

TELENOVELA 7

The hands in this story wrench
with despair when Marina begins to faint
from the strain of remembering her husband
shaking her—the pain and violence,
his hands almost bronzed in their strength,
deliberate in the need to harm.
Her wannabe lover grabs her,
his prehensile limb, robotic. He touches her face,
her hair. They kiss—importance
of gesture. It's him, him, him, her suitor
is the one who matters. Unseemly, she realizes—
her hands push Roberto away.
She needs to escape.

Roberto mourns the loss, clamps his hand on her—
tight like that of Pierre de Wiessant
modeled in Paris by Rodin in 1885
(*The Clenched Left Hand*),
one of the Burghers of Calais,
symbol of the injustice of fate.
Rodin made hands look painful,
but with expressive
possibility: broken, tumorous, clinched.

Roberto wants Marina, watches her
through a windowed door
while she holds her husband's hand, hers soft
and soothing. Fabrizio's in a hospital bed,
white gown, white sheets,
the husband she loves, the beast
she dreads, who recalls little about last night—
maybe a spat?
She remembers his hand
still wearing a wedding ring,
raised—a cobra about to strike.

BROTHEL

My student Lisa invites me to staff
the front desk, nights, says I won't
have much to do in the Upper East Side
apartment where she turns tricks,
and I can get a book out of it.
I'm already titling it *Brothel*, envision
scribbling through the slow hours, pages
piling up, tenure, or better, a bestseller,
but I've been trying to work on my marriage
to a husband more jealous than Othello,
who keeps track of my every hour.
She's going on about the wealthy oilman
whom a group of the girls peed on last night,
and I interrupt to regretfully reject the offer—
probably a mistake because *Brothel*
would sell more copies than
my poetry books, and my marriage blows up
later anyway, like anything with contents
under pressure put to the flame. Her pimp,
someone who scares me, walks into my office,
as if he owns her, me, even the university.
He ignores everything except for Lisa, says
not a word. She rushes her stuff
together, follows him out, head bent
in submission, and I think about how
tough she looked as she laughed
about the john sprawled on the floor.

SOMETHING AMISS

Deidre's had an out-of-body experience,
by which she means an out-of-her-marriage
experience, blames me that her husband

found out. *My lips were sealed*, I protest.
His eyes were peeled, she lobs back,
all accusatory. We've been on the outs lately,

after I refused to loan her my dog. She proposed
to stand outside Barneys, hoped with a cute
dog to meet someone new, preferably a man

who could afford the pricey clothes—her husband
on his way to being ex, anyway. Deidre pounds
my living room wall over whether she'll ever fall

in love again. *I've got one more love in me! Or two!*
For an answer, I bring her to my ex to have
her cards read. He was a shitty husband,

but a brilliant tarot interpreter. I can see
the hesitation while he lays out the deck, tells her
she'll soon wed again. He confesses to me later

he lied, pulled the Chariot and the Three of Swords,
meaning she'll never be able to truly love anyone.
A couple weeks later, I see her outside Barneys

with a cockatoo on her shoulder. It's squawking.
But Deidre talks—well, mostly shrieks
above the noise—to a handsome man in a suave

coat who is foolish enough to try to stroke
the bird. I keep walking, because if he
only loses a finger, he'll be a lucky man.

FALLEN

I fell by the tennis stadium
whose fenced-in club wouldn't admit
girls like me. I fell on broken glass—

face cut in multiple places—shards
that missed my eyes. I fell and ruined
my favorite blouse, its purple-pink

embroidery. I fell and ruined my face,
still carry the scars—faint
bits of unraveled lace. I fell

as a ten-year-old, not realizing I would
become what my mother called fallen.
I fell and a cop wanted to know

where I lived, brought me back
to my red brick home, blood red
and dripping. My mother, who didn't like

cops, opened the door, gasped, put
her hand to her mouth. I fell, muddy
and banged up, realized for the first

time the link between loss of control
and blood. I cried. This was
the bleeding that made me a woman.

LET ME BE CLEAR

I didn't want my sister's money, after,
only the plaster cast of Grandmother's head
made before she went crazy—

screaming for hours she was really a Jew.
Instead, I got legal technicalities,
brutal language of testaments,

broken family. Truthfully, it had been a twisted
mess of dirty socks for a long time.
The lawyer in control of everything

slouched on my sofa with his fake smile,
expensive blazer, while I waited for him to leave.
I got the police visit about the oxy scattered

about her apartment, questioning why a person
who looked respectable like that could fall
but be too wrecked to get up. I received

the phone calls earlier, *I'm a little short this month*,
always the same libretto, her needing
an extra twenty or fifty, until I stopped

answering the phone. It's only the ocean
that never freezes, not so the heart.
No surprise that I'm the one who got blamed

for how it turned out. Okay—none of us were saints.
I was tired of it; her unrooting teeth repelled me.
Filial duty went so far, and then it turned

into something unpalatable, like duck fat.
When I thought of her, one in a line of troubled
women, I also pictured Grandmother's plaster head.

Their impossible futures ended with pills, doors
that didn't easily open—women, after it was too late,
lying on the floor, waiting to be found.

COMMUNING WITH EINSTEIN

You and I joke around a lot
in the imagined voices of our dogs,
make up fake quotes by Einstein
in the subway or at home.
The deep-thinking dog that reclines
beneath the couch, her den,
is in communication
with her own personal physicist.
*Einstein says you can love someone
and not love him at the same time.*
She sulks with indignity
after you've cleaned the mites
from her ear. A reasonable proposition,
intense attraction that overlaps
with resistance. I've found it to be true,
and you've never done anything half
as extreme to me as to Q-tip my canals.

*Einstein says you can be hungry
and not hungry at the same time.* We laugh
as the other one, the pipsqueak dog,
with her oversized behind, creeps up
to wait by her bowl a few seconds
earlier every day so that now she's waiting
Zen-like with Einstein for lunch by 10 a.m.
while we have coffee on this green couch,
the one we were amazed it took
just fifteen minutes in the store to choose,
so clear-cut the consensus. I wait
for Einstein to snap his fingers,
make the couch, subway car, you, me,
our dogs—everything—disappear. Here

and not here. I'm looking at our yellow
and purple-speckled orchid—the one you gave me
just because—that bloomed a second time
this winter when it wasn't supposed to.