

BETRAYAL

Taos Lopez

I.

It burns well beyond incinerable content. It burns long after the fire itself is gone.

II.

It rages on just as it whimpers. Your pulse is faint. Your pulse threatens to explode at other times. It's a love story that slits its own throat, but it's not a story at all. It's your life. Your heart beats as a reminder of the beating you've taken. If you could reach it you would pull the plug, but you can't reach it so you reach for something else. First, you pick yourself up from the pavement.

III.

You wipe away dirt and small bits of gravel from your cheek. Your shirt's in shreds. Your body stings in various places. Your right ear was nearly torn off. You laugh to yourself momentarily, then you look for your phone and find it under a parked car. It's a web of shattered glass but no matter, it still works. You call a number because you can't stop yourself from doing so. No one else exists. You don't realize it but that simple fact is the problem itself. You don't realize it but that simple fact is the dream realized as well. For a split-second you consider the difference between need and want. The phone never rings, it goes straight to voicemail; an automated voice echoes in the near distance as your phone slams and skids into oblivion. The shape of the world as you knew it only moments ago, echoes along with it. There are only four directions to choose from. You return to the one most familiar. You're beginning to lose control. With each step you take, the sensation of loss intensifies to the point that it emaciates your flesh. You're disappearing here. You're confident you'll make it there, to your destination that is, but you wonder what will be left of you when you arrive. You know these streets like the back of your hand but you've never been more lost than you are right now.

IV.

You are a savage self. You are a hungry animal. You want what you want but you are forgetting your name. You want her but she's a more savage self than you. You walk around with a knife around your neck. You walk around like you can't wait for the world to cut into you.

V.

You wonder if you have always been a stranger to yourself. If so, is anyone not a stranger? It all begins to make perfect sense to you. Knowing nothing of yourself makes you realize why her heart's a house of mirrors.

VI.

Your life has become a theater of sex and violence, and there are always at least two dramas being played out simultaneously. One on either side of the curtain.

VII.

Three black eyes, huge bruises on your dick, hundreds of bite marks, torn lips, cut flesh, broken nails and a scratched back, welts, a concussion, eleven days in the hospital. Sex is a matrix for pain, she says.

VIII.

You're only part of the secret she has to keep. Her secrets keep her alive. You keep your secrets in order to keep her in your life. Sometimes you want it to end. She understands the double entendre so when you admit it to her she merely tucks a lock of hair behind her ear and checks her phone.

IX.

In a text she talks to you about death and her favorite kind of pain. Usually she does this while you're fucking her. Everyday is a different day when you don't know what, if anything, awaits you. There is ash on the warm wind when she leaves your house. She fastens her garters at the thigh before exiting. She works at an art gallery, and at the gallery there are a number of men who'd happily slit your throat just to fuck her in a back room. Before you pick her up from the gallery you drive to Beverly Glen and fuck a woman who is completely different from *her*. The other woman is not a secret but fucking her tonight will be. Secrets are a heartbeat. Secrets are a carbon fog.

X.

You walk for miles and eventually you arrive at her bungalow in Hollywood. The lights are out so you don't knock. The darkness emanating from inside tells you everything you need to know.

From *Betrayal* by Ceremonial Abyss.

