

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

BE

"The other married lady in the group is beautiful, tall, the ideal American girl, fresh faced, big eyes, perfect body, long legs, and genuine. We want to hate her because she's by far the most beautiful woman in the room. She understands that. She has no women friends. She has women acquaintances, she knows that none of them like her. She has been married for years without having children. Lately she has been thinking about starting a family but her husband wants her strictly for himself, on his arm, available. He likes money, he makes lots of it. They're making their bid to push themselves up from the middle to enter the upper middle class. She has a walk-in closet. She has great clothes. She looks great in her clothes. We try but we can't hate her. She's great. She's funny. She's lonely. She's supportive but she won't talk about herself until one of us loses control and confronts her.

"You couldn't possibly understand what the rest of us have been through. You have no right to be here. You're slumming and you know it. Nothing happened to you like what's happened to the rest of us. You have everything."

"Unfortunately we are all feeling something similar. There is an awkward silence. Finally the nurse interferences, "I see that you are crying. Her opinions are affecting you deeply, would you like to say something to her or to us?"

"The silence is copious. Our thoughts are haunting.

"She doesn't have anything to say. How could we be so mean, us? I wish I could go to the bathroom. How much longer is this meeting? God I hate this. This is stupid. The nurse isn't supposed to interfere unless the group or someone is in trouble, so who's in trouble? This is boring.

"Her story, when it comes, comes in one long exposition.

"She has always been beautiful. Her parents are early impressed with the perfection of her form. She is taken by her mother to model when still a baby. Her mother is a dowdy Barbara Bush type who keeps the perfect middle class home for her son, her daughter and her dutiful absentee husband. Her father is a doctor and her brother is expected to, and does, join him in that profession. She is expected to, and does become a perfect wife.

"Sex is never discussed and her mother, painfully aware of the vast beauty of her daughter never leaves her alone with anyone. Her mother is vigilant. She has perfect hair, perfect nails, she's a good girl, obedient, a B and C student, never rude or procrastinating. They have no animals in their home because her mother is allergic to everything. She loves animals. She loves the petting zoo so much

111

that her mother can rely on this as a bribe inducing her to complete unpleasant tasks.

"Her mother makes a fair amount of money from her daughter's career. Her mother does not put this money in the bank. Her mother does not buy a nicer house, does not pay off the mortgage on their blah house, does not take her on vacations, does not buy her much more than what the other kids get. Her mother is a shrewd compulsive gambler who manages to come out even. Her mother never saves a penny. After 14 years of modeling, she has no money, nothing tangible, nothing substantial to show for her work.

"She is not allowed to have ugly emotions, she is not allowed to be sloppy, lazy or wicked. She is the model of the virgin princess until she's 14 and a clever boy, able to see through her perfect exterior into her loneliness, succeeds where the jocks have failed. He talks to her. She has some interesting internal dimensions. The clever boy who originally was only trying to score, comes to enjoy her company. When he's turned on to pot he generously includes her. The two are now 15, the pot loosens them up. They listen to music, go for long walks, kiss, pet, have intercourse.

"This is a relationship based on friendship and shared secrets. She says that they aren't druggies, the pot was a way to be bad, an outlet for the clever boy tracked into a limited dimensionality and the beautiful girl flattened to a thin membrane of outerness. They are covered and protected by their shared ritual herb. They are not in love like grownups, but they are about love. Their love provides oasis until she is sixteen. Then he graduates, gets accepted into his first choice college, two thousand miles away. He goes. She is lonely. She pines. She smokes more. She makes friends who smoke out. She becomes a druggie, a C and D student, gains weight, stops modeling.

"Her mother and father have a terrible fight about money. Her brother is away at college. Her parents decide to split up. She quits school, loses weight, becomes a model for real, on her own. "It was time to stop fighting my fate."

"Modeling is fun but she is high all the time. Her clever friend graduates college early, after three years. He comes, asks her to marry him. He doesn't seem cool enough. She can't remember what it's like to share the secret part of herself. He has no access to her. She turns him down. She likes sex. She is free with her body. She does what she likes with her body, it's her body, after all.

"She doesn't save any more than her mother did. She spends money on immediate gratifications. Amphetamines and then cocaine replace pot. "Pot is for losers." People in her set are winners, they have money, lots of money, money to burn, they're young, they're beautiful, they're bored. Boats are fast or big. Jets take them to parties in exotic places. Love is thin and rich.

"She passes out during a shoot. She is diagnosed dehydrated. The doctor speaks with her in private. He says that he knows she's a coke head. He says she should quit before it's too late. She almost believes him. When he says, "A beautiful girl like you..." she stops listening. She is so furious with him. *Isn't there anything about me besides my body? Nothing at all?* She hates her body. She is jealous of her beauty. Her beauty gets all the attention. This, she says, is when things really turn to shit. "Have you ever heard," she says, "the expression, 'Live by the sword, die by the sword?'" We had. "Well, what that means to me is that whatever you think you're using is also using you."

"She goes back to work. She's more careful about her habit but she doesn't stop. She feels competitive with a new girl who arrives on the scene. She's showing signs of wear and tear. The new girl has the easy innocence she had once herself long ago.

"Now," she says to us, "you will really hate me."

"You don't have to tell us if you don't want to," says our group leader.

"I want to," she says, "I will tell you. You think I'm perfect. I'll show you how perfect I'm not."

"The new girl dies of an overdose. She isn't with her when it happens. It isn't directly her fault. The new girl has some seriously sleazoid buds. She has advised against these douchebags. But she was also the first one to turn her on, the first to encourage her to fuck without love.

"I killed her." She says, "I taught her that it was ok to live without her heart."

"She thinks she ought to quit modeling but she prevaricates. Her father has a heart attack. She goes home to take care of him. Her brother is too busy being a doctor. Her mother is bitter, betrayed. "Let the bastard die alone," her mother says, "That's what he deserves." She nurses her father for a year before he dies. She does this as penance for the girl. She meets her husband. He is younger than she is but she's beautiful and not too old. She wants a family. They get married right away so her Dad can be at the wedding. He's in his wheelchair but he's there. Her mother's there too. Her mother cries, gets drunk and goes home with a friend of her son's, another doctor who recently divorced, hasn't yet learned how to handle his libido. The wedding is gorgeous, storybook, like a wedding on an afternoon soap opera. All her childhood acquaintances come, lots of her modeling friends. Even her old clever friend comes.

"To make a long story short she likes her husband ok but she's back in a high paced scene. She has a hard time saying no to coke. She drinks too much, not too, too much, because her husband likes her thin. She wakes groggy. She thinks

maybe life is meaningless. She feels purposeless. She's conflicted about whether or not to have children.

"One dark and stormy afternoon she gets lost. She has a flat tire. She stands at the edge of the road, attempting to flag down help. She is abducted. She is blindfolded, taken to a warehouse. There are two men, one is older, one is younger. She never sees them. They fuck her several ways. She passes out. They hit her. She wakes up. They fuck her again, another few ways. She thinks that her soul leaves her body because she can't remember much about it. They dump her off, blindfolded, in the rain, in a parking lot. A young couple find her. She remembers the girl screaming. she remembers a scratchy blanket. She is naked.

"Her husband says he doesn't mind. He says that he still loves her. But he doesn't touch her. They don't make love. She goes to therapy. Her therapist thinks she's ready for group. She is scared to be here because women don't like her. Women don't have much sympathy for her. She says maybe she doesn't deserve sympathy, seeing that she has done so many bad things in her life.

"She has a hard time keeping her soul attached to her body. She wonders if her soul hates her body. She thinks that beauty is a curse. She read that somewhere. She has trouble praying to a male God. She wonders if she could pray to a woman god or would a woman god hate her, envy her beauty. She wants to be someone else. "I hate myself."