

## Cara Benedetto

She said there was a woman, *another woman* that owned my head. She was a sex worker and a slave, and until I learned to give to Her, my paths would be crossed.

I left the woman’s office with the dirt floor in my face. She crinkled her nose as she recognized the forgery. There was no true mourning in me. Only the sadness encountered by a spoiled apricot. No longer a peach, dead on one side.

Afterwards I walked back to town with a man on a grant. On the way we stopped pit-side so he could finger a teen with his dot gov. We continued on to meet my boyfriend, the only one I ever had, who would stare at me through goggles, like he was reading my diary in front of me, like I didn’t need to speak because he already knew my dreams.

He knew nothing of the slave in me.

We had been there one week. A town of interiors. A place where people were named other. Trains split them ripping, haunting its scape with a scream, producing a reality that existed in bitters.

It was here people were pushed into the heart of the country, now slaves of agro culture, born of white-faced meanness.

It was here we were introduced.

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Years later I would be reminded of my slave. Perhaps The Other Woman had decided She was done with my head, and wanted to try something that felt pleasure and moved lower. Maybe She was the sub writing endlessly to a Dom half way around the globe in hopes that She could unpath a cross for me, because She was exhausted from watching boredom fuck.

I let Her or She let me. We went together to find the scratch in our back. Ziggy had died that year. It was my fault. I needed to guilt my arched spine. He sat between us and just beside a recent divorcée en route to visit a model online.

The dating site would pick him up from the airport. He didn’t know the name of the hotel. He tried to show me a picture. I felt joy for him. It was irregular but I felt it. I wanted him to be as happy as my recent clam. I wanted his path to uncross even if it meant demise at the hands of scam. I’ve done it too. I was doing it then.

The person I was going to visit was in a sense my first kiss. He wasn’t, but I decided, so that’s how it started. My record twisted fact and romance became a person. My body has known many and that’s why this one was special. This lie was private.

I was at my mother’s house over Christmas. I had been offline dating for months. I was hungry. I was searching her basement for a clue to victim. I found it. A scrappy note that read “Merry x-mas!”

This was the path. I found it on Facebook. In seconds *add friend*. I scoped his photos. My favorite was of a woman standing against brick, ankles tied thick with rope. She wore a black fitted blazer and matching thong. Her tan ass up and out. She was wet, drenched from what seemed to be her own spaghetti sauce. She was beautiful and I felt like I was her, even though I was out of rope and had lost the sauce-pot.

I showed my mom the photos, “He’s an idiot who exploits women with eating disorders.” I shrugged and kept mining. There he was, lightly walking from a doorway, dressed in black. It was a fuzzy shot. In the comments section there was a back and forth. It read: Of course you find the only picture of Me, I can always count on you. Her response: You are welcome Sir.

I thought this was odd and mild jealousy filtered through the five minutes I’d invested. Five minutes tagged onto two decades we had been acquainted. We’d been kicked out of art camp at the age of fifteen in Wisconsin. My mother was called to drive three hours

and pick up her little crying daughter as the counselors shouted, “Good Luck nine months down the line.”

I wrote and he responded. We began a change ex trade. Every three days, there’d be something in my box. Sometimes it was wet, others not. I offended him once because I was honest with myself. We moved on. I shattered my clit twice because he was honest with me. I wrote him plays, poems, text after text, from longing into longer. I made him one audio file, and sent him three pictures of my hands. I pined in my Pittsburgh zoo. He had been impressed with my cage. He agreed to teach me Master. My language altered. I became smaller.

Eleven thousand Facebook chats later I boarded the plane. It was the last of my artist grant money and I wanted to enslave myself to something new. me or She, it wasn’t of choice or matter. I had smallled my i for the previous six weeks. There was no single person at the airport that day. There was The Other Woman, my true slave, and me the tortured one, who pretended by way of grammar and announcements to family and friends:

Yes i’m unavailable, fuck off, i’m taken, leave me alone, i belong to someone. i shouted in Facebook posts, messages to my head. i needed nothing to please. Enslavement had brought space. Finally someone knew how to exploit my centered self better than She.

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It was just past the state deployment of fifty shades of grey. Like the trending artist I was I made art that used, elevated and tore at tropes of misogyny. I never spell that word right. Never.

But that’s what I did. I thought it was funny. That through puritanical systems of colonialism Americans could capitalize on women in a new gaze. The Doms of culture could simply name it what it was, enslavement in poor lighting, out it like good neo-liberals know how. They could also uncross a path to the pocket book with an ambiguously grey name. Those Masters were good, I thought, but I’ve got a lockdown on instability and pain, and they couldn’t beat that. I wanted to know it better so I headed west. The museum had been teaching this kind of thing since the beginning.

In response to Hollywood trying to steal my hack project I held a patron preview at MOCA Cleveland. Here they paid MFA candidates to continue their masochism. Throughout the course of the evening I opened my teacher-time dress to expose garters, and white leather mesh. Having quit CMU the previous day I was no longer anyone’s Master. *Dominant Dialogues* swiped smiles. Two docents gave welcome. Scripted, they spoke about the floor and walls, as if it was Her soft scalp and labic pain.

Anyway, this is all very direct and true but not all of it is in fact, because I skipped the Europe bit. I skipped the moments when I realized that my mask couldn’t stay, where the I insisted on capitalization. I skipped the scene where I cried into a blood-strewn bridge. Into a mattress, after being beaten and chained and then fucked like a good daddy does after a spank. I haven’t yet mentioned how She allowed me a twelve-minute close up or swinging in the sex club.

I didn’t go into the scene that established the shot where I got to keep living this body-wig. I slipped through the torture museum to the artwork that validated my exposure because it filled their hole, contracts, and signatures. But not love, never sacrifice.

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No longer with Master or Dom, I write him in daily. Because his measure is flexible to cups. And I’m always thinking he’s mad, even though he’s not. That he’ll be mad when he reads this. And then again I’ll be one friend less. And the slave will starve and cross my paths.



I make more decisions. I was born into said liberated skin class, and I will still choose slave, because, I've never actually known slave. The I and my She can't take the former, or much more of the ladder.

That's the system here. That's what's happening.

## Part Two: An Ex Sub In Slave Country

I've moved to the house in the south. I live in the place where American commerce found its terrible origins in force. There is collective memory. It is not mine. It is a part mine part I part of this feeling of pains. The suffering of black souls and black people that led here.

Here I inhabit a single family dwelling that I refuse to fill. A lonely plant lives with me. It senses everything. A breezy golden palm. Another cat's afterlife.

Today the plant has decided it wants to live upstairs where I write. I untie my shoelaces and hope for the best as it slowly climbs each stair. I wait for it to arrive bedside. When it does I'll make it coffee and tell it to make phone calls until it hates me like my Dom.

While in administrative wait, I look The Other Woman up. I miss Her more. Wikipedia tells me She's not mine. Wait. She's a slave to the owner of my head I guess. Hm. So the woman who crosses my paths is a realtor of souls? She bargains with Her Master who lives where? My muffin gets harder and my iced coffee gets fatter as I contemplate said issues. I decide to rewrite history again.

The syllabus says: *The Other Woman is the owner of my head. No one else is allowed to live there but Her. She may cross or uncross my path, my dental floss, my lace, my hair, or whatever She feels like obstructing. She may do so without harm or injury to Self because She is the boss, my manager, the only one I love sex worker, and the one to whom answers matter.*

There. No one wins again, least of all a pimp. The Other Woman has no land. She runs the wind. Rules my circus. Has last act. I'll take Her bet over hand over fist over tack. She resides in all of the refusals to Dom without choice. She has hands wet with gift. It is Her will the self seeks. It's Her stakes I eat.

I gaze at my plant and try to remember what it looked like before we began working together. I dig dirt in my thighs. I leave the house in haste.

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The Uber driver asks for stars. I have none to give. They shrug out a casual swimmer's stroke. I sit down and listen. I want someone to hear The Other Woman. I attempt to follow a path that strays in an okay way. I want to please Her. I need to try. It's the only way my nails won't break from progress.

She's silent. I get off. We have keys as we walk towards a rich sea level, the area known to play a major role in the history of slavery in the United States, serving as the second largest slave-trading center in the country, established in 1865. Our mouth hurts from that sentence.

I stroke the metal tip as I wander through Tobacco Row towards the James River. It's low at its center with railroad tracks hovering. There is an island naming its post. A church was there, welcoming souls with a true depth in hate that only children can muster. Here at this bottom of shock, there are no markers saying why or how or when. There are no names or faces. The individuals lost. Their frequency drowned.

Up the canal there is public art depicting an iron box. How a man travelled twenty seven hours to the north to be free. (Again I think I live in Germany) at this bottomed out space, the center of hell, where one feels the scream, resides the Virginia Holocaust Museum. A Survivor must have decided that they needed to remind us because our We wouldn't. They knew that trauma belonged to the body that couldn't hold it. So there it went. Progress in mourning has many brands. Today the mourning is every morning because we still make and agree to every version of slavery.

## Part Three: The Affair Begins

The Other Woman smells best. That's what Nina says. She doesn't dare complain unless She needs to prove dramatic effect. Her love is a fact that will last forever. Her threats are real. Her self-harm a roadblock. Her witch status grants access to all finishing procedures. She can set a table with Her tits or play grace with one eye open.

Because I know all these things from watching 90's erotic thrillers, I spend a lot of money to purchase perfume. I hope this satiates Her somehow but I have a feeling that it will make Her envious. I wonder if She ever takes space in my mouth. If She can feel my toes when I stub them.

I brush the holes careful not to avoid them. I bandage my toes. I place the perfume bottle next to the headless child. I wait for signs that She's untying my life. I wait for "no" to register.

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I write with the awareness that this is not writing. I'm coming off a writer's high. The page is dictating me as sense often can. Secure in the margin. I am a hunger. We begin with descriptions to absorb vertical resistance. Today I will find a recipe and bake The Other Woman cookies.

I jump out of bed aware that I have surrounded my cunt with speechless beings. Is Projecting the friend in the night that wakes me? The sculpture stares back, a remnant of sad lovemaking. Golem lives on the fire's overhang, waiting for a word, a mark in touch. There's the plant I overwater just like my own feral body. Lastly the white beaded necklace. So many objects of protection will get one exactly to the space where they believe words have power, near — Her.

There is blockage in space. Does it mean we can't stand? Will I have to get online to date? Is there too much filter to center? Too much weight that hinders? No I think not, not enough. This faulty rhythm proceeding from symmetry — it's not Hers.

No I can will The Other Woman, She said.

