

Cash Tender Total

It could be argued that every relation is transactional, and many have. If you want to touch me, it must be through a pane of glass. You might describe my skin as “electric,” “responsive,” or “animated” as you press your thumb into the small of my back and for a moment watch my body shift in the live stream. Maybe it would even start to feel real after a while. A robot watches me as I undress for the picture I’m about to send you, and she predicts my pose with a kind of tenderness. But keep in mind that *tender* is a button on every cash register, pressed over and over again in every grocery store in the city where the lines never end and perhaps one day we can pay with just a meaningful glance.

As a young girl just entering the working world and at the same time the sexual marketplace, I had a summer job at the amusement park ticket counter (picture me, if you will: tall, androgynous haircut, freckled in a regulation T-shirt and name badge). I was terrible at learning the muscle memory required of me, my crackling brain resistant to becoming a calculator but softened over time to a smooth and bright white surface. Does that image make you feel as if my body became more efficient, that now it is at the peak of its performance, an improved version of the original? Instead of a compressed bill with the face of a president, it is the shivering air between us that carries the necessary means to complete the transaction.

You might mean to evoke something more than a hospital bill, a cash bail, a hidden fee, and between us it seems soft as lace, but I told you I wanted to eradicate capitalism from the language of romance. I often find it cannot be separated no matter the effort to force it apart. If you felt a charge at the assemblage of pixels that form my collarbone, I did not mean to make you feel as if you owed me a response. It’s not that kind of energy. I scroll back through the archive and bury myself in text. Last night, I admit that I nearly fell asleep cradling a machine. Strike, lightning, and give the monster breath.

Tea Rose Nightgown

1.

can we talk about the last time you saw him
tall in a suit his bone glasses his large hands
unannounced a new blonde wife

one on the way
one is here one
one here in her belly
one on earth,
one here in her

you are there little girl little
night cap little night
gown how old was I then so little I was
when I was born there is a lot I didn't know
I didn't know him this was the first time I saw him
pink rosebuds on my new nighty pink cat nose I squeezed
it too hard it made a mess cat shit all down my new night-
gown the heavy blue outside pressing me pressing my eyes
shut I didn't want a new kitten I didn't want a new one

I woke up in my old nightgown he was gone

//but Ede what was his name where was he from

I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT
ANY
MORE

*okay well he is all but gone now
I cannot trace him*

*Leo Simon Zaback : her biological father's name and that is basically what I know and I refuse
to concoct a story about it but what did she call him when she saw him saw that he was he but
not her*

IN YOUR WRITING: IT IS NOT EXACTLY HOW
IT HAPPENED.

he came back brought me a new kitten new life then he was gone for a long time

his last name dangling from your name
barely visible, written over

how many tall dark haired men can lay claim to me?

*was it awkward was it strange pressing the little cat body in your hands cat shit ammonia
stink clinging I have a lot of questions what color was the nightgown what color was the
light in the kitchen in the room where he saw you all skinny transparent bag of bones*

I don't want to talk about it anymore either

2.

Ede and her sister listening to father coughlin and playing cards
you must have known he hated jews did you know he agreed
with the fascists did you know you might be a little bit jewish
but that's not the point or did you just listen
did it make any sense or did you just leave it alone

why does everyone in my family look exactly the same?
all the women tall and bottom-heavy like jars of milk
all the men tall and lanky like fence posts like telegraph wires in deep snow
all of them in purgatory now among the innocents

I have so many questions Ede like why did I always have this nauseous feeling around
all my uncles how they smelled like old gold cigarettes how rough their hands were
when they picked me up and I didn't know why they picked me up why I had to let them

What about how all my dreams of blood of dead babies of blue babies always climbing
up my legs what about crying blood what about all the sufferings of the righteous what
about st. scholastica with a dove emerging from her mouth saint of those dark blue
storms rolling in off the lake what about the cold porch where you slept

what aren't you telling me

can we talk about the last time I saw you
more dead than alive but still so soft the last
time I saw your body strange in the hospice your nightgown
cabbage roses or was it dying leaves or was it only a pale pink field
how dumb the cheeseburgers we ate that night while you died

then I put a picture of the virgin mary in your casket I printed
it from the internet botticelli blonde with a fat baby fat
angels with round cheeks with roses

this family: I don't talk to any of them, reader. I haven't spoken to any
of them in years their round faces their dark hair girl cousins with so many babies so
many boys boy cousins all fucked up
shooting guns whiskey old gold cigarettes roll the dice
they put babies in those hard girls with blue creamy eyelids with
straw hair in hooded sweatshirts sweating through their makeup

I have all but disappeared I am all but dead to them but no one can ever really
disappear when where we are allowed to be is so small and it takes so long to get
anywhere until you are away, as I am away but I dumbly type their names I name
them perhaps I am fighting hard so that no one forgets me so that no one leaves me
covered in cat shit crying myself to sleep but there is no guarantee that will not be me,
alone at the edge of a pink field at the edge of a doorway snug in a place I've known.