

Man

I found him drinking rain from the roof, right out of the spout, the droplets scattering from his beard when he shook like a dog. I am first the virgin—touched more by hair on a grown man's face than by his wit. I know only that I do not know this man, and he is grinning to take me in.

I would be his mother then—with a face of sweetened cream. "Speak to me," he says, and I feel my face become a veil that dissolves in sweat. I say what I did not plan, cannot retrieve, it all goes through like water in a sieve. The words swim in a larger sea—some pulled down in undertow, some buoyed up to sun, rocking from the shore. I coax a match to fire. His dripping forehead sags to low.

I am a victim to him now—to know I may not try his hate, for surely bone would break my fist before he buckled under, surely his answering blow would devastate. The veil appears to correct this oversight of physique. But I cannot see him well through lace. We'll even up the score with a game or two. I'll be the bitch who plays her cards close to the chest. He smiles and drinks with open mouth. This hand is not my best.

I feel pregnant with the heat, depressed by extra weight. Can this man carry me and all I take? His only baggage is his face—an emblem of mistake and find, the skin a telling of muscle on bone. His eyes, those bulbs in creases, speak oceans to my hands: I want to pull his madness near. His face is all that I have learned, and like a girl I take him, dumb. Every line is earned.

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