

Stretching to Understand

by Siolo Thompson

You looked like someone I didn't want to know. I guess that's why I got in the car that night. My penchant for self-destruction was aroused by your black nail polish and the lavender circles under your eyes. You looked like someone that could hurt me, yeah, that's why I got in the car. I thought we would ride through quiet streets, smoking too many cigarettes, trying to find things to talk about but falling into sullen silence instead. Eventually we would have sex in the back seat of your car, never getting all our clothes off, my skirt around my middle, your pants around your knees.

The regret would linger much longer than the act.

Instead you took me to the top of the water tower and you wrapped a blanket around my shoulders and told me that you were sorry about not being able to hurt me, that you didn't have it in you to fuck me carelessly. You talked like you were thinking out loud. I felt like I was walking with you in a dream and I never wanted either of us to wake up again.

You looked like someone I could never know, you were dark and beautiful and quiet. In time I told you all my secrets and you told me all of yours. We had such happy childhoods, everything almost perfect.

The almost perfect perfection of middle-class American life. Our happy child memories blurred in places here and there by the occasional incident of alcoholic rage or night-covered sodomy (your father loved you too hard we thought). Our lives were full of the furry edged expressions of twisted love. All our old scars we showed each other and I kissed yours and you kissed mine.

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You just wanted to be understood, you said, as you pulled that long, black hair away from your lovely square jaw. I understood you didn't I? How I stretched myself to understand you!

All my understanding didn't help a bit.

You looked like someone that could never do a thing like that, but I had been wrong about this before. When I realized that you had your father's curse I tried to stretch my love for you right on over into understanding and I did. You already had all my secrets and I was trying, trying so hard to hold on to all of yours.

You looked like someone I didn't want to know. It's damn hard sitting here looking at you through this glass. I loved you so fucking much and I love you still. You looked like someone that could hurt me but I didn't stop to think that it was someone else you were hurting all the while. Hush now love, I know that you really were wanting to be better than all that and that you never meant that boy any harm. I'm stretching still to understand you and I forgive you even if no one else can.

