

**the international bestseller**

*from NYC TRUCIDO FIRES*

# LUST DEMENTED

*"A vein-bursting,  
twisting, and turning  
supernatural noir."  
- The Village Voice*

**MICHAEL D. SUBRIZI**

**Every man, when he is quiet, when he becomes desperately honest with himself, is capable of uttering profound truths. We all derive from the same source. There is no mystery about the origin of things. We are all part of creation, all kings, all poets, all musicians; we have only to open up, only to discover what is already there.**

**- Henry Miller**  
***Sexus: The Rosy Crucifixion*©**



IT WASN'T EASY TO RECOGNIZE Percy. On first glance, somebody had stabbed him several times, stuffing him with what looked like ritualistically chosen snippets of absurd literature. Pages placed inside him similar to the way a grandmother cut slices into a ham roast and stuffed garlic. Blood dried in branches of rosemary. Body crushed and crumbled on the splattered step.

What really made me gag were the mutilated pages. Books on the floor reduced to binding. Shelves torn from the walls. I fell into a sneezing fit trying to blow the stench of death out of the room. The exposed brick came alive with sinister people trapped within frames. Spotted up snapshots of Percy's hanger-ons. Their cavernous eyes. Their glimmering fangs. Percy always bragged that he had a lot of enemies. He never once mentioned a friend.

One picture stood out from the rest. It was of Percy and Missy lounging together on a deserted beach. Clear ocean swallowed up by a curtain of depraved sky. Missy occupied another dimension, deep off in the starlet pose with everything overflowing. Percy appeared ancient, a mere bystander next to the dime piece.

Now I was a mere bystander... outside of the frame... still waiting for Missy to come in and scream. Nausea in waves...

"Freeze!"

*"Lava will turn us all to stone. A hundred times more terrible than what happened in Italy or Iceland."* Missy was beyond convinced that the world would end in the same place it began for her. A monk found her wandering the shores of Heaven's Lake on Baekdu Mountain. He named her Eun Young.

*"It means Missy in English."* It wasn't true. It means one who always gets luck and protection from the king.

"On the ground! On the fucking ground!" Squinting through the charcoal haze, the officers closed in with their weapons drawn. A stomach of earth. I'm kissing the floor. Percy's leaky corpse was staring me down. I couldn't make out the blurry fuzz. The cuffs were cold and tight on my wrists.

"I didn't do this."

"Maybe you didn't."

"I did..."

"What?"

"I did know them."

"Who's them? I only see one body."

Curiosity awoken, the neighbors watched my heels skid to the patrol car taking

sips from their tulip glasses. Scandals were common in this part of town. Crimes were rare.

“Duck asshole!” They reminded me a second late. I crumbled in the fetal position. The pigs floored it, only to slam the breaks. A few more times, a few more bruises. A trickling stream of brutal stop and go. The city was a self-absorbed amoeba. The ride couldn’t have lasted shorter. No matter where you happened to be in NYC - a jail, hospital, or bank were only a few blocks away: The holy trinity of the modern age.

Down a hallway of echoes... the muffled chatter of the human zoo... not even placed in the cage for a hot second... the slavemasters take me out to look me over... not too interested... not too thrilled... a busy night in the neighborhood... I want to plead innocence... just can’t raise my voice over all the others doing the same... intimate confidants packing the pasture... their smudgy windows leading to cunning ways out... their sunken eyes accused... their savage intentions glorified...

A room opens up. A psycho exited grumbling, “So the fuck what... suck it...” incoherently possessed he tries to bite me... I don’t flinch... I doubt he can bite me into a coffin... go fuck yourself we make acquaintance... now to look the cops in the eyes... the two that led me into the cramped room... the pale redhead... cartoonish curves... kung-fu swagger... emerald marbles in the sockets... the dark man... slits squinting... shoulders that widen door frames... a warm inviting host of a voice. “Take a seat.”

I closed my eyes letting them watch me reverberate in the echo of past voices. They knew I would rather listen to them talk. Missy was missing and maybe I knew and maybe I didn’t. Either way they’re shaking the wrong tree for coconuts.

## {II}

DARKNESS WAS THE WORLD I WAS no longer a part of. Sgt. Bethany Powers had the light in my face with a glare of scrutiny

“Make any sense of this mess Farrow?” She waited for me to break the silence.

“You’re perfect except for the uniform.”

Sgt. Bethany Powers smashed my face off the table. The room trembled. I was back on Roosevelt Avenue in Queens watching the trains pass each other in the night. Jumbo jets swept down from above. Everything moved around me in immediacy, but I stayed frozen: Just another dissolving hologram.

“So Farrow... what made you come into the city tonight?” Her soothing voice took its sweet time slicing through the stale air.

“I came for *A Greater Truth*.” The severity of the situation was squandered. Squandered in years of writing rising from the concrete maze. Squandered in the mocking sky constantly caving in. Squandered in the sagging marshland bubbling to swallow me up.

“Did you get it out of Percy before you carved into him?” Their efforts to unwrap me, felt routine, unimportant.

“I heard you were more than familiar with Percy’s wife, Missy.”

“His wife? It’s been years.”

“Years?”

“Missy fucked me over. A year’s passed since I’ve seen her.”

“A year almost to the day. Nice anniversary you planned.” A dose of serum. I wondered where she got her information and how the hell it was so relevant and exact. After the fleecing Missy ran on me with the help of the lecherous high society literary czar Percy Featherston, I lost all concept of time. I had to lead the conversation into insignificance.

“It’s not my style to badmouth the black widow. None of this woulda ever happened if...”

“What woulda never happened, Farrow... Percy would still be alive?”

“We better not find Missy taking a dirt nap in your backyard.”

“I hope she’s okay. I hope she gets everything...”

“She deserves.” Det. Anderson grimaced, patient and methodical.

“I hope she gets everything she desires. Everything she thinks she needs.” I used Missy. She used me. It usually went that way in love. The idea that she was in danger made me cringe, but the cops would do little to help. If anything, clarifying what they didn’t know could only complicate the disaster.

“How did Missy fuck you over Farrow? It seems to me she found a more successful man. A gentleman that adored her. A successful man that helped her gain the recognition that she deserved.”

“It seems if anyone did anything to anyone... it was you Farrow. Tell me. Just how did Missy fuck you over?” Sgt. Powers went after my insecurities. It made my blood simmer. I couldn’t resist. I had to hear the words out loud.

“Missy fucked me over by...”

“Come with it.”

“Don’t keep us waiting.”

“By stealing my book... *A Greater Truth!*”

“Your book?”

“*A Greater Truth?*”

“Yeah. Did you read it?” An image of my book’s last passage brought a smile to my face. “Either of you?”

“Actually to be completely honest, I feel like I’m reading it as we speak.” Sgt. Powers humored me, attempting to turn me inside out. “But, I don’t believe you wrote it. Not a fucking chance.”

“I don’t believe you read it... not a fucking chance.” Our doubts appeared out of nowhere... threatening to spread into a local plague... popping up on the cankerous faces of the Grand Central commuter rush... splotching over the skin of the staggering tourists drunk on Times Square’s radioactive waves... climbing out the scabrous loudmouths of bluebeasts in riot gear ducking flaming bottles.

“Farrow, can you prove that you wrote it?” Detective Anderson ended on a long pause, listening intently as if his life, not mine depended on it.

“Do a mother’s eyes match her baby’s?”

“Sometimes they do match Farrow. Sometimes they do.” The only place that offered any escape from the morbid meditation was Sgt. Bethany Powers’ green eyes, where of course I found my reflection. Too bad she was against me. Too bad she only cared about the dead.

## {III}

THE CHOKESMOKE NYC AIR HIT my lungs offering up a different lick of instinct. I had to watch my every impulse, as the people that would be doing the same were not to be trusted. Smooth survival was making sure to walk with purpose at all times. Detective Anderson followed me through Gramercy with the swiftness. He wasn't undercover. He knew I knew he was watching me. He wanted me to know.

Percy's designer clothes felt soft against my skin. I didn't snatch them up today and I didn't steal them. The old conniving bastard actually gave them to me. It was his idea. Absurd, that after all the years of trying to infiltrate the world Percy controlled, he was the one that approached me. At first I thought he was guilty about Missy choosing him over me. Then I came to my senses and realized he looked at her as more of a literary whore than myself. It was a competitive stable of a brothel: This incestual world of words. Percy, a writer himself, was under the same blessed curse. He wanted to give me a place to live. Give me clean clothes. Thing is: He forgot how he became what he was. I could live anywhere. I could wear anything. So I felt nothing about the Queens coffin he placed me in.

Detective Anderson slowed to my creep. Every time I caught his eyes a dozen ways to ditch him entered my mind. I wondered why he just didn't cuff me to the scaffolding of Featherton Publishing. Was he nervous I would try to take the whole building down with me? Was he afraid I would wither away of starvation and heatstroke like a mangy hyena in the Serengeti? There are more convenient maneuvers to antagonize the grim reaper.

I didn't have the key to Gramercy Park, but it was easy enough to hop that pathetic fence. I wasn't sure if they were trying to keep people out or in. For some reason I expected Detective Anderson to do the same. Instead he just reached in his pocket and whipped it out, shutting the gate gently, so not to bring notice of his presence to the others patrons.

I was exhausted, overwhelmed. I collapsed in the first available spot that was more grass than dirt. Detective Anderson towered over me like a sentimental grizzly.

"Farrow most murderers return to the scene of the crime." The statement made me want to lie down in the middle of the A-train's tracks and chant doo-wop with the subway rats.

"This wasn't the scene of the crime."

"Close enough." I could feel the Featherton townhouse radiating hellborn vapors beyond the gates. Shut your eyes and everything will go away. My head was a heavy shell. I was fading fast. Let the lids ease closed. A little bird was bouncing in front of

me. They were all over the city. Easy not to notice. Squeaking and tweeting. Fade to inner silence... come easy dreams...

*“I met someone that can help you.” Missy and I were on a rooftop somewhere in Hell’s Kitchen. It was summer, but not the summer of the current year. The buildings hanging in our shadows had a superficial incandescence. I already had my share of the conversation from the sharp breath of entry, but Missy wouldn’t let up.*

*“Oh yeah...”*

*“Featherton Publishing mean anything to you?”*

*“Who is it? An editor...? A mail clerk...? A family connection...? A friend of a friend of a friend...?”*

*“Featherton himself Farrow. He tried to pick me up. I didn’t realize who he was at first, until he told me, and when I did - I immediately thought of you. Percy Featherton...” I could feel her poking me as she moaned his name.*

*“Percy Featherton is de...” I woke up mid-sentence. The finger poking me belonged to Detective Anderson. He was standing over me with mysterious urgency. His jaw was clenched. His eyes were crossed in the most disturbing fashion.*

## {IV}

LIGHTS FLASHING, A BLACK UNMARKED Ford Explorer stopped short on Irving Place with all its windows down. Chaotic radio breaka breaka filled the air.

“Long time no see Farrow.” Sgt. Bethany Powers squeezed the pulp out of the wheel.

“The pleasure is mine.”

“Anderson, you didn’t tell him yet!”

“I didn’t want to disturb his sleep. Guy’s our number one suspect and he’s nodding out in rush hour.”

“Tell me what?” I figured I was being arrested. I’d be cuffed at the wrists and ankles, tossed around ragdoll, and dragged from sweaty cell to sweatier cell.

“Farrow they found Missy’s body.” Detective Anderson spoke slowly in a windy cemetery voice, laying his hands on me with the conman chi of a Reiki healer. My body slumped over... head curling into chest... lava skin... liquid pain... bones molting. Detective Anderson opened the back door of the squad car for me limo driver style. I could hear the engine’s purr and nothing else. It was more soothing than distracting. Sgt. Bethany Powers hit the sirens. Peeling out, she took a wild left onto 18<sup>th</sup> street. Memories bombarded me...

*Missy showed up in full evening wear ready for confrontation. Featherston was at her side with his hand extended, waiting for me to shake it. Missy had a glowing, almost blinding smile, proud of her accomplishments. I turned my back on them both without saying a word.*

“Fucking caldron.” Detective Anderson’s accent shifted guttural as his body twitched in preparation.

“Temperature’s rising.” Sgt. Bethany Powers’ eyes drilled inward as we weaved in and out of downtown traffic.

*I could hear Missy’s heels clicking on marble museum floors. We were surrounded by valuable art. Then the sound of her heels disappeared. Then the art disappeared.*

No more than another set of wheels click-clacking across the river: That’s all we were. The Brooklyn Bridge echoed with taunts. What the hell was Missy doing on the other side of the river in the first place? She always complained about the boroughs, the subways, the stoops, and anything New York that wasn’t Manhattan. Maybe she had some premonition that Brooklyn would be her final resting place.

*Missy didn’t know I was choking on her perfume. It was the first time I followed anyone. Let alone a lover. The moment was romantically cinematic, except for the spy behind the invisible curtains. I didn’t have to hide. They couldn’t see me even if they*

*wanted to. They couldn't see anybody, but each other. When he kissed her, the flavor of his lips filled my mouth. It tasted like saying hello again to a dead relative at a wake.*

A final tear rolled down my cheek. There was a commotion on Coffey Street. I always envisioned the confrontation with Missy differently. I would see her from across the room, slowly gravitating towards her, melting every step of the way in her incendiary gaze until I was a pool of truth at her feet and she would bathe in me... drink me, until we were one again.

This city keeps its cops busy. Sgt. Powers and Det. Anderson left me in the car while they mingled on the miniature lawn similar to a couple at an East Hampton benefit dinner. Something about the casualness of their gestures offended me. Both officers appeared to know everybody on the scene. From the backseat the sounds of their voices were distorted, struggling futilely to be heard over the rest. "We need you to identify the body." Det. Anderson offered up a polite invitation to the gore and emptiness waiting inside.

## {V}

LITTLE STONES TRAPPED IN CONCRETE slabs forced into the grass. The path to the front door disintegrated before it materialized. With a somber greeting, Sgt. Bethany Powers quickly ushered us to the back of the house. Center of gravity shaken, it occurred to me the amount of time that passed since I stepped foot inside an actual house and not an apartment.

Stories hidden within stories. Trails of reality dosing dream logic. From the outside the three-story shell looked no different than the other dilapidated shitshacks that the longshoreman used to stain with sweat. But inside the ceilings were strangely arched. The second and third floors were completely removed and the walls reinforced. The three of us exchanged glances under slices of light. Gothic stone statues and heavily carved furniture were scattered everywhere allowing very little room to move.

The officers stopped short, releasing air from their constricted lungs. It was time. I looked down at the body and quickly looked away.

“That’s not Missy.” An unfathomable error. They must’ve already known. Fury built up inside of me. I felt stretched vertically as if the devil was kicking her high heel up my ass.

“What do you mean?”

“Who is it?” Sgt. Bethany Powers and Det. Anderson studied my reaction, all but taking notes.

Light through the stained glass ceiling divided the victim’s body into occult fractals. The dead writer lying on the ground, skull split, body thrashed by an evaporated predator was a polar opposite of Missy.

“Monika Gloom.” There was a strange silent understanding between the icy amazon and I. The sensation carried true into her death.

“It looks like her vocal chords were cut out with a pair of scissors.” Sgt. Bethany Powers traced an imaginary line centimeters above Monika’s throat, snipping away with long spindly fingers.

“Whoever did this tore the folds of flesh right through her neck after they were done peeling her open.” Detective Anderson’s intellectual tone conjured images of the scores of fatal wounds a person would have to examine before gaining such expertise.

“Pages thrown all over her. Once again all the books ripped off the shelves...”

“... separated from their binding.” I was turning into one of them. Finishing their sentences for them in the fashion they originally hoped.

“Okay... Farrow let’s get it over with now and not at the station. Tell us everything you know about her.” We were all playing the same game in different ways. Certain

facts had to be left out to allow myself the greatest available freedom, which seemed to be diminishing in violent flashes of time. I had to give the cops something.

“She wrote the dark stuff. Her talent... her presence was intimidating.” The more I looked at Gloom, the more I zoned out. The place I entered, I didn’t want to go. I tried to drift back, but it wasn’t happening quickly enough.

“D.O.A. had a reading scheduled tonight on the Bowery.” A random cop appeared to be a fan of Gloom’s schlock. “It starts in a half hour.”

“Get moving then!” Red hair whipped me in the face, nearly stripping me of my unalienable rights.

“Farrow! Let’s get shaking, huh.” Detective Anderson nudged me away from Monika’s body.

“No chance. I’m done with you guys.” Bloody pages of *A Greater Truth* were stuck to my shoe. It took a few Radio City kicks and half the Harlem shuffle to shake them off.

“Have it your way.” Detective Anderson exaggerated his huffs, theatrically storming off, leaving me in the room alone with Sergeant Powers and Gloom.

“You artists are always broke, but usually can still lose yourself in a good fuck.” She grabbed my belt buckle pulling me close enough that I could smell the napalm on her breath. One hand slid between my underwear and my skin. The other she kept closed in a fist. Slowly she uncurled her fingers, revealing a crumbled twenty dollar bill in her palm. I took it and she pushed me away. Then something hit her. Her brain was storming. Lizardish oracle eyes locked on my belt buckle. Somehow she knew Percy kept my pants from falling around my ankles. Somehow she already knew.

“I don’t want to get involved.” Clearly writer genocide. Slit throats flooding, screaming vowels and owl eyes of frozen cadavers. Burn all books, drain all ink, smash all screens.

“We have nothing. Believe me when I tell you this. Remember you or someone you love will be next. Go to the reading. Just go and see if anything feels strange.” Damn sexy how she mixed her bullshit with sincerity as she found a better grip, stroking me.

## {VI}

RUMBLING. A STORM WAS CREEPING up. Not bolts, but white flashes ready to blanket Brooklyn's bellyland. The first drops sounded like the neighborhood kids were dumping pails off the deserted factory rooftops. Outside Gloom's house a cop chatted up the driver of a yellow cab. I got in without bothering to say where I was going. It was a relief to be free of the dicks breathing down my neck. Anytime I tried to envision Percy's ceremonious corpse, I could only see my own.

"Some writer's bar on Bowery and Houston is where the cop told me to drop you. That okay with you?" The transsexual cabbie's raspy Macy's fragrance aisle accent shook with the cab as we rattled through the potholes. Long hair dangled on the divider.

"Yeah, but take your time. No rush." I wanted to get back to it. I needed to write. Make sense of it all.

"I spit verse there sometimes." The cabbie took both hands off the wheel, interlocking ten fingers and flexing both biceps.

"Oh..."

"Taxi-poems, I guess you'd call them."

"Yeah..." My brain was leaking all over its empty page. The chaos crackling above felt right on target. All I needed was the rain.

"I saw you made the news." The driver turned completely facing me in an effort to engage me. "Curiosity got the better of me and I took a spin to see for myself."

A small flat screen television was pinned smack dab in the middle of the back of the front seat, strategically below the partition which had a little moveable drawer where you could slide the money through the bulletproof glass like a late night liquor store.

"TV repeats every fifteen minutes or so. Gives me a fucking migraine. Every time I turn the volume off, a fare turns it back on. I hear this city's sickness in my sleep. It's one thing to read the paper in the morning... another thing to listen to it for your entire shift." The cabbie was really able to carry on a conversation with herself. Definitely a writer.

"Wait. This is it... here it comes." The rain began to come down harder. A smooth layer of careening water covered the windows erasing the outside world. A hotel restaurant scene appeared and disappeared in a matter of seconds replaced by a pearly-smiled reporter who appeared a little too joyful to be reporting a murder. The little screen filled with images of Percy's townhouse.

\*\*\*\*\*Today steps from Gramercy Park a typically peaceful street was the site of a vicious, cold-blooded homicide. It was here where publishing czar Percy

Featherton was found savagely murdered in his lavish townhouse. The pages from his most recent success *A Greater Truth* were found torn and scattered over his dead body. The book was a stylish mystery written by his wife and protégé Missy Featherton. Police have taken into custody Michele Giacomo Aurelio Faro who was discovered at the scene in a state of confusion. Bizarrely he seems to be attempting to take credit for a book he didn't write\*\*\*\*\*

"That's some long name you got." The driver looked back at me instead of the road, bulldozing forward.

"Yeah. I'm surprised they didn't butcher it. Did it sound like I was guilty?"

"I don't know I just met you. In this country..."

"She made me sound guilty. Didn't she?"

"Mr. Farrow it made you sound like a man who's seen better days."

"Why didn't they say I wrote the book? Why did they give Missy credit as the author?"

"I suppose because her name is on the cover."

"I wrote it."

"No shit?"

"The cops believed me."

"You believe that they believed you? You wouldn't be the first killer to ride in this car... this planet's outside its head. Just when you let your guard down.... WA-BAM!" Electric sky followed by a thunderous boom.

"I'm no killer. I'm just a... just a friend of the dead." Construction cranes hung above us. The overseers were forcing futuristic change. A neighborhood famous for its anonymity in the past was transformed see-through. All the buildings going up were all windows. You could see the new neighbors cozying in. You could hear them pop their corks.

"Afraid somebody's after you in particular or just all the writers they can find?"

"Somebody's exterminating writers and I'm heading to a room full of them. What are your plans for the night?"

"What do you want to take me out on the town or use me for a shield?"

"A shield from the shield."

"Gotta keep the meter moving. I suggest the same to you." The driver shrugged me off, pulling over across the street from the club. I placed the twenty in the partition's pay slot only to be refused.

"Nothing disgusts me more than a bum scheming to take credit for someone else's work. I hope you finally get picked out of the crowd." The cabbie grilled me with a lippy smile through the rearview. I lifted the bill high like a hypnotist. Gently laying the green on the back seat followed with a middle finger.

It was always raining on the Bowery. The door slammed. The cab's spinning wheels showered me. I was alone for the first time since I stumbled upon Percy's cold cadaver. I found a seat on the curb. The entire city was just a fucking puddle to make a mess in. I became fixated on a paper coffee cup overflowing water from the storm. The soiled cup wouldn't fall over no matter how hard the rain came down. I put the cup to my lips and sipped. I was drinking the city itself. The familiar taste of millions of overflowing dreams. It tasted natural, like licking your own blood to stop the bleeding.

## {VII}

IT WAS AN ILLUSION THAT I was drinking anything more than air. I watched the drops build at the bottom of the empty cup, but didn't have the patience to allow them to grow into something substantial. Crushing the cup, I placed it in the gutter, and booted it into the middle of the street. A few cars ran it over. I waited for the avenue to open up, making a point to step on the dirty flat cardboard before slipping through the doors of the poetry club.

Some people are ghosts... able to float aimlessly without ever truly compromising their ideals to the world of flesh. It was no secret that Monika Gloom chose a spectral image to boost her circulation. Nonetheless, her fans were the authentic living dead, feasting on one of their own. I scanned the room for Detective Anderson and found him talking up a thin woman with huge glasses that made her look like the human fly. There was a buzz in the room and the conversations seemed to blend together into some foul concoction of spirit.

"...who could've done this?... it doesn't make sense... writers feign suicide ... musicians get drained by love.... painters turn into vegetables..." The auditory select herd had some interesting philosophies on the final days of an artist. A hovering impatience called for an orator to stand above us and make sense of it all.

"What a bore." Distinguished and distant, Lars Wildman gave off an air of self-destructive royalty. I should have smelled him coming.

"What's a bore Lars?"

"This fucking senselessness. The easy ending is death. For once I want to see a story that ends with life." Lars seemed heavily medicated as always.

"I'm sorry about your father." I could already picture Percy's body in the ground, maggots eating his skin.

"You hated his guts like everyone else. It was just a matter of time that somebody dealt with him the way he dealt with others." Lars was Percy's son. His real name was Clayton Featherston. He probably picked his last name so the day somebody decided to shade in his past with typeset font and pleasant exaggerations there was no chance the title would get fucked up.

"Now Gloom's gone too."

"Last time I saw the dark sorceress she attacked me with a steak knife at Peter Lugers. I splashed her eyes with gravy, but she managed to take a piece off the corner of my ear." Recounting the story, Lars pulled back his hair so I could see the slight deformity the slain scribe marked him with. A questionable tale to say the least. Waiting for my reaction, his eyes became orbs that turned the world into a giant shadow that only he

could navigate aimlessly. It was at that moment that Hawaii appeared wearing tiny pink shorts. I hadn't seen her in some time. She looked pretty much the same as the last time we bumped into each other, except she was wearing shorter shorts. Every time we crossed paths I noticed that her shorts would get shorter. Shorter every time. Hawaii was the bridge between Lars and Gloom. A couple years ago, she dated them both simultaneously and the discovery blossomed into the scuffle over red meat that Lars had just finished lamenting. It made the papers and I remembered lining my kitchen cabinets with the newsprint.

"Farrow the transient outcast and Lars my bitter love." Hawaii put her arms around both Lars and I. Hawaii had the habit of laughing after everything she said. It might have come off as an obnoxious or an ignorantly stoned gesture if it came from somebody else, but something about her ways was subliminally seductive. It was a gentle orgasmic giggle that forced you to picture her in scenarios reserved only for her. "How are the girls?" For some reason it made me relax to see Lars cringe. Despite his open-minded demeanor, he struggled with the fact that Hawaii's main duty outside of spoken word throwdowns was to help chicks rid themselves of unwanted pregnancies. "They're fine Farrow. Thanks for asking." Hawaii smiled, affectionately massaging both of our shoulders. "Truth is I've shifted roles at the hospital. I got a transfer to the neonatal intensive care unit about a year or so ago."

"That's nice." Lars stayed suspicious as Monika Gloom's latest pet got up on the stage.

Kiko seemed to hover above us all, forcing the entire crowd to start at the pointy toes of her stilted blue leather boots and follow floral black lace leggings to her lunar skin mid-thigh, tangling our minds deep in a short black and white anime maid's dress, slices of fabric missing which allowed her tattoos to burst through bleeding color. Her hair dyed deep blue where it was not jet black, short where it was not spiked up in a fuck the world typhonic wave.

"Why don't you all shut up?" The room filled into an immediate hush as Kiko snarled, whipping her neck around jaw first.

"You... you just stand there waiting to hear me read the same words that you read to yourself. The same words that you make mean whatever you want them to mean. You think they're written for you, but these are my words. Monika used to say... Kiko you're my porcelain muse, stay near me so I can write. Never shatter." Kiko licked her lips, fighting the endless desert in her mouth.

"I can't do this." Choking up with two fingers inserted past the knuckle, Kiko shook Gloom's latest novel like it was an extension of her fist.

"Pale skin and pale words." Lars rolled his eyes, twitching on account of the unwanted attention. The gawkers that weren't wrapped up in Kiko's trance were staring down Lars from all corners of the room.

"What do we do now?" I was getting restless, short-attention span and all.

"Listen." Hawaii used a roguish whisper to undress Kiko on stage.

The crowd cynically dished out unintelligible jeers intended as support. Kiko inhaled deeply, opening the hardcover as she exhaled into the microphone, "This is an excerpt from *Viscous* by Monika Gloom..." Everyone started clapping like their favorite band finally sobered up enough to take stage. Kiko dramatically stared at a sky blocked by a black ceiling. When she was finally ready her eyes fell back on the page. "The uncivilized fathers of New Amsterdam cannot comprehend the biological

clock of the immortal undead. I have seen more sunrises than the city's bridges have been masturbated by river waves. I have tasted more necks than the soil has swallowed plague ridden bones... that's it... she's dead... I'm sorry..." Kiko and most of the Gloom groupies in the room seemed to have the passage memorized. Stomachs grumbled to be fed their idol. Heartbroken fans stormed the stage, prying the book from Kiko's hands. Ripped pages filled the room, twisting and twirling through the air, landing on candles with poofs of smoke.

I noticed Lars shaking his head and found myself shaking mine in agreement. Whatever happened tonight was over and done with. Hawaii gazed in wonder at the strange man making his way across the room. Detective Anderson motioned to me and it seemed like a good time to get some fresh air.

"It was nice seeing you guys. Give Detective Anderson my regards."

"Who?" Hawaii and Lars exchanged suspicious glances.

## {VIII}

BLACK RAIN. WRITING IS A race against death. The only difference that the present moment had over the day to day was the assassin slicing up the competition and leaving my calling card behind in torn from the binding. Usually when I left a room of writers, a suspicion lingered that my delusions were justifiable.

Cloud sweat pounded my armor chest. I could only march on unashamed to ruin or fame. Delivery guys in their makeshift ponchos chugged forward through the honks. The city was mad with hunger and willing to pay dearly for her secret fetish. It had been a long time since I'd seen or been seen. Seasons had passed since the public success of my pilfered novel. It was no mystery to any of them that I was sitting around chanting obsessed curses of vengeance.

*Nude in the dim lighting, Missy moved in a trance of summoned passion. The music was loud enough that she didn't notice me at first. When she did catch my eye, it was with a gas chamber stare. A metaphoric blade at my throat.*

*"Practicing for the old man?"*

I was staring lost into the East River. I didn't remember exactly how I got there, but I could remember other things. Spend enough time in this town and every corner becomes stage for a memory. There was a bench at my side that I just couldn't sit on. Last time I sat on that bench, Missy stood behind me with searing eyes.

*"You're not a man." Her words were forever etched.*

*"You don't even know what a man is."*

*"You're not a man, Farrow."*

*"A man survives."*

*"What?"*

*"A man survives. That's all."*

Missy's reasoning at the time was based on nothing more than what she wanted me to decide for her. I had already made my decision before I met her. Just the same, she had already made her decision before she met me.

*"You're no writer." Engorged, her breasts shook as we waited on line at the supermarket. She was pregnant. Hormonal.*

*"What do you want?"*

*"I have no idea. I only know what I don't want."*

*"Then what don't you want?"*

*"I don't want you here. I don't want your baby living inside me."*

*"It's our baby. Not only mine."*

*"It's nothing."*

Missy had room for a dozen razors under her tongue. She explained how she had no choice. We weren't ready. She had to kill it. Now ghosts of dead publishers and overly ambitious writers were at my sides. I wondered if anything changed. The bench was still there. I wanted to rip it out of the ground and throw it in the fucking river. That's just what I needed to do, so I did it.

## {IX}

THE BENCH DIDN'T FLOAT AND neither did I. Rain arpeggiates the river's surface helping along the three foot swells. Above the water the city is a shimmering miracle. A rough menstrual drain pouring from Gotham's luscious lips. The entire planet was spotted with blood to drown in. I was more a part of it than it wanted me to be. The bench was sinking somewhere below me. I could no longer see her, but I knew she... I mean it... was still there.

*"What do you want me to say?... um let me see Farrow... how about... I just give you more material for your book."*

*"My book?"*

*"A Greater Truth... if it even exists! Not everything in life is material for your book. Please don't make me material for my book."*

*"Your book? What the fuck are you talking about?"*

She called it her book. I was taking her serious up until that point. I should've taken her even more mysterious when she let that claim slip. If the night carried out in the direction it was heading, my last book would forever be credited to someone else. Motherfuck memories. Thoughts of the woman were electrocution. Unfortunately, the river made certain things far and others close. How strange to be alone anywhere in this city. Fighting the current would only tire me. Bobbing between silence and droning echoes... between the townhouse Percy's life was taken and Gloom's death-stained cave.

After the Williamsburg, there were two more bridges for me to pass under before I was out to sea. I too wanted to join in the killing, but I set my goals higher than one of my own. I wanted God dead by sunrise. The fantastical concept reflected itself illuminated. It would be a traditional crime of revenge, jealousy, and awe all in one. Such an overweight sacrilege bordered on immortal innocence. Somebody already discovered the nuclear bomb more than a half-century ago, but took their finger off the button too soon. Fuck it... maybe that's how civilization began in the first place. Either way the almighty appeared to be immune from any technology our tumored brains could design in self-hate.

Enough deprecation. Save philosophy for the silhouette of a man ready to leap into the waters. I could just make him out in the downpour. Though I couldn't see him clearly, I sensed where the figure would land before he even leapt. I wasn't sure if it was a giant raindrop falling from a cold steel cloud or a human tear straight from the creator. Instinct on my shoulders, I took deep breaths preparing for the dive to make things right. Occasionally there are times in life when you know you're standing or in