submissive. Born of a cruel father. Jealous and dirty. Dirty. Dirty, that is what they called him, that is what they screamed at him.

Carly (part 2)

He loved her before they had met.

The woman's manicured hands reached towards the tattoos on his stomach, the one thing that he could not change. "Don't touch," he said quiet, nasty. She softly groaned as he placed her arms behind her head and tied them with a leather strap.

Vent your vexation upon me. I resist you. I resist you although the wetness between my legs betrays my defiance. You hold me down. Put your fingers inside. It hurts. Hold my head back by my hair. I am yours. Your child. Your victim. Reject me. Hit me. Hold me down. Tell me what to do. Tell me I am wrong. I am wrong. Tell me I am bad. Gently kiss me. I am yours. Tell me I am yours. Forever. I am yours . Kiss me. My breasts. My hair. Call me a bitch. A dyke. A horny bitch. I resist you. I want you. I resist you.

Afterwards, you are respectful. When I meet again, you are respectful.

He thinks that Carly is beautiful. Perfect because she is imperfect. Inked and pierced. He can do it better, the best, to reach that crux of humiliation and adoration; both the psychological and physical point of orgasm.

He is beginning to care for her. He has always cared for her. He is finding it hard to use her. Emotions are spilling over, pouring into and polluting lust. He wants to be human, not some fantasy figure. Some piece of meat. He wants to make love as lovers. Brown eyes, there are storms in her dilated pupils. He kisses the small of her back, gently. Touches her so lightly, so gently. Her breathing is heavy and he can hear her fear in every breath. So sweet. The scent of his fingers, so sweet, so sweet. The taste of her, like honey and the sea.

You said it would be like my first time, just like my first time.

She sounds like a baby. He wants to hear her moan again. He holds her in his arms and she shudders, breathes fear and arousal. Holds her close and safe. He makes her come with his fingers. Wraps her in a black fur coat. She takes his hand and her tongue caresses the tips of his fingers. He acts like he wants to protect her.

They have found each other, clawing in the dark. What does he have to offer her? Protection? Violence? Love?

Chapter 20: Sun.

Hold your head in my arm. On my breast. Kiss your head. Over and over. Little baby, baby.

He knows about my inner fire. The first time that we make love as lovers I am afraid, afraid that my fire will burn and destroy. The first time that we make love as lovers I cannot bear penetration. I cannot kiss his mouth. Fears stream back along well-worn paths of the sexual subconscious; the male sexual urge, that selfish desire, that self-centred sexual urge which forces ego, body and mind into underworlds of lust and danger.

He ejaculates in my bed, over my hand, my sheets. At that moment, I feel cheap and used, even though he has not penetrated. At that moment, faces flash through my head. Faces of past fucks, images of men who have pursued me- disrespecting and ignoring my will with their false, degrading image they have of me; their degrading image of all women. Quick gropes. Talking to me in the guise of friendship. Following me. Frightening me. No one would believe me. They would say that I am just unfortunate. Unlucky. A while ago, at dusk, I saw a dark silhouette of a man approaching me on the street and I crossed over the road. I did not consciously fear him although I did cross the road before I really needed to, earlier than I would have done if he were not there. As I walked away the man shouted, "It's all right, love, I'm not going to rape you or anything."

So, so, thoughtless.

I feel as though I have been raped. I am a single woman, fair game in their eyes. Meat-heads. They goad me thoughtlessly with their lump of sexual meat. No care for me, no care for my fear or safety, and all beneath a mask of amiability. Always betrayed.

Just for a moment, just a moment, do I feel this way as his cock pumps and secretes a warmth unexpectedly into my hand. The thoughts then vanish from sight, the hurt, the fear, thoughts streaming back along well-worn paths of the subconscious. Along paths engrained in my mind, thoughts run back, hide. Then I kiss his forehead. Run a hand through his spiky hair. Sweet punk. I place another kiss on the top of his ear where it is pierced.

"I wish I could desensitise myself to the pain," I stroke my fingernail along the lettering on his stomach.

"You have to have pain to survive," he answers, kissing my hair, "it's the body's natural warning system."

It seems that we wake simultaneously. He is warm and comfortable company in bed. I touch the bristles on his chin with my fingertips; rub my face against them like a cat. He places a light kiss on my nose. I kiss his nose. Then I am curled around him, arms cradling, maternal. Now, my face is on his chest, his arm around me, touching my hair. A man. This man exists as beauty, as a specimen of man beyond the boundaries of media imagery dictating what is sexy, and what is not; beyond those bounds of plastic, sanitised society.

The next time that we make love as lovers I have no emotional inhibitions. I kiss his stomach, on each letter of his tattoo. I know the pain he endured to receive the inked designs so I kiss him better. *TAKE CONTROL*. I kiss him on the mouth, for the first time. His tongue is pointed, probing between my lips, forcing my mouth open, then it touches the thick metal bar of my piercing. He can feel the metal passing through the flesh. He lies on his back and I straddle his strong, straight erection. Slowly he moves over till he is on top of me. He is looking into my eyes and placing his penis back slowly inside of me. He is speaking to me without words. I lose all strength. I cannot move. I am weak, placid. *I have taken you, you are mine*, he seems to speak from a primeval silence, a psychic sexual sight. He holds me down. Hands on my shoulders. I am his woman.

Carly (part 2)

"Say my name."

He whispers my name again and again. I, Carly, who was invisible, unwanted, a grey cloud. He whispers my name. His skin is wet, my fingers outstretched upon his back. I hear the sound released from my throat. It is my voice yet I cannot control it. He is whispering, "Come, come."

I like the feel of my smooth skin against his rough chin. He twists my navel ring and I kiss his pierced nipple. He places a hand around my neck. I am aroused as his fingers press tighter against my throat. He sits up, abruptly, accidentally scratching my skin with his nail as he jumps out of bed. He turns the rock music up on the radio and dances around the room.

Start at the neck. Move down to his shoulders, his back. At first, coldness shudders through me, perhaps memory of Suzanne's clients, as my balmed hands massage my lover's strong body. Perhaps the cold is from his past. Soon, the callisthenics warm frozen areas. *Heart mind womb*. A warmth blossoms from my solar plexus, not the fire of anger, a different heat. I concentrate on pleasing him. Smooth, oiled hands across buttocks, calves. He sighs, groans from his throat. Thumbs press hard in circles down the legs. Then I massage his feet, his duck feet, wider at the top. He loves to have his feet touched, tickled, his toes played with. His arms hang lazily over the side of the bed. I spend a long time massaging his feet. Energy is running between us. I search for tense knots in his muscles then knead them firmly, as hard as I can, whilst the exotic aromatherapy oil helps disperse the tension. "Harder," he mumbles, relaxed. I undo the knots. I concentrate solely on caring for his body and in doing so am purging negative energies from myself. I work hard to please him. Our hearts pulse. Afterwards, we are both relaxed. I enjoy the massage, the tiredness, the satisfaction and the intimacy. A mutual pleasure.

...My god meets your god. My goddess meets your goddess. I smile a mad smile. Man. Woman. You smile. Crazy smile that seems to shift between us. Prick. Cunt. Balance of power shifts too. Till androgyny. Your spirit is inside me. I am you. You are me...

Outside: orange autumn sun. He says that he sees a sycamore seed falling in my iris.

I live for times like these. Precious, precious moments. Good times, lulls, cancel out all bad, all guilt and loneliness. I am sailing on another lever. We want to sail forever, never die. My lover, my friend. I am open, I tell him secrets.

My teenage years. The constant arguments with my father, which I felt did not affect me at the time; the arguments, and the making up afterwards, our only form of communication. A longing to become a woman, to be like my friends, to be normal. The longing for my periods to start. The unbearable ache of developing breasts. My mother refusing to acknowledge that my body was changing, not thinking that she should buy a bra. Then, two years later, the elation of wearing my first bra. Hours in front of the bathroom mirror. The longing to become a woman. Dressing in short skirts, high-heels and too-much makeup....I want to tell him everything. I want to tell him too much.

I lie naked on my back, we speak and laugh. I feel so healthy, light. Everything has changed. I have a future. A future with someone. He sleeps and his breath reverberates comfortingly as I lay my head on his chest. The noise is deep like religion. There are words, meanings in his breath.

Chapter 21: Darkness.

"Spread your legs, *wider*," the operation occurs in candlelight. He holds the razor blade to the vulnerable skin. Meticulously, seriously and with authority, he shaves until I am smooth and bare. The sight arouses him.

An exposed and vulnerable Carly. He tells her that he loves her. Carly is confused and silent. She knows that she loves him yet remains silent. She just looks into his eyes. His feelings are a raw, alive entity. Something she must not harm. She holds his head in her hands and says, "I don't want to hurt you, ever."

IT WAS NOT MY FAULT. IT WAS NOT MY FAULT. IT WAS NOT MY FAULT. Cannot stand the sun, this sun. too bright. Too bright for my darkness.

"Fuck off! I don't believe you. I don't believe you. Leave me alone." I remove my mask, my armour. See, now, I am scarred. Wounds have been covered by creeping layers of time. A disfigurement. Beneath the thin, stretched outer skin, half grown layers weep, encrusted and ill. The wound still blisters, bubbles up sometimes. The pain is like the first pain felt.

"It's not me you're talking to, is it?" he says, "who're you talking to? Who did this to you, my baby?" He stays.

I was abused. He tells me that it is not my fault. I know. I was abused. I will always be affected. The violation has left me damaged. My father did not respect me. My anger merges from the frustration of being rendered powerless. There was nothing I could do. I did not know. I did not know that it was wrong. Even the power of my own emotions was, is, denied. Feelings disrespected, trivialised, belittled; made to feel ashamed of my anger. The pressure inside, the forbidden rage, cannot help but escape. Anger is one extreme reaction. Another is the terrible haunting of depression. Colours everything. Colours everything grey. My nights in the flat by the pet shop where the hole from my violation attracted negativity, all bad, all evil, floating in a stagnant pool. The white ice of loneliness. No sight of the future. The wind blowing against the window. Too cold, too dark. Too unhappy.

IT WAS NOT MY FAULT. Yet, I felt, I was made to feel that I was the only one who had done something wrong.

I am not the same as you.

The effects of abuse will always remain. Touched, tainted, soiled. Bullied, held down, held back, harmed. Self esteem stolen and broken. A fight to get back the pieces and rebuild. Smashed mirror, chipped fragments. Dangerous shards like needles, knives.

I am not the same as you. I was abused.

"I know people," he says, "I could get someone to hurt him, friends of mine, outlaws. Dark angels."

Look at all the cracks. Never be the same. I have changed. My world has changed. "I've been through a lot of shit. Could've broke me," he murmurs, huskily, "I used to cry a lot but not much anymore."

Chapter 22: Mother.

Carly's father is sitting at the kitchen table. "She is haunting me in my dreams," he says.

"Don't be silly," Carly's mother answers. Then does not listen to him anymore.

Mum, do you love me? Will you hug me? Will you make me a soothing cup of tea when I cry? Fall on my knee. Will you feed me soup when I am ill? Mummy, will you feed me? Feed me my favourite food? Slices of homemade pizza, pineapple upside down cake, hot chips in the evening of a seemingly never-ending summer's day? But mother. I have not seen you for such a long time. Hugs are precious in a lonely adult world. When ill, I am ill and alone. And now, you do not even know what my favourite food is.

Again the pain is like the first pain felt. Betrayal. I feel isolated once again.

Sweeping, dusting. She is always sweeping, dusting the house but the children never come home. We never come home. *"My home will always be their home," she says, come home.* Sweeping, dusting it all under the carpet. She makes the tea and the pressure builds up. *The pressure.*

"You can't hide it, mum." I remember telling her on the phone.

I tried to explain to her how hurt I felt inside and she said, "Just forget it, can't you? Don't let yourself rot away."

Then just screaming. "Rot away?" I screamed, "*ROT AWAY?!"*

Now we do not speak. I have not seen her since last Christmas. The day after Christmas day. I miss her. Like she is dead. But she is not dead. I have tried not to think about her. Then a birthday card. *'All my love, sweetheart,'* and signed by her, bought by her, his best wishes signed in proxy by her. I would visit if he was not there. Patriarchal figure. My mother would not recognise me. My world when I was with her, when I thought she loved me, before the realisations, the revelation, is now a barely recalled memory of naivety. Simple innocence. An old reality that will never come back, such foreign terrain. I can never go back there. We would talk, drink tea. I would kiss her cheek, put my arm around her shoulders. She was never cruel to me.

Why did she take the side of my father?

I imagine trying to reason with him, asking him, "Why?" Showing him how hurt, how damaged I am. I wonder if he ever thinks of me. But then I realise. Then I remember. It is no use. He does not care. He has an alien mind.

Sweeping, dusting, there are only clues to his abuse. She is always sweeping it under the carpet. Swept with obscure dust are abuse, ghosts, memories and emotions too real or too extreme.

I am the volcano, the spark, the aggressor, the carpet puller-outer. The bravest and the most hurt.

I am haunting him in his dreams.

Chapter 23: Autumntime.

Veil my truth

And drink my blood

My dragon-vermin

Butterfly.

Hail my oath

And seep my brow

In autumntime

And honey.

Chapter 24: Birthday.

"Why didn't you tell me before!" he asks, holding Carly's chin on his fingertip, "I could've got you a present."

"It's OK," she says, "I have an acorn from Artemis." Carly is acting strange and intense. Her lover understands. There was no one there to hear him cry either. "I don't want nothing from nobody," she says quietly, sincerely." He stokes his fingers across her neck. His hand closes and his grip pushes her jaw upwards until she is forced to look at him.

"Don't be frightened," he kisses her forehead where she frowns. She is always wet. He is always hard.

"A paradox," he tells her, touching her skin gently. Her want for independence, her willingness to be alone is strong. Her reluctance to ask for help is disturbing yet her silent demand for adoration, attention and a longing to be cared for is all possessing. She apologises for her anger yet he likes her rage. It is real. She is a paradox. Her complexity yet her simple needs. Her peace, her cool; yet her pique and passion. Her darkness yet her innocent joy, her light. Her child-like reactions to kindness, her sexual reaction to cruelty. On her birthday she dresses like a woman. She wears white stockings. On her birthday she reacts like a woman as she holds red wine to her lips.

"Love you," he says. His voice is deep and rich like wood. Like oak. That vulnerable alive thing, love, emotion, that quivering entity, is between us now, exposed.

Chapter 25: Marry Me.

Drink with me

My sugar Queen

In Cupid's

Bow and harmony,

Love my truth

My veiled lame

Bluff

In pools

And webs

Of tragedy.

Mystic maiden,

With caustic sight,

Cast down your vow

And marry me,

I will let you sleep

And heal your sorrow

In your world that is woman,

And when I see you,

A wondrous child,

I will seal the chasm that is shame

With pride.

Chapter 26: Forever.

Sex, friendship, adoration, exploration. They are drifting timelessly. There is a thin film around them, like a bubble. It is weaved from the same substance that angels are made of. Molecules of belief, trust and hope. It feels that they can live like this forever. Cocooned within the bliss, Carly's lover has proposed.

Already I am here, his white spacious flat, adapting to sharing life with another. Curled in his arms, becoming a part of him. Already I obey. And I love him. I love him. Yet, marriage is a war-zone where love is killed. And then over the years, no more fighting, just silence, secrets, mundane life. I do not want this passion to die.

Last time he held me together. I broke down yet he held each piece of me together until I was whole again. He did not judge me wrongly for my anger. He enveloped me in warmth; waves of affection lapping around me, washing all the bad things away.

Carly wants to be with him forever. It feels as if they will always be together, yet her concept of marriage is sullied by her parent's dysfunctional relationship. The taunts of her father, as he endeavoured to hide his own insecurities. Her mother's rejection of him. They never kissed. She had never seen them kiss. Her father would try to touch her mother, hold her, yet she would pull away. Carly would be watching. Seeing. Then at night she would put her child's ear to the door, listening to the arguments. Her father's voice raised in anger, "Love! Love! You don't know the meaning of the word!" She loved mummy.

Chapter 27: Love and Malice.

His question of marriage remains unanswered, lies just beneath the surface. Itching. Uncomfortable. Just beneath the surface. Like an old wound. Like rejections in his unknown past kept hidden. Like my inability to communicate normally and reasonably with those I care about. A lot lies beneath the surface. Like magic concocted from dark drug-comedowns. Like dark deals in his unknown past. Like confusion. Tangled reality. Knots.

We make love. I cry. A silence which seems wrought with irritation. Yet perhaps I am imagining it, the effect of past disrespect, of emotions belittled, seen as inappropriate, irrelevant. Perhaps I am expecting it. My father was always so angry with me. Why was he always so angry with me? "Are you angry with me?" We have become close. We are too close and my sight is blurred. I cannot see with rationality. I am detached. I am spiky, drifting, threatening to lance the invisible seal that surrounds us. I am drifting from the oasis. "You are, aren't you? Don't you want me? Don't you want me anymore?"

An itch. An itching, irritating silence as he turns his back. "I've made a cup of tea." I place the cup down on the dresser by the side of the bed.

"Thanks." He chokes on the word. It gargles in his throat. And I sink further and further.

"If you don't want me here I could go. Take my stuff and go. I don't care. I don't care if you want to finish. It's all right with me. It doesn't mean anything to me. Sex. No, it's all the same. You're all the same." It is my fault. I am argumentative, trivial, picky. Pick. Pick. Picking at words to gain control, whilst I am losing it. He is swallowing me. Desperate, stupid, using words like knives. Sapping his strength to restore myself. Pick. Pick. Picking at words as I cling on to power. It is in my head, this power that he takes from me every time he enters then withdraws from my body, leaving me pink and open.

Carly is testing him. Testing if he really cares for her. Testing how far she can push him before he pushes back.

My inner defences have reappeared. I can no longer feel the pleasure of his kindness. He may allow me to trust, and then rip that trust from my grasp again. He may be playing a sick mind game. My sword, my shield, guards me from attack, betrayal. I put on the iron mask of the wasp. I can never trust. Abuse has robbed me. We have become too close and I read too much into every gesture. I wonder where he has been, who he has seen. Who he has fucked.

Fighting. Always fighting. Fighting her lovers. Fighting her father. Fighting herself (self hate versus survival). Fighting depression. Fighting oppression. She is afraid. She fears her lover leaving her, hating her, harming her. This fear, this insecurity manifests itself as malice, madness. Deep, deep down she cannot trust men, therefore finds it hard to love. She feels that she will be abused again and her words or violence defend that powerless, ill-treated self.

There is a worrying silence. Lying beneath the twisted sheets. Still, defiant, like me. Picking at silence, waiting for a voice. And I sink further and further. That alive thing, love, emotion, is between us, pushing us apart. The tea stands untouched. A skin forms on top. And I wait. I wait for it. I lie next to him on the bed, his back is like a wall. I stroke along the shape of his body beneath the white cotton shroud.

He gets out of bed and puts on a t-shirt. An unexpected chill, something like rejection, something like sacrifice, shivers dangerously, down my spine. The bed is soiled; crumbs and dust. My self-esteem deteriorating. "Where are you going? Why are you hurting me?" I plead.

Carly (part 2)

"I'm not hurting you. You just feel hurt. You're beautiful," he says. Then he turns away. He is making strange shivering noises. He starts to leave. I feel a sudden surge of attraction. I love him. I love his eyes. I jump up and grab the neck of his t-shirt, tearing the collar.

"I don't want you to go," I pull him towards me.

So, clouds gather, his mood darkens as she drives him to an anger to match her own. Happiness, safety, stability, the luxury and comfort of a loving relationship are lost in her storm.

He leaves and I lock the door. Lock myself away from him. In foetal position, I curl, for a day, a day and a half. Degeneration, darkness. Darkness behind a locked door.

Carly hates herself for pushing him away.

He knocks on the door. Knocks again. I let him into the room then curl up again and hide my head. He has shaved off his dark, spiky hair to a severe skinhead style. He has brought me a cup of coffee. I sit up, take a sip, then throw the coffee to the ground. The cup does not smash but hot, volatile liquid flails across the wall, ceiling, bed. His face is hard like a mask, painted red with anger. I jump up and hit him across the temple with my knuckles. He grabs hold of my wrists and pulls me down onto the bed. He is on top of me. Holding me down. He speaks so quietly, so quietly. Quiet and nasty, like a pimp to a whore, "Don't fight me, don't you ever fight me. I'm out of your league, baby." He will not let me go and I try to struggle. I can feel his cock hard, pressing against me. "No," he says, so quietly-almost kindly- that it turns me on, "no, don't you fight me. Don't you ever fight me." He roughly pulls down my knickers whilst holding one of my arms back. He is thrusting his pelvis into me, his cock hard, straining inside his jeans. He has psycho eyes as he kisses my mouth, bites my bottom lip and smiles. He opens my legs, holding my knees apart with his legs in between. "Is this what you want?" he asks, whispers, almost snarls, "is this what you want?" There are tears on his eyelashes. He looks like a runaway child, a deviant teenager. He is so handsome. I feel guilty for my lack of trust.

Dominator- dominate me.

We are shadowy, twilight creatures, two animals fighting in the depths of the night. One on one. Real. Raw. It hurts. There is no one here to see us transform. Struggling, we are two creatures in the shadows of the night. A violent past, psycho eyes. And a mad smile to each other. One on one. We touch. It is like a fight. He holds me down. We entwine naked upon the bed. "No, no," I cry, cry real tears as he pins back my arms. I kick out, yet think, a voice in my head says, *take me if you can, rape me if you want*. He pulls my defiant limbs. He turns me on. Turns me around. Crazy eyes and shadowed jaw. He looks so bad. That is why it is so good. The tip of his tongue explores me.

"Do you trust me?" he asks.

"No," I am defiant and I push him away as he holds his snaky tongue inside my mouth. He holds me down and tries and tries and tries again. It is like a fight. *My wild strong man, take me if you can, rape me, rape me if you want*. Nails graze. I bite his shoulders. I cut deeper, deeper lacerations into his shining skin. He moans, grunts, the sound of an animal in pain. Veins protrude from his tense, muscular neck, pumping blood to the mask with the psycho eyes. There is a sudden tightness, a painful churning in my stomach, my ovaries. A sword is thrusting inside, stinging. He has lanced me. I scream, then smother sobs as I grip his shoulder in my jaw, growling, noises forced out with the pounding, pounding of his hips.

One on one. There is no one here to see us change. From human form to animal to spirit. It is raw and real. He is my demon. My god. Just a piece of meat, pounding, pounding. In the twilight he changes again. He could

Carly (part 2)

be anyone. Any one of those men, those strangers. We transform. We are fantasy animals from the mythical planes of good and evil. There is no one here to see us change. He is a beast with winged arms, falling upon me as I growl and snarl and bite. Beneath this human guise, stripped of flesh and bone, we are beasts of the ether of our imagination, of the night, emerging from unknown dominions. There is no one here to see us change. Two animals entwine.

I hold him close. Like a mother to a son; like a sister to a brother, like a gangster to a gun, like a lover to a lover.

I touch his scalp. Wet with perspiration and his shaved head so soft like a baby. *What a bad, bad baby. What a bad, bad boy. What a beautiful man. You are my beautiful man.* He clings to me. I put my arms around his strong back. Two strangers holding tight together, lost upon a spinning world. And I am sure I heard him whisper, "Please make it safe, please make it safe."

"You're a man, you're a man." No regrets at all.

I light a cigarette. It is getting light. I have a bruise. Streaks of semen, blood upon my skin. They seep into my pores, disappear. We smoke and do not speak. A train rolls through the city in the distance. I will always remember this twilight time with him. I will always remember this night.

Chapter 28: The Abused Abuse.

Is it true that the abused often become the abuser? That the abused abuse? If so, I could never marry. My husband would become my enemy. I would abuse him, accuse him. I would have no peace of mind. I would goad him to anger. Drive him to hit me. I would fight back. Within the vicious circle my self-esteem would flounder further and I would feel that the beatings were deserved. The fighting would continue until divorce or death. The children would witness the aggression. Children, silent victims of the bitter battles; rejected, neglected, unable to be heard above the angry noise.

I can never have children. This is my sacrifice. The abused abuse. I fear that I would taint them, unleash my temper, unleash what is hidden even from myself. A cruel legacy. I will not inflict the legacy onto a child. I will remain unmarried, childless. I will break the circle, stop the cycle, snap the chain. *Break, snap, God, it hurts.* But that is the truth, that is real, of course it hurts. I accept it, yet sometimes I am bitter. My father has harmed me. I am hurt, raw, right down to the nerve, to the bone, to the heart.

Chapter 29: Dear Father....

Father, father, I am just like you. I am a liar. A hypocrite. Just like you. I must be like you. Father, you are creator of some part of me. You paint me in your own colours in your own mind's vision of me. My life somehow sprang from shades of you. I leapt like a spark, like a flame, from your own anger and hate and love and sadness. Father, father, you are a god. A patriarchal god. Your authority is oppressing. Crushing freedom. Your invisible male ego is insidiously dominating.

I am like you. Of course I am. I am whatever you say.

We are linked. Our minds. We are together. Together we know the truth. I no longer care about the damage, the damage to this family. You do not care either. I will deny it. You will deny it. No more blame, it is gone. It is all gone.

I see you in the crowd. And I see right through you. Yet you do not know this. That I have always seen through you, deceptive and selfish. Beneath your public mask, blue eyes reveal suspicion and fear; insecurities that make you want to dominate the vulnerable, the weak, the child and the woman. To you, women are not real. Not really part of the real world. They should be subjugated, feelings, life, sucked out of them, until controlled. Until they are just giant cut-outs from magazines pasted over a background of myth; two-dimensional images, stereotypes with no faculty to feel. There is still a hint of smugness on your face and a false snap-shut smile. We will waste no time. You have no love to give me. I will not waste my affections on you or try to earn your love. I will waste no time in trying. Together we know the truth. We know what is barren, sterile.

This is all a fast river of thoughts, fluxing, flowing through me and by the time I reach you I am smiling. It has been a long time since I last saw you and now we speak. You look older, talk slower. It sounds as if you are play-acting to make me pity you. You are still pompous, authoritarian as your condescending gaze flicks pale blue eyes across the people walking by. People that you are afraid of, that you are apart from and cannot communicate with.

We could be two strangers. No warmth, no closeness. No true shared humour. Yet there is a bond. Together we know the truth. We laugh falsely, uncomfortably at your attempts at light-heartedness. You do not even recognise my own attempts at jocularly. We are special. More estranged than strangers. Yet our blood is the same. I can talk much easier to the man at the bus stop, in the queue at the supermarket, a one-night stand, a taxi driver, than I can to you, my own father.

I expect the lightening to cross your pale blue eyes to rekindle that childhood fear. None comes. You are silent now. Age has mellowed you. Your hair is frosty, grey like the cold pavement, like the concrete.

Winter now, almost a year since I saw you. And since then, many transformations. How I have witnessed my own transformation! My reflection in my mirror, sometimes my only companion, my only proof that I still exist as human, not a soulless cloud; my image in shop windows, car mirrors, flashing disco walls sometimes fractured, sometimes distorted.

I touch the grey curls on your temple. Where I touch, you disappear in thin, grey flames, smoke and clouds. Father: you ghost, you phantom. Your pale, blue eyes get paler still. You are disappearing. A white light floats around us. I am just like you. Destructive and a hypocrite just like you. You are disappearing. I touch your green, checked jacket. It curls into air, in grey swirls, disintegrates rapidly into nothing. Can we bear this separation, daddy? Wings beat thunder from an angry cloud. The white light engulfs you.

Carly (part 2)

I have been haunting you in your dreams.

Carly's spirit floating in the dream sphere, travels upwards, onwards. Romany spirit, soaring like the bird she once was many incarnations ago. Away, away from pain, from blood, from bones, from flesh, from lust. Her spirit, something pure, travels to safety, to peace. There is a seashore. She walks along the beach picking shells from rock pools. Gypsy spirit. Proud, free. Never lonely. The sea hush, hushes. Naked, timeless child spirit. Salt wind breathes through her hair.

Shh, shh, I will flee now, flicker off, leave my dear Carly and rest upon my cloud spun of belief and hope. I hope, I hope, to be there for her when she wakes. I am her guardian angel and she needs me more than ever before. I have told all her secrets to you. It is the only way I could make them real. You must keep them. Keep them safe.

Chapter 30: Interconnections.

An email. We never talk anymore and now this. An email. She never sends emails. Strange.

Carly,

I tried to phone you and Laura tried to phone you and your phone's not switched on or you've changed your number. Sweetheart, Justin went to your flat and they said you'd moved. You didn't tell me. Carly, sweetheart.

A clot has stopped his heart. My father is dead. He died in his sleep. I killed him. I killed him in my dream.

Stare up at the ceiling. Follow the cracks like rivers, streams.

My father is dead.

I remember how Laura and I would sit side by side on her bed before we went to school. My father would brush our hair gently, very gently.

Carly (part 2)

Chapter 31

The End.

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