

Cathy Ford / TWO STORIES

CUT FLOWERS

a rape story

There are two types of long-stemmed roses. The most fragile is the dust rose. It is distinguished by a faint musk, and a soft pink shade. It grows in the desert, and is formed by millions of grains of sand blown together, usually during a storm. The most important thing to remember about the dust rose is that the exquisite petals will deteriorate rapidly, and may even disappear if anyone touches the flower.

The correct name is unimportant. It is sufficient to say that there is no other means of conveyance, and that he travelled alone. He didn't speak the language. There was a truck leaving in the morning. He paid a student to translate, and bargained for a cheap fare. The truck would be carrying sacks of grain, a few boxes, a trunk or two, extra fuel, a group of workers. He had to take his own food. The money was paid, and the truck left at sunrise. It was very hot. He was alone. He didn't speak the language. He thought they were talking about him. There were ten men on the truck. The trip took three weeks. He could do nothing. He was a kid, a tourist. They held knives to his throat, and made him strip. They laughed and talked loudly. Every one of them took him every night for three weeks. Every one.

You stand at the top of the hill, and the procession of mourners stretches all the way to the gully at the bottom of the hill. There are no signs along the road. No one knows the name of the road. No one knows who is in the coffin, or how the person died. The coffin is open. You can see the wave of bodies inch down the hill, you see the box suspended above the dust-choked road. You know the box is lined, with satin. The smooth-skinned face stares into the blue sky. The pale fingers are laid over a dozen long-stemmed roses.

Some are blood red. For a day or two. Most black eyes, however, are neither red or black, but purple, and then a kind of budgie green. Her eye faded from green to yellow. She got beaten. She was hitchhiking home from work, and three men picked her up, in an old Pontiac. They wouldn't let her out when they got to the street she wanted. They spoke another language. They took her to one house and tore off her clothes, and took turns. Then they made her get dressed, they had fists and knives. They took her to another house, there were other men. They laughed at her. They took her to other houses. Everyone watched every time. Sometimes one man would do it twice. How many men. Ten houses. She could do nothing. Ten different houses.

Bleeding is difficult to control for the first few hours. Touch the petals on a blood rose, and it will weep. It stops bleeding eventually, but if crushed, the bruises cannot be disguised. It is a red, sticky secretion that gives the blood rose its name. It is not as exotic as it may sound. The blood rose is easily grown, and is common in many gardens. This long-stemmed beauty smells like most other roses, and has very few thorns.

AMBULANCE BLUES NOTE

Okay so today I read your story in a national magazine and it's not bad. All that time never knowing how what you did. Picked the thing up in the drugstore same old reason being there at ten after ten and it raining outside. Saw the name clear and it never clicked. Cold in my head. Wasn't it?

Cool low name in the throat, sneaking up on me slow. Can't hold out too long. Flicking through to page thirty-seven and this is the headliner easy reading boy meets girl meets husband. Waiting for the laundry again. Spin foam bubbles freak. The first sentence.

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happy to see you again.

Made me think I'd lost my head. You in me.

Easy cotton sheets. The skin of his body the same like silk, dance shadows smooth. It is you. I remember. Waiting carefully like a new toy. Had to smile hide my smile under the edge of the mexico shawl covering. So relieved glad. Can't play this one over no.

Hundreds of times.

"Would you like a coffee?" he said.

No but

iall cum with u. taukin.

Susan it's just a name connections I'd rather be roughed by a lumberjack than bored by a poet. Is that it? No. I love your voice. I'd nearly forgotten that exquisite edge of it. I know which country you're from.

Sentence two and the title comes back to me hard. I never was brave. I glance again at the cover. Gloss. Model smiling. Eyes wide. It's not everyone that has the same size of eyes. No wedding ring. So maybe it is you. Never read any one of those revised revised revised pages you carried furtively. Robber thief. A green dark green notebook. Cheap pens. Precious to whom.

And the monotone drone sound system your attention tension please. The store will be closing in ten minutes. So the magazine's a dollar so I'm needing change anyway so I really do buy all the bubble gum left in the old wrigley's box, one cent each by the till. So.

And the rain doesn't stop for us. Together or apart. A part of it. The memory. The survival. On the bus a three year old boy gets sick and the younger skinnier quicker girl more naively hands over a plastic bag. He gives. Ejaculation. You gave. Rubber boots.

I come for charity and find an analyst. F you and I'd like too to have that old it ain't me song but who's listening anyway. You can't do two things at once. If but I'm not I could be one of those lead me anywhere's it might happen happened but you're away and it's all right and the dreams stay for maybe two hours and I started a journal of them. But only for me. I have no photographs. You're so far. It feels.

I turn my plants when it's the right time. I have some things all my own everything and that's not what you could have gotten anyway.

And I read page three under the light waiting for it to change. Critical. A tense slip here and there. Nothing serious and my surprise is not surprise. I expect you to be good at this. Too. Wet rain on the page and the washer still digesting blue jeans and the thirty-five cents. If I could leave I would. Green.

Want me to read aloud to you?

Yes.

Like cries and whispers. And I know it now. The story is you, you are the story, story you. Stone you. Wish I could. Alone with you. Wish I had. Thinking two twice babe.

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all day. Where have you been.

Waiting.

O.

Want it said quietly and with conviction. No mistakes. No argument. No hand trembling please. Clean across a room full of people. Never.

The oh my god please don't contradict me I know as much as you of you of me don't turn me into shouting it out. I want.

He's here, he's not you. Fear. Care. When it's a husband and it's good it's good. Can he be villain in this piece. How the brown eyes and the money for the abortion that was before but I never let him pay. He's more open than you are but not to me. He assumes. That's the magic in it, the skin trembles the voice. I hear you I hear.

You never vanity cause it really wouldn't hold but there were lots of other things and cruel. You thought it was painful before I did and then you said so and then I knew.

You cut quick in the throat at the wrist it doesn't last long. Pain. The muscles in my shoulders tightening migraine. And you ain't corrupting me honey. I'm incorruptible.

If the story's not about me then who could it be. Can it be. Reversion. The structure is the important voice here the characterization based on the narration one lung one view.

Back to it. Your story. A man about women. Private. The lover about the husband. Never quite inside it, hitting breathless close.

And no one's known my sigh and I'm a good keeper. I. You. Praises.

I have secrets from myself. You. So it's lucky you're not in the laundromat. Is this the wrong city. I've seen you around every any corner. Couldn't help but say it say it how I can't really get far enough away from it page six there I am and all the things stupid said.

Like how he moves. You move. Taller and thinner and. You. Eyes eyes hard to say if they're warm or hating. Hard. Honesty. Can't be objective.

The blue jeans drop beside the t-shirt dropped. Do you stretch once every night before you get into bed. Habits. It's dark out. Light a candle. I want you. Slow. The hands perfection and your mouth and what can be said now.

Stone

u. r u in time 4 th 1st time

last time.

Dream.

Again?

Threw it all away, without you. The stories that must be told.

When I was seven to sixteen, no older, I skated with them those blush cheeked ladies and never really knew the difference between ignorance and lust. Except my legs looked better. Untried. Woman passion in tights any color and the small town whistles always hurt my ears feelings. I didn't know. So mention awareness. How I did one or two moves best but never all of them and how it might be fun that knowing laugh. When I knew what style meant really I tried it without pants tights pants one less but I got rashes and still do. Naked under clothes. Slow. When I learned the other harder lesson I quit wearing the to the waisters cause you know they give away every ounce of extra. You know from the ones that are doing it. Fat. These are more comfortable and that's even truer than the other reasons. How to take off. Delicacy.

But I've never walked right, not like a GIRL, more like a DUCK, my father still says so and it's not together but I had a broken heart my whole life (until) and it's not the same story, and how is that to be said (now). I'm still stuck on it never enough attention sexuality food or presents and giving more more more until I run out. I cry easily at movies even television so how could I explain that to you. I mean really. The music. The symphony.

So the woman in the story, your story, is ten pounds heavier than I see myself. Myopic. Or I gain it. Also smarter. Also more calculating. And hides her diaries like I hide mine in my head. Always. And drinks beer.

I hate beer. I hated it when it was back of the chevy and sitting up or lying down no thank you and garters. I hate it now the sweet taste so bitter and I can go to the bar with other women and it has to be beer social presser and I drink tomato juice. I get real off if there's no salt shaker. I need it. I can take terry cloth wash once a monthers though, even red. Salt in a french fried glass shaker with a dented nickel plated top is just right. Can't get the smell off your hands. So. I don't care about that. You forget some details. Some smells. Caught in me a memory. A memory. Your fine soft hair.

The woman in your story. Is it me. Like a mirror. Forgotten.

Sometimes (once) she meets a woman enough to love (maybe two) and maybe touches her and maybe not but the feeling is the same glad. The heroine is basically the antagonist and the protagonist is primarily schizophrenic and so the story is a short story.

So she decides in the end what?

Goddamn washing machine spitting soap and suds and bubbles and water and then my book's gone. That's how it is.

I'll roll one and get the ice out quiet and it will burn my throat like always. He doesn't ask me if I want one. That's it. Staring at the ceiling. Rolling.

Walking you through me hands across the table open to the wind and thinking hoping that means cherish. Remember me.

There's a piece of hundred year old sealing wax antique on my desk I sit there and picking it clean and maybe you in a year or so or a lifetime.

Stare. At the ceiling. Or the white walls.

Looking for.

I'm supposed to be setting up the mask for my next manuscript but it's probably you and I'm waiting six dimes for the dryer and the mexican shawl. You never even had it together for a place of your own alone. Accusations. And anyway I know the story ending. Ends.

I'm acquiring a taste for grand marnier. Hits slower and longer. Licking out the bottom of the bowl. Tongues.

pul th cur tans bak wil u. 2 c u n th

sunshine.

Close. And always protected. Self-protection. I could have worn a veil and then you might have known. A statement. It's pretty hard to give that away twice. Disguises. I married the man and he's grown accustomed to my body fails my dreams. A perfectionist my mother said. A huge non-existent ego pride. Romance? I face you.

Hungry? Piece of pie?

scru u?

No. Yes.

Still. Reaching later maybe later yes later. Comparing to no one. I have a well-developed memory on continuous short-circuit and I know there are no islands. Undress me and you have.

Wine and wine rose you. Soft against your thigh. How I miss you. How glad when you're not there. I don't want to be the repetitious pattern.

How running to the window in the middle of the night and you never and that's how I know you couldn't be. My number's not in the book and that's a whole different racket and it's getting tighter.

At the beach and sand in my eyes. Hair. Start swimming. Sometimes women drown unintentionally people. How can you have lost that.

And I wonder if they paid you for the story and if you eat better than you used too. That's not all. But I've been waiting an hour or so and the sheets have to be dry and I only do them every second time. You know what I mean. And sometimes it's him and sometimes it's you and it's all not the same. Love.

Can I give you a ride?

shur nd thn think uv u sew i

forget

when to get out even across the street knowing what's coming. No language. Even if I don't look for your stories I'm in them. I demand it. I have priorities. And feeling the superstition suspicion in you that I've been had.