

## *Sarina*

(in three parts)

I.

Mia was running late; she was supposed to be at the park to meet some friends for a Sunday picnic ten minutes ago. Surely, all would be fine on this lazy Sunday afternoon, as time stalled. Yet, Mia's sense of punctuality always anticipated anxiety if she ever found herself delayed. Even the slowest moving clock nearing a halt would not allay her angst.

She quickly gathered a basketful of blackberries from the garden and in the process her body was marred with the bush's treacherous thorns. Oddly, the scrapes and scratches faintly adorned her forearms and palms, and had another person been present they might have remarked on their beauty. She, however, had no time to stop and admire such damage, marking vulnerability of the body. Rather, she took off on her bicycle.

She wore a dark blue woven hat and white linen dress that almost reached her knees. She pedaled furiously, exhausting what energy was in her legs to such a point that she thought she might expire. When the fabric of her dress curled to the whims of speed and wind she did not attempt to fix herself although she was left exposed. Mia noticed the men and women in their cars turn their heads to register the satin-covered meeting place of her thighs. Their faces broke like a heavy object falling through the surface of a lake or river, revealing their shock and desire, but they did nothing more. Neither honk nor whistle came

her way. Wandering eyes did not bother Mia; she only concerned herself with arriving at the cemetery as soon as possible.

When she arrived at the cemetery she followed in a procession of black hearses. On this Sunday the earth would be opened up to receive a person's body. She thought to herself, "I knew we shouldn't have chosen a cemetery where merriment is not often appropriate."

Mia had left her phone at home and had no way of contacting Roxy, Brook, or Harlem, so she walked around the cemetery with her basket of blackberries searching for them. Hadn't they said they wanted to meet at a certain person's grave? At first she became restless but after walking for a while she grew tired. Rather than actively searching for her companions she began to wander aimlessly hoping to casually bump into them. The unlikelihood of doing so as she traversed 125 acres of trees and bushes growing over brittle bones and spirits did not heavy her load.

She came across a weeping willow and sat on its bench. She fell asleep under its shade and allowed herself a dream. Her body was surrounded by murky pond water and above were lily pads interrupting the sun's attempts to reach her at the water's depth. She was sinking toward darkness, yet she felt comfort. She was not certain, but a woman cradled her in her arms, kissed her, and even moved to feel her breasts. Was it that the certainty of death would bring pleasure, or perhaps that pleasure brought the certainty of death? She was wet, dripping from her cunt into the water surrounding her as the unknown woman gurgled in her ear, giggling. She removed Mia's clothes and began to slip her fingers between Mia's legs, between her lips, and dip into her. Between gurgles of water, she said to Mia, "You are my progeny. I am in your womb now, but you came from mine."

Mia awoke. She thought her dream was strange. She tried to remember the woman's face but was certain she had never seen her before. She was black, her lips like coal. Mia, white as she was, could not imagine how she might have ever come from this woman. She pulled her underwear aside and felt that she indeed was as wet as the pond to which she stared out at, her fingers dripping with a thick fluid. She put her fingers in her mouth to taste.

The sun was lower than it had been when she arrived; she felt her heart start in her chest. *The picnic! I'm so late*, she thought. She resolved to continue. She walked past faded gravestones and idly read the names that had been etched into them. They all said, father, mother, wife of father, son, daughter. 1872-1945, 1883-1956, 1903-1978, 1907- 1982.

Mia felt hungry so she began at her freshly picked blackberries. The first one was too young and its sour bite brought a tear to her eye. The second was too ripe, too sweet, and when it burst in her mouth the flavor was that of rotting. She continued trying blackberries but could not find one that was right; and each subsequent one was worse than the previous, either more bitter or more sweet. She felt sick to her stomach by the time she had eaten half of what she had picked. Stunned that not a single tasty blackberry could be found in the basket, she tossed them into some bushes only to discover a small colony of maggots crawling along the bottom of the basket. She doubled over to release from her body all that she had consumed and saw the grass stained velvet. She ran and threw herself into the pond to cleanse.

Mia awoke again; again she had been dreaming. However, as she looked around she discovered that her blackberries were missing. She was certain she had carried them with her into the cemetery. Perhaps she had left them dangling on the left handle bar of her bicycle.

Had she even picked blackberries that afternoon? Looking at her forearms she noticed some scrapes and scratches. They were lovely in their own violent way, but she could not recollect how she had gotten them. She placed her fingertip at the opening of her vagina and felt that she was still wet. She pulled forth the syrup and when she tasted, recognized the hint of blackberry.

The sun was nearing its expiration for that day; the western sky had been emblazoned with purple and pink paints. *The picnic! I'm so late*, Mia thought. *Fuck*. She thought she was distracted because she was worried that all she wanted to do was fuck, why else would she be so wet. She got up from the shade of the willow tree and resolved to find her friends. She remembered the funeral procession that she had first seen when she entered the cemetery. She wasn't certain why, but she thought someone there might be able to direct her to her friends. Mia had lost her sense of orientation so she returned to the main gate to find the funeral procession that way.

She sensed the heaviness of the path that she traveled, the weight of the vehicles on the ground as it succumbed beneath steel and heat and sadness. Mia walked the path as well and it wasn't long before she came upon the funeral. She had an odd sensation in the pit of her stomach that told her to turn around but she swallowed her disgust. She tapped a woman who was crying beneath her black veil. "Have you seen my friends Brook, Harlem, and Roxy? All three of them are quite tall, you couldn't miss them." The woman said nothing. She ignored her completely, surely because of Mia's impropriety. Mia turned to the next person, "Do you know Brook, Harlem, and Roxy? They all have dark hair, dark as the night, you couldn't miss them in the middle of the day." And the next weeping man she shook, "Surely you've seen Brook. Damn it! You're acting as if you've only known the

passing of winter.” She continued like this, asking each person if they knew of her friends, but they all failed to respond to her inquiries. Finally, she stood before the priest delivering the sermon and begged him to tell her of the whereabouts of her friends; Mia was crying now but only from frustration. The priest pointed to the open grave and she turned to see her mirror’s image lying in the dirt. The body was pristine and perfectly manicured save for a tongue protruding from her lips rubbed down with red oil; the tongue was charred and gnarled, as if it had been burnt.

Mia shrieked. She turned to escape but first came across the tombstone that was to be laid on the dirt once it obscured the body from public view. She was confused because it read *Sarina Elizabeth Bordeaux, 1984-2011, Beloved daughter, sister, and friend*. She looked for other tombstones but could not find them. Was she not Mia? She didn’t have a twin that she knew of, yet Sarina was her spitting image. She approached the grave to look into its depths and observe the body again. She breathed a sigh of relief. The woman resting there, while very similar in features, was actually a brown woman, black or Hispanic, she was not sure. Sarina was not her; she was Mia, and Mia, it seemed, might still be alive. She glanced at the back of her hand and screamed, because it was just as dark as the skin of the woman in the grave. “It is not mine! It is not mine,” she cried, shaking her hand. The funeral attendees took no heed of her request, they would not take it from her. She scanned the crowd and realized that some of the faces resembled Sarina’s, they resembled Mia’s. Mother, father, sister, brother. etc. Mia looked once more at the body in the grave and realized that indeed it was hers, so perfectly preserved save for that tongue, she thought sadly, *I won’t last as long, I won’t remain as such*.

She looked at her own body. And as she saw it for the first time, blisters began to blossom, red and ripe. Her skin was peeling away. Mia was rotting. She picked at her face as it fell apart; flesh was wasting away leaving only the bare structure. “No,” she whispered as she stumbled from her funeral, “I choose life.” She pulled her linen dress from her body, not caring that it was torn in the process. She let her decomposing body fall to the earth. She opened her legs as if she were a frog on its back, waiting on the biologist’s table, and felt for her cunt. She breathed a sigh of relief for it was as fleshy and soft as it had always been, even as the rest of was left with just its bones.

She felt for her clitoris and it felt good. She pulled her cunt open so that it could receive the world, rubbing her fingers and palm against the slick skin. She moaned. She wanted the funeral party to discover her in the middle of the road, not at all hidden from view. They would murmur, “Sarina is definitely not dead, she lives,” as she moved her hips to the rhythm of her earnest stroking. In between her heavy gasps of pleasure, Mia said to herself, “Okay...okay... after this... I’ll just keep looking... for... Harlem... Brook and Roxy... I knew... all I... needed ...was a fuck.” She moved a hand up her stomach and began to fondle her nipples, pulling at them until erect. She thought about her first girlfriend and her mouth shaped like a perfect “o” sucking on her left breast. Submerged in the memory Elena materialized on top of her, her hand deep inside Mia’s cunt searching for nothing but the willingness to give pleasure. It had always surprised Mia how much a living part of her body could take. It was unlike a mouth, that even in consuming food would choke if a morsel made it down the wrong pipe or a fish bone scraped at her throat’s walls. Her vagina, however, would take Elena’s hand.

Mia was calm at last, with the rhythmic heaving of her chest she was finally satiated. Resting with her eyes closed, she felt someone brush her hand. She should have been surprised since she certainly was alone. Cold fingers distinct from her own grazed her hand and when she opened her eyes she saw the woman from her first dreams that afternoon, a black woman with short curly hair, a ring of silver threaded through her nose. She wore nothing but strips of cloth that she might have procured from raw plant material; they hung loosely on her body and in some instances failed to conceal the parts of the body that a public might expect. She pressed her body over Mia's and kissed her, their lips and tongues rubbing. Mia felt her body, it was solid and present, and for the first time she was certain that this was true.

Mia saw two women standing above them, watching them, and she finally realized she had found them. "Brook, Harlem, Roxy..." Mia whispered, "Have I found you after all this time?" They did not respond—Harlem merely kissed her even more earnestly while the other women watched hungrily. Mia, at last, felt relieved that she found her friends despite being hours late, for it was well into the evening and the moon had replaced the sun at the sky's center. That the cemetery would be closed at such an hour and that her friends would remain into the eerie evening did not strike Mia as the least bit strange; neither did her own presence there. "We've missed you, Mia," said the black woman in the short breaths between her lips meeting Mia's skin, her teeth sometimes nibbling as if to take her in.

"You've had enough, Harlem," said one of the women watching. "It's my turn."

"Don't be ridiculous. There's plenty for everyone and I'm not quite satisfied yet. You'll wait."

No one asked Mia what her opinion was, but she didn't mind as Harlem's mouth ravaged the edges of her cunt before investigating its depths. It was only as the other women began to pull Harlem from her that Mia began to protest. "Wait!" she exclaimed, "Before you do that you're going to have to tell me how we know each other. I can't remember. And while I can see what you immediately want with me, what do you ultimately want from me?"

"Now that you are dead, reunification."

"Mia, we're three sisters. Can't you see that you came from us? We are your ancestors."

"Not really. You three look nothing alike, Harlem is dark and you two are white. And me, I think... I'm brown," said Mia examining her hand again.

"Well look again," demanded Brook as she grabbed Roxy and kissed her on the mouth and slipped her hand up her blouse. Roxy returned Brook's embrace as Harlem approached the women. She pulled Brook's clothes away from her body to reveal the rounded landscape of her ass. She disappeared her hand to feel the crevice located between those soft mounds of flesh as the three women moaned, "Sisters."

It immediately became clear to Mia that these three women were witches from another century. *Am I also a witch*, she wondered? Three female witches that are sisters that fuck each other, she chuckled, because it was almost a cliché. The ways in which they're related is more complicated than the transmission of blood and genetics. Mia had questions about relatedness. If she had always belonged to these three women, why was that thread of connectedness invisible to her in life? She asked herself, *what traits have I inherited from these women to make me theirs? Was it Sarina or Mia that belonged to them?* She smiled. Had it not been for these witches, Sarina would have never known the right way to tie up Elena and

flog her until her ass was bruised. She saw that now. What other rituals of pleasure, love, and denial had her body known before her mind had recognized it as a possibility? *And this*, she thought, *this must be my final rite of passage.*

“Do you think you understand now?” asked Roxy.

“Surely. Almost. If you finishing fucking me, I might comprehend even better.” The women approached her at the same time and began to touch and feel the surface of her body. It began with light touches, quick sensations that flitted across her naked body. She was able to download the very first and immediate sensory information of touch, before pressure, before friction. this mediation between the outside world and her insides, she thought, *Bataille was right*. Sure the thinnest layer of cells over her lips, nipples, clit, and anus were all on fire, but where she felt she might not survive such stimulation was the scalp and forehead, which accounted for such a large continuous surface. The witches could not restrain themselves any longer. How long had it been since their last communion? They began to kiss and lick the body of Mia and her only desire was to submit. They didn't fear that she might start disappearing before their eyes, which was contrary to what Mia was accustomed to with her mortal lovers. Because she had faith in the wisdom of her elders, Mia believed she would not grow scarce. For the first time, Mia ceased to attempt to locate her desire in the meeting place of the other bodies and her own. She felt her body being dismantled as the three witches took small morsels for themselves. They were hungry and Mia was tired, and so it wasn't surprising when only her right labia remained and Harlem polished it off.

Mia was already dead. She couldn't die a second time. Besides Mia had decided that Georges Bataille was right, eroticism *is* assenting to life even in death. The cycle of reproduction and consumption allowed for the fusion of life and death. The witches had awaited her passing only to consummate the final sacrificial act to achieve continuity. Mia recalled that time she starred in a short pornographic film. As the camera caught her doe-eyed expression she sucked on the pink plastic cock strapped to a man whose biological cock lay flaccidly to the side (he had been impotent all his life). Then, she became immortal. Elena was there too; Mia's cunt enveloped her fist.

After being digested, Mia found herself reassembled in Sarina's grave. She wasn't quite exhausted yet, so she climbed out and searched for her friends Brook, Harlem, and Roxy. She wanted to play some more. They did not make themselves immediately visible to her, so she wandered aimlessly in the dark cemetery. She felt as if she had been traveling for an undetermined length of time, maybe a decade, but she could not find them. The eeriness of the cemetery began to frighten her; the eeriness of her solitude began to frighten her. Hadn't her mother always warned her not to walk by herself late at night? It would be unnatural for someone of her corporeal design to feel safe, so she didn't.

Mia began to run, her heart pounding in her chest. She happened upon two cherub boys carved in granite. Though they were winged creatures of God's kingdom, they had sinister looks engraved on their faces as they furiously pulled and tugged at their barely erect penises flashing out beneath their heavenly garb. Mia was shocked when a frothing white substance spilled from their pubescent penises and fell upon the grave that they guarded. Mia read the tombstone and saw that it was Mary's. She screamed and shut her eyes; it was exactly like the cum shots she had seen over and over again when she used to watch her

older brother and his friends watching porn bought from the neighborhood store. All over her face and a little in her eye. As she ran by, she looked back once more and saw that the cherub boys had returned to stationary positions, the heads meekly tilted and the hands tightly clasped in prayer underneath their cheeks.

The air began to smell of liquor and sweat. Mia figured that it might be Brook, Harlem, and Roxy and that they would be fucking. She moved toward the scent of degradation, eager to find her haven from the current nightmare. She found instead a heap of dirt piled next to the tombstone. Mia edged nearer to see that a couple men stood shoulder deep in the grave, hovering over the coffin with their shovels in hand. One with dark hair pried the coffin open and the men sighed with pleasure upon discovering a freshly buried corpse. Mia was relieved because it was not Sarina, rather she gazed upon the face of a teenage boy nearing adulthood. *How sad*, she thought. One of the men withdrew a bracelet from the dead boy's wrist and held it against the moonlight to reveal that it was pure gold. Another man took the shoes of the boy's feet and said to the other, "This is great. Mark's been needing shoes for some time now and here, a brand new pair."

His friend replied, "And once I pawn this bracelet, I'll be able to help my girl pay for her abortion." There was silence for some minutes as the men continued to ransack the grave for more valuables. They couldn't see Mia watching as she stood directly over them.

"Okay," one of them said, "Let's do this."

They unzipped their pants and let them fall to their ankles. Mia was shocked because their penises were already erect. They first started touching and caressing the corpse, its shoulders, stomach, and thighs. Their touch was so tender; Mia thought she was dreaming again. One man proceeded to massage the corpse's cock while the other gently

pried open its mouth—Mia heard the jaw cracking—and placed his cock there. Mia turned away as she heard the two men grunting. She felt disgust well up in the pit of her stomach and yet when she slipped her fingers between her legs, it was moist there. The men muttered, “Thank you, thank you,” over and over again. Mia heard them zip up their pants. After closing the coffin, they climbed out and began to return the dirt to its crater. As they worked, the dark-haired man said to break the long silence, “There was a young woman buried today. We should do her next. In the obituary it said she was engaged to her girlfriend, so there might be a ring.”

Mia screamed, “Sarina!” The men did not hear her. She was desperate and hopeless, she could do nothing to protect Sarina’s body, but then, what would be the point.

Mia ran and she ran some more. Away to nowhere. She realized she was beginning to recognize parts of the cemetery. She had been here before and there as well. Though she felt horny and crazed from the past two encounters, she was reluctant to satiate those cravings. One word circulated through her mind, denial. She wished someone would strike here. But there was dew dripping onto her thighs, and it was thick and she could smell how wonderfully sweet it would have been to taste. Mia was violently halted when she tripped over a tombstone. Blood seeped into the earth and she noticed a deep wound between her legs.

Ignoring the pain, Mia read the letters on the tombstone that had almost killed her for the second time. It said Harlem Adams, 1826-1857, Union nurse, burned at the stake in the Confederate states for practicing the craft, Beloved sister. Harlem had a tombstone on her right and left. They read, Brook Adams, 1824-1857, Union nurse, burned at the stake in the Confederate states for practicing the craft, Beloved sister and Roxy Adams, 1826-1857,

Union nurse, burned at the stake in the Confederate states for practicing the craft, Beloved sister. “They’re here,” Mia smiled. She smelt the blackberry-scented grass that grew over their bodies. She could not inhale enough of that fragrance and she grew progressively more intoxicated.

As Mia came for the last time, that night she couldn’t help but wonder what else she had inherited from the three witches.

## II.

“I hadn’t seen Sarina in weeks when I heard that she was in police custody. For some reason, I thought we had more time. I knew she would be restrained in the temple for a couple of days. She would be forced to live her last few days completely ascetically before the final public execution. I had entertained the possibility of rescuing her, becoming the hero of her story and whisking her away from her death. I’ve heard from the few that make it out of the temple alive that they tie your hands behind your back so that you can’t even masturbate. Women go wild trying to rub their protruding clits against any hard surface to try and get off. They throw their heads back, their backs are arched impossibly while their hips are thrust forward. They stand with their knees bent and legs wide open so as to make the clit more available. But they’re kept in completely round rooms. They are alone. There are no objects that might satisfy that hunger. The thought of Sarina enduring that end to her life, as opposed to some other one, was unbearable.

“At the time I thought to myself, *Whores deserve better. My fiancé deserves better.* Part of me knows it’s my fault that she’s there. When her parents were out I’d watch over her. We would sit across from each other without saying a word. Without a word my legs would part. I always wore a skirt and I never wore underwear. Her eyes would rest upon my second mouth and then flit back up to my lips stained dark red. It was like she couldn’t tell the

difference. She might not remember that, we never talked about it. I don't know if I did it on purpose. Well, she started following me after those baby-sitting sessions. I let her follow me for years without letting her know that I knew she was my shadow. I never touched myself thinking about her until she was old enough, but still I got pleasure knowing that she idolized me."

"That's all interesting, but Elena, you said her imprisonment was your fault. How so?"

"Oh yeah, I brought her into that world. She didn't start trickin' till she wanted to, but if she had never met me... I ended up not doing anything to free her. I would have disgraced her had I succeeded. We have to do this every year. One of our whores must be handed over to the state. It's always been that way, and we choose her democratically. Even *she* has to consent to giving herself away. You look surprised, but we do something similar most days. It was Sarina's turn and that's it. Of course I'll miss her, but she was happy to go. I don't know if she knew about them tying her hands behind her back. She might not have gone then. She probably let the rope cut into her wrist trying to scratch her ass.

"I was anxiously waiting for the day. I would stand beyond the gates of the temple and stare up at the window I felt to be Sarina's. I thought I saw her eyes and when I did I'd begin rubbing myself down. She needed to know I was tortured and that no relief would ever come. I spent those days watching over and over again the movies she'd acted in. There were only a few but she was so talented. Oh man! There was this beautiful shot where she was giving head to a pink and decorated plastic cock. The guy who it was strapped to, his soft dick was flopping around like a dead fish. Her ass was in the air and my hand was deep in her. That kind of stuff is priceless. I'll long for her.

“That day did come. Everyone in the city got the notice that there would be an execution. A lot of people knew and loved Sarina, so they wouldn’t miss it. Everyone was dressed for the festivities, wearing reds and golds to excite their senses. Though we were outside in broad daylight, it smelt like the smoke and sex that stews in an opium den. The weight of the bodies upon each other, slowly beginning to agitate against each other brought urgency to our situation. They had brought fruits to gnaw on, blackberries, pomegranates and other aphrodisiacs. Their mouths dripped as they ate and the transformation into salivating dogs was immediate. I showed up with all the elder whores in the square sometime before noon. We were all in mourning, so we wore black and painted our eyes and lips as dark.

“We were organized in the square so that the center was a stake. There was no effigy to a deity to which we would prostrate ourselves; Sarina was the perfect substitution. We in black stood at the very front of the crowd, our heads were hung low, and our bodies were still even though the masses behind us pushed up against us. Across from us the crowd parted. The jester emerged dressed in spectacular garb. Was a smile or frown painted on his face? He put his weight on his scepter before standing before the crowd and raising his hands in the air as if to say, ‘I’m God.’ Sarina followed behind him. She too wore a mask and a robe. The mask was painted and vibrantly colored feathers protruded from the edges. Though she did not resist, a man wearing a hood and cloak pushed her along. She was so beautiful, her gold hair bronzing in the light, her dark skin shining like obsidian. I knew then that I loved her beyond and before my self.

“The crowd leered at her like monsters. She paid them no attention though; I could tell she was in her own head. She walked to the stake and threw off her robe. Unveiled, her

body appeared before me for what I knew would be the last time. The hooded man bound her tightly. The rope ran around her neck, chest, stomach, legs, and feet. It was strung between her thighs. The jester poured gasoline on the wood at the base of her feet. She was limp save for her hands tied to her side; her fingers twitched incessantly. At that moment I realized she might be having a mild epileptic episode because she hadn't masturbated in some time. The jester pulled out a box of matches. The energy of the crowd was at a pinnacle; people were itching.

“Sir, I know I shouldn't have. But I had to. She opened her eyes for the first time and she looked right at me, or through me, I couldn't tell. The jester was just about to light the match when I screamed. No. The square fell silent and I rushed to her side. I rubbed her clit and her body grew erect again. Her thighs tensed around my hand. No one killed me so I continued on. I got my other hand up inside her and I fucked her right there. She simply licked my face as if I was fading before her; she wanted the salt off of my skin. Finally, she laughed, her body writhing and convulsing over me. I removed my hand glistening with her cum all over it and waved to the crowd. She whispered, 'Fuck you,' before falling back limp against the stake. I returned back to my position among the whores and hung my head down low.

“No one said or did a thing—too drugged up. The jester began to prance around Sarina. Either smiling or frowning, he prepared to ferry her to the other side. The crowd began to sway. Their smooth and fluid motions soon became quick and rapid jerks. When it appeared that the crowd had recovered its previous level of excitement the jester lit the match and delicately dropped it at Sarina's feet.

“And that was that. The crowd got off just as they always do, their heads thrown back and their mouths wide open. We, in black, stood utterly still. After some minutes of screaming and my whole body aching, she was gone. Everyone left and I remained to watch the flames lick up along the edges of her body until it died away. On my knees, I began to collect whatever ash I could and feed it to myself. It made my mouth dry as I longed for her cunt.”

“Elena, you know we’ll have to put you to death too. That was a silly thing you did.”

“I understand.”

“Your death won’t involve all that fanfare either.”

“I understand.”

### III.

Sarina began stalking Elena when she was just thirteen years old. The much older woman had on many occasions watched over her in the early evening when Sarina's parents had failed to make it home. A lovely middle class apartment. Walls. Beige. Carpet. Beige. Every object seamlessly blended from one to the next.

Sarina would sit hunched over, her body too gangly to remain upright. Across from Elena, she was shy because she had already fallen in love. Elena's breast rose to the top of her chest, heaving and almost spilling from the tight constraints of her bodice. She wore bright colored things; a violet blouse one night, an orange vest the next. Sarina saw the gentle rolls of Elena's stomach and desire to put her head there. Elena painted her eyes, lips, and cheeks. Black, red, and pink. Sarina's mother said to her father that Elena dressed like a whore. For Sarina, Elena was both clown and seductress, her tongue brushing the corners of her mouth and tracing the outline of her made-up lips.

The two sat across from each other, not saying a word. Elena twirled her hair and checked the clock often. With the beige overhead light Elena and Sarina both thought they were waiting for a heavy-handed interrogator to break the silence. She was being paid sixty an hour; it was a decent gig. But she would be late for a better gig if Sarina's parents didn't return soon. Her parents would return laughing and merry, wine almost erupting in gurgles

and burps from their mouths. Elena would take the check and quietly leave without saying a word, rushing off to sell more of her time for better wages. Sarina yearned for some caress from Elena and a promise to return.

Elena grew increasingly bored with the baby-sitting sessions. Why did Sarina have nothing to say? She would ask her one question as she arrived, and always, a one word answer. Sometimes the answer was no more than a girlish grunt. Elena began to think of ways she might entertain herself in these tedious hour in the presence of this child.

Like most skilled workers in her trade, Elena most regularly abstained from wearing underwear. Sitting across from Sarina with her legs crossed, she noticed Sarina was staring right there! The drool on her chin was not the result of apathy, but its opposite. So Elena uncrossed her legs; she wore a lizard green dress that stopped just short of the middle of her thighs. Her feet landed more than shoulder width apart and she began swinging her thighs. Her expression still did not change; even as she began to enjoy herself immensely, Elena appeared totally bored.

Elena's swinging thighs took on the slow shutter speed of an old camera. The motion caught Sarina's eye and she squinted, peering to see the small lens winking at her. Elena's legs were dark like coal and she opened up to an even darker region of her body. But Sarina thought, *some light must get through if that small crack is to take my portrait*. Sarina had never before sought her reflection in someone darker than even herself. Elena believed that the young girl did not notice the only opening in the apartment was the hole between her legs, but she knew otherwise. Sarina's posture changed; she became upright and she leaned forward, curious.

Elena's spread legs became a ritual. Sometimes Sarina thought it was a camera lens, other times she was not certain at which of Elena's painted mouths she was looking. Never did they touch each other. Never did they speak to each other about the silent peep show taking place in the living room of a bourgeois apartment.

Sarina found herself completely entranced by Elena. One night, after Elena had left, Sarina climbed out of her window. Her parents were still drinking and laughing so that they did not notice her absence. She found Elena's scent and footprints and began to track her from the suburbs into the city.

The landscape may have been wilting. Things were falling apart. Refuse became a fixture on every corner that deterred one's eye, but only to have one's gaze land on the next heap of rubbish or decaying animal. Besides the trudging masses, few things breathed.

Sarina hardly noticed these things that might have caused her disgust due to the sharp contrast between her family's immaculate beige apartment and the external world. She was fixated on this moving object and imagined the opening around which her legs and torso rotated. Elena was breathing. She wore gold and silver jewelry that set off like chimes against the late night tired murmurs. Elena might have been a demon bewitching a child with a syncopated song.

Elena entered a dilapidated building but Sarina dared not follow after her. She climbed up a fire escape until she found a window suitable for her viewing. The room she found Elena in was gaudily dressed. Dark satin curtains. Decorated rugs. Languid ivory statues on antique settees. When Elena entered the room the statues stirred from their slumber, their heads nodding and their toes and fingers twitching. Elena laid down on the center table and the audience arose, watching intently. She placed a bowl at the base of her

feet and slowly began to shed her clothes. She did so almost completely apathetically and when she was done, Elena lay there passively. The patrons approached her and touched various parts of her body, her lips, her nipples, her forehead, her ankles, her belly button, and so on and on, until no surface of her body was unmarked. By the end of the procession, folded bills and heavy coins had been collected into the bowl, spilling out onto the table and the floor.

The statues assumed their original positionality and became again frigid and cold. They were tepid and unmoving, the frames and muscles of their body utterly stiff. However Elena remained. Her legs were now spread wide. Sarina was anxious because she had a view of the body from the side and she could not see the opening to which she desired to prostrate herself. Elena placed a hand between her thighs, pushing deep into herself. The other hand massaged the hairy mound at the base of her stomach. Elena's decorated face looked utterly uninterested although there might have been a hiding smirk beneath her curled lips. As her hips heaved and her chest rose with greater vivacity, the statues too began to writhe in place. They did not touch themselves, but they made gasping sounds and their faces puckered like live fish on a cutting board. Hysteria descended on the space. As the patrons became more rabid, more hungry, Sarina feared for Elena's life.

Sarina followed Elena daily for years. She always remained a distance behind, certain that Elena would suspect that it was just her own shadow trailing at her heels.