

CHAPTER NINE

DEDUCTED

Beauty is supposed to buy you things. It's like brains or money. Isn't it? Being born special. Everyone always made a big deal about how pretty I was. What was that for if it wasn't going to be good for anything? You wish you were what? You wish you were me? No, you don't. You wouldn't want to walk in my shoes. You know what I heard once? That if you put a bunch of people in a circle and everyone's all sad and complaining about their lives and everything like that, if they all tell their problems, put them in the center of the circle, like a big pile of shoes, if you could take your cares, your worries off, like shoes, and place them in the center of the circle, then, once everyone knew everyone else's issue, once everyone's shoes are off, in the center of the circle, you could take anyone else's troubles, anyone else's shoes (this requires suspension of disbelief because we don't all wear the same shoe size) if people are given the choice, if they can take anyone else's shoes, they always choose their own shoes, they want their own problems back. Because, really, when you think about it, your problems suit you, don't they? They're the ones you have the skills to overcome. You don't want to be me. Do you want to know what being beautiful feels like? Have you ever been to a party or a picnic, somewhere people are hanging and for some reason the food is late being served, so when it's placed on the table, time to eat, everyone, the ones who were talking quietly, the witty, amusing, social slicks are suddenly motivated by hunger. Supposedly civilized people swarm over the table to the food. You might wonder how they could enjoy eating like starved hyenas until you realize that passions have not been allowed to evolve they're frozen inside a cryogenic concept called sin. They were sealed soon after Saul fell off his beleaguered donkey and misnamed himself Paul.

There's something about women's lives that haunts me. I have this image of a young girl, she's maybe 15 years old. I've seen her so many times, in so many different people. The picture in my mind is a composite of all those girls. She has sandy brown hair, straight to her shoulders or a little beyond and bangs. Her hair isn't clean, it's not been washed for a day or two, well before greasy but able to have some density, not fly-away. She's wearing a blue jacket, a red skirt, a t-shirt (old) and jeans (dark), and sneakers. She's on her bike which is not new but is fast and she's pedaling and laughing or coasting and grinning. Her hair is mussed in my mind, she is the essence of freedom. Nothing is expected of her, her eyes are bright. She is moving where she wants, how she wants, when she wants and she is sure, sure to get there, sure life is good, sure of life's meaning, sure footed and maybe even cocky. She sees the mothers of her friends, her own mother, overweight, tired, overburdened, lonely. She knows that this will never happen to her. She has never heard the word, never run across the concept, marginalization, but she knows that nothing like that will ever happen to her. She's better. She has reached 15 miraculously without beatings or rape, without overtly destructive people acting out on her character, bruising her soul. Her

mother doesn't tell her old fashioned things, like "men and boys only want one thing." Her father didn't laugh and ridicule her when her breasts first showed. She doesn't know. Yet. What can happen to a girl.

That same girl ten years later, she's everywhere. She's gotten more complicated, even in composite. She might have two children, one toddling, one in a hand me down stroller. She might be married. She might be single. Her hair is still straight and sandy brown, she is nice, well behaved, even though she's getting tired a lot more of the time now, finding herself yelling for no apparent reason, her children's eyes wide, not with terror, but sympathy for their distraught lonely mother. Or she wears black leather jackets and does serious things for important reasons while feeling dense, trapped, questioning existence. She experiences a fair amount of physical and mental freedom, except she gets scared at night coming home alone from parties as late as she'd like to, thinking, she reasons for no good reason, that some degenerate you *read about them all the time* might be lurking on her stairway, in the alley, behind the dumpster. The thinking, the fear does as much damage as anything, impinges on her ability to close the deals she'd like, explore the options she'd like. Contrary to the legend of practice makes perfect. Risking wrath is getting rather more difficult for her than less. Or she wears a suit, works 12 hours a day in an office, can't cope, copes anyway. Or she's in the hospital getting a cyst removed, or a complete hysterectomy, she buries her hysteria, puts on a good face for the nurses, doesn't want to make a fuss. Everywhere she is being acted upon. Not ignored, not entirely, not yet, but no longer the central figure in her own story. She has slid to the periphery.

Ten years later, oh, make it 15, why not? She's 40 now our composite, life has simplified, she's alone. Her kids are out all day or gone. Her husband left her. She keeps up with two or three soap operas. She has a shitty boyfriend who replaced the last one who drank too much. She decided not to have kids but she can't crash that damn glass ceiling. She married an artist more famous than herself. She dedicated her life to service. People she considers her friends are just like her.

Don't you get it? It doesn't matter whether you begin rich or beautiful, strong or brilliant, if you are a woman you will be marginalized. Society will push you into its dark corners you will be belittled and forgotten before your time or brief years after your death.

The only comfort is that men die sooner. They shrivel up and disappear, leave the world of the elderly 90% female. We live longer, so what? We live longer because we have such incredibly diminished expectations, we live on less for a lot longer, polishing turds, making the best of bad situations. Ad nauseam.

But when you realize that, since no one takes any notice of you, not really, not who you are, there is no longer any pressure to be anything for anyone else's

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advancement or well being. You have no youth left to barter, your body is no longer a baby making machine, you have an element of personal freedom. It feels negative at first, this fresh bud freedom, negative and tentative, and you think that you've been left behind, lost, forgotten, then poof, you're moving in the world aware that no one is aware of you and, if you can get through, and past, the self pity, you have maneuverability, not in a market economy sense, in a creative sense, you can now create your life as you would like it to be.

The hardest part for me, growing up with a beauty stigma welded to my body consciousness was to give up thinking it was worth things. I bought things with my beauty so I believed in the value of beauty as a commodity. The problem is that nothing I ever traded myself for made me happy. I used to look at ugly women and wish I was one of them because I thought that they were free. Part of me knew that they were looking at me the same way. When I was high, I could see a figure eight of envy swirling back and forth between myself and other women. I mean, even other models, you'd think we'd have lots of experiences to share, and in a way we do, but as long as we were selling ourselves, well, God, you can't give yourself if you have to sell yourself, can you? I mean, if your business is selling apples then you can't go around giving away apples, you'd go broke, right?

I was miserable. I thought there had to be more to life than buying and selling. Everyone else seemed to know the score. I couldn't fit in and I couldn't ask for help because then everyone would know for sure that there was something wrong with me.

I thought that if I could make myself a better person. I tried taking my medicine, my punishment. Nothing happened, nothing at all. I wasn't happy. I kept on taking punishments, swallowing medicine and pride until all I wanted was to escape back to fun, beauty, drugs, power, anything was better than being good.