

A Body Made of You

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Melissa Lee-Houghton

Penned in the Margins

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is a selection of poems written for other writers, artists, strangers, lovers and friends.

Thank you to all the sitters for allowing me to write their portraits.

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To Steven

A Body Made of You

STEPHEN

King-mask

There's room for carelessness; bodies
thrown like Jekyll's teeth.
There are bones stuck in, boners
that never came and your name
screwed in a letter.
I'd wire it to a bomb.
Age hasn't aged you but I fear
your body over the back of a chair,
a rat nibbling your ear. Will you
be announced, to me? I came
from Hades, waltzing black, for irony.
I couldn't stand the sound of lyres or
loves — we ate steak but what we needed
was blood; you are halfway
pure alcohol, chemical — you strut
like a wary, wily, thirsty cat in a desert and all of your
prey circle you while you hold the chewed pencil
to Judas — draw a fucking star, a bent halo; Osiris —
I will put stars all around your poorly head,
I will mould them with my hands —
*and like Tom and Jerry you will go soft
when your clothes fall off and there is no chase,
no whirring of canaries around your cerebellum —*

opportunities should never be missed
while there is
still time for adulteries.
All the true gods mastered this.

Dog-mask

As Goya held fast to
what death is to madness then
so you are to flesh.

You fear the moon,
the shy girl in the studio.
She does not ask for sex but shows

carnage in her liquid eyes. She looks toward the bed.
You cut her with the edge of a brush, a lick —
wanting to devour her, unsettle

her to goose-pimples.
She keeps her shoulders shrugged and tense; oh
the work involved to loosen them.

I envy that you've lived your visions out
in paint, in bedsheets, having discerned a normality
of Being, a pure boredom

of suffering expectancy, acceptance and awe.
You're white as wood and dark
as a mouthful of bitter liquorice-spit.

When I called to you days ago
you just answered, but my dear you are down

and have always been down that well, and have severed

your own ropes, broken your own wiry spine
*(while I was building a stretcher from rusted iron,
casting a real dead head in bronze, you understand) —*

but dear friend, your skin looks tired with bruises
around the eyes; where I too have lost all tenderness.
You let my difficult whispers coil

in your frontal lobes. De-structured,
I give you handfuls of glass, a glass full of blood,
a sterile wish for silence

or a mask with dog teeth
to put on a face that women won't want then
to sit in your lap and be rocked like back when

you were king of tides and waves of orgasms.
I will ask you to wear your mask, like me,
and I'll keep my dress on and my sensible shoes.

But I imagine first that you will catch your real face
in one of those mirrors I should've smashed —
and then I just know that you'd cut off your nose.