

EXTRACT: TESS DENMAN-CLEAVER

The first woman says: “Don’t you see I don’t want any part of this? And don’t you see that I have no choice? I couldn’t sit down and give myself an explanation, let alone you.” She is seen from behind now, facing cheap closed curtains. Perhaps this whole scene is around the time of a siesta. Gone or to come. The fan blows her hair a little. She considers an empty frame lying on the table and through the same frame, views an ashtray, removes the ashtray that is formally redundant from the frame’s rectangle leaving an unremarkable abstract bust in metal that looks like a low grade Naum Gabo. She appears to be bored, just a little, perhaps depressed by the day, the heat, the atmosphere. She only slightly caresses the lip of that vase with lazy fingers, languidly in the heat. Witnessing this, the seated woman is inexpressively provoked. She watches intently as the other stares off into an alcove at a painting of a dog emerging from a geometric shape, a painted triangle. She opens a curtain for want of any better option and witnesses her face reflected back against the window, layered over pine branches, then collapses back onto the sofa. The woman happens to be imagining a scene of unusually languid eroticism. She imagines stroking her magnificent hair away from her face surrounded by other, even more beautiful women with impossible bodies. She imagines moving through them, down towards the water which is like crystal. She wades out into what surf remains, kneels, dives, pushes outwards, looks back at the festival of beauties, all together sitting on the sand like that. In the reverie, she treads water and continues to stare at them as they in turn stare out, back out at her. After a moment she remembers. She turns and looks pityingly at her seated companion, still as glued to her chair as the first is mobile.

Do they speak?

The first woman says: “Well, what is it?” and the other woman answers, saying: “Everything we talked about last night. It was a terrible night for me too.”
“I’m sorry.”

“Are you really sure?”

“I don’t know.”

“But there has to be a reason. You know I understand these things.”

“I know you understand these things but I still don’t know.”

There would be a long pause and then the first woman says: “I’m leaving.”

“Wait a moment...”

“Wait for what? Why a moment? Wait for what moment?”

“Like I said, its morbid.”

“I do this with absolute...I do this quite cynically.” There is a sound in the distance, a distant echo. “Take a moment to consider, will you?”

“You put such an almighty effort into not feeling a thing.”

“What is it you ask of me?”

“Just this way, the gap closes, the drawbridge comes slowly down. And there am I, always bouncing myself back off your wall and into this big fat mess of the same stupid, pointless questions. Pointless, utterly. Cold and pointless.”

“We’ve avoided certain things all along. Why bring them up now? There are some things you would never tell me; you would never share.”

“The answers are what you are withholding, some secret space where all the locks break upon entering. Of course, you offer no answers when you bother to say anything. Either way it is nonsense, and perfect in its way. I feel I have been stuck here for years, across time, some endless bag end of some eternal elastic void and it’s nobody’s fault but yours and mine.”

They pause?

She leaves.