

Chapter 12

WHAT COLOUR IS A MIRROR?

WHO CAN'T REMEMBER their first time?

Not old, not young, not fat, not thin, not handsome, not a dog—the out-of-towner in a green Corolla sticks out just because he was the first.

Cowboy told me what to charge.

“Go higher if you think he’ll pay, but don’t go any lower.” Then, acknowledging my greenness: “He wants fancy stuff, say no.”

I walked toward the car with the strange sensation that a glacial soul had stepped inside my skin. My legs moved forward on their own. It felt as if no action was of any real consequence. In such a state, I could do anything.

He wanted me to blow him. I’d fantasized about that often, but the size and taste of someone in my mouth was still unknown. I knew what felt good, though, what made me cum. It had to be the same for others.

So I sucked him off. He grew impatient and began to stroke himself. His fist banged up against my mouth. I pulled back. He slowed and asked me hoarsely if I’d jerk off while he watched.

I hadn’t been aroused at first when I got in the car, but as soon as he’d unzipped a switch got thrown. I was hard and ready. Side by side, we masturbated in an empty office parking lot. Eyeing my prick greedily, he asked me if I’d cum. A dislocated part of me re-

sponded: “*Twenty extra.*”

Knowing that he'd see me blow, his strokes got even faster. I couldn't hold it in and shot a load up to my collar. He moaned and loosed his own wad while my cock bobbed up and down in dwindling, dry spasms.

He reached across my lap and pulled some napkins from the glove compartment. I could tell he wanted to get rid of me as fast as possible. He paid the price I'd set plus premium for cumming, then drove me back to Grosvenor, both hands on the wheel and his eyes fixed straight ahead.

In less than twenty minutes I'd made more than in a whole day's worth of begging.



I didn't know it then but wisdom had it: save your load. Cum too early and your evening's shot. Maybe not forever, but long enough to lose a trick or two. Johns expect a stud who never quits. That's a hard one to pull off when your prostate's working overtime. Women fake; men cannot. Limp is limp is limp.

It isn't so important when you're out for cash to party with. Otherwise, you hold off till the last guy of the night. Sometimes you get lucky and he wants to take you home, which means more money and a place to sleep.

But as long as I had Cowboy's rooms, the protocol of managing arousal didn't matter. Even on the coldest nights I made enough to feed myself, with extra for some brand new jeans or King Treads when my sneakers died.

My rhythms soon matched Cowboy's: late to bed and late to rise. If the night before permitted it, I'd treat myself to breakfast, usually at Fran's but sometimes at the nearby Golden Griddle—the Golden Girdle—which had better bacon. Then on up to the library to spend the day in comfort wrapped in other people's thoughts.

At closing time I'd buy a supper out of last night's stash, and in the downtime afterwards, saunter back to Jarvis for a nap. Cowboy

would be there sometimes, playing his guitar and humming out of tune.

I began to understand the pull of hustling he'd talked about. The street was like a magnet. Even in the winter slush, trekking out to Grenville-Grosvenor filled me with anticipation. I was going on display. However bad the night, I felt alive standing in the weird orange twilight, staring down the headlights. The mystery of me—the missing years, my rebirth in a city both familiar and unknown—became irrelevant. Like the hero of a book I read, *The Outsider*, there was only *me* and *now*, an object of desire, a receptacle for other people's fantasies.

In another book, I came across a poem. Coy about its subject, I knew right off the bat that it was talking about me.

Slender boy
 —no euphemism there
 when an opened door—

he stands
clothes-conscious

invoking law
and men's desire
and,
somewhat invisible
(a universe is fluid with
dark and lights
around him).

He is a sun,
which touches him,
and arrogant
to have planets bound,
circling.

*Slender boy--
not for those who seek,
but those who stare*

and wonder.



That spring, Raymond kicked us out.

The signs had been there from the end of March: small, mostly useless repairs to the plumbing in the kitchenette; a couple of floor tiles replaced by linoleum several decades whiter; curt greetings, as if *Hello* tasted like a dose of medicine.

“Don’t sweat it,” Cowboy reassured me when the news came down. “We got a week or two till someone’s desperate enough to pay the rent he wants. That hard up, they won’t stay long. Either that or Raymond’ll kick ’em out. There’s never any lease. He wants income, not a tenant. Least ways not a tenant who expects a real landlord. I think he gets disgusted with himself for being a drunk with a hard-on for Stetsons. Every time he throws me out he takes the pledge. Guess that’s how come it never lasts. At least the weather’s warming up.”

And it was. By the second week of May, when I sold my winter clothes and packed my knapsack, the thermometer had cracked the twenty mark.

I’d survived the year before and I’d survive again—with the difference that I wasn’t worried about stretching out a fixed amount of money. Three cold months of servicing the lonely, the hidden and the scared had built me up a string of regulars. Ken, the restaurant designer from St. Catharines. Doug, the lawyer who rented two-hundred dollar a night rooms for thirty-dollar blow-jobs. John, the Dutchman with a condo in the west end who’d fallen for me. Barry, the fat guy from down east who cruised in a delivery truck that smelled of rotting cabbage and tobacco.

Which is not to say the money flowed.

“Thirty? I’ll give you twenty.”

“Twenty-five.”

“Will you cum?”

“Get real.”

I usually told the hagglers to fuck off. On slow nights, sometimes not. The really cheap ones got a rep. They knew better than to stop for any but the newest of the new kids on the block. Fresh young faces learned, though, or got warned—by me, by Cowboy, or the brothers, Scott and Daryl, who rarely tricked but knew the street like no one else. Only Stretch, the pock-faced blond, was regularly seen to drive off with the cheapskates. Even then, they’d cruise for hours first.

But most nights all it took was one or two less mingy guys and I’d be set. When the weather’s warm and you can sleep outdoors, when the only entertainment you require comes off the printed page, when you don’t turn on, tune in, drop out, how much money do you need?

At times the sex itself was just the satisfying of a client’s need to cum while being touched by other hands than those connected to his wrists. Sex isn’t sex when, to quote a Sondheim song, you’re making love alone—even if it’s free, and almost always better.

Some clients only wanted to jerk off, drinking in my hard-on with their eyes. Others wanted me to suck them, or to suck me, or to get a hand job. Guys in little cars were fine, but guys in big cars took forever to get off. I’d end up counting strokes, waiting for their muttered quasi-warning, quasi-plea *Oh, man, I’m gonna cum*. If I was blowing them, I always upped the price when I suspected whiplash might result from servicing their grudging cocks.

But there were times the johns weren’t after sex, at least not only. Holes deeper than their mouths or asses yawned. The need for company. The replay of a memory. The hope for fantasy at last made flesh. Filling up those holes, I found I had a gift.

I could become a mirror.

What colour is a mirror? Could one describe itself without referring to the world it reflects? Using skills I’d practised begging on the

street, I walked to every idling car with absolute neutrality. Neither fast nor slow. Legs bowed neither in nor out. Posture neither stiff nor slouched. Expression neither vacant nor responsive. Nothing to intrude on what could be a budding fantasy, a portrait painted at a distance on my skin.

Inside the car, I'd let impressions fill me. Hundreds of them—thousands—each falling into place with the irreversible but random certainty of beads in a kaleidoscope.

The car itself: *model? size? colour? age? transmission? upholstery? temperature? odour? cleanliness? upkeep? mileage?*

The man: *tall or short? fat or slender? young or old? long-haired? short-haired? brushed or gelled? cologne? how much cologne? in shape? getting there? losing tone?*

Complexion... clothing... posture... ticks The pieces all meant little on their own, could even be deceiving, but together told a story.

Speech revealed the most. Not the words themselves, the absurd pretence of normalcy—*How ya doing? Cold tonight. Whatcha up to?*—but everything behind them. Listen to the music of a sentence and the secrets of a man sing loud. I'd learn not only who he was, but who he wanted me to be as well.

And what he wanted, I became.

At first it wasn't easy. To look in someone's eyes and know the person that they're seeing isn't you, to be what someone else's lust dictates, to be filled with history and personality that don't belong to you—it's a kind of rape.

You can't, however, rape the paid.

I'd split myself in two. There'd be me—the real me—observing, and a new me born of someone else's psyche. The second me was pure response. It fed, not on its own desire, but on stimulus it gave the john. The more it turned him on, the more perfectly it fit, the more aroused I got. I was a blank erotic slate waiting to be dreamed upon. And just like dreams, where you don't realize you're god, the client never knew he was creating me.

But for all I did it every night, there always came a moment I'd

recoil: that first touch when the fantasy collided with reality; when I no longer had the option to assert myself; when, in context, it was just too late. Did some part of me despise the lie that was to come? Was I scared of letting go? Was becoming someone else a kind of death?

I knew a place inside my head, calm and silver-grey, where fear and instinct, even muscular response, could not intrude—the same place I retreated to when times were rough and only future pleasures got me through.

Breathing was the key.

In to four.

Block for two.

Out to six.

Again.

Again.

Again.

The grey would spread like mercury. The urge to flee would vanish. In its place, a smooth reflecting surface unaffected by whatever was projected on it. I could welcome, then, this turning into someone else. Invite it, even, like an actor stepping into character.

Acting's easy when the audience is feeding you your lines.