

Glass Handcuffs

by Brett Garcia Rose

I am a therapist. I know danger and sickness when I see them. I tingle in their presence, sometimes in awe, sometimes revulsion. Nothing touches me more than a reticent patient in tears, breaking through to a place I'll never see. My steady voice guides them on, blindly drilling through the soft layers of despair, of anger and hopelessness, dropping little pools of light in the blackness, carving notches of progress for them to see and remember.

Most days I get the routines, the bill payers, the chronically lonely, the people who go to the carwash because their hose is too short, the spouses who marry themselves and confuse self-loathing with love. Also the obsessive masturbators, the self-abusers, the pathological liars, the kleptos who always get caught. People wait all week to sit on my couch unaware of their own lives slipping away. For \$150 an hour I'll be anyone's friend. I soothe their pain and sponsor their illnesses and have a receptionist collect the fees and show them out.

They send me Christmas cards, gifts.

I am a psychological seamstress, a fashionista for the suicide set.

Every sickness I see infects me a little more. I encourage my patient's creative and energetic unburdenings, collecting the fallout like a tarp collects rainwater. I have imaginary containers of virtually everything neatly stacked inside of me, sorted by last name, payment date, prescription number. I am a library of mental disorders. I am the Kmart of phobias, the Costco of anxiety, and I'm tired of holding it in. I am tired of waiting. I am tired of everything.

I am Hypersomnia. I am Narcolepsy. I am Sleep Paralysis.

I attended a gallery reception four days ago. I don't remember who invited me, how I found out about it. Another semi-literate artist expressing himself through excrement-colored paints because his coworkers at Starbucks convinced him he had *it*. I met the painter, too; skinny little thing, wispy hair, thirtysomething pimples, fake

English accent. I've met a hundred painters. Five hundred. A thousand.

This is where I met David.

Daytime, when I feel right, I gravitate towards ugly men with their cow-like acceptance of life, their underdeveloped sense of entitlement. Some women choose gay men as friends; I go stark ugly. The uglier the better. They are like comfort food for me, easy conversation, steady and smooth, patient when going around obstacles. Willing to take the long road into my pants, willing to circle forever, searching for signs, their soft, transparent tempers stretching neatly behind them like little tails. Willing to die lost without ever having arrived anywhere. Sensitive, fragile men, careful with the things they do not understand.

Nighttime, I'm feeling wrong. I'm feeling lonely, needy, guilty, privileged. Nighttime, I'm feeling power, exploitive, manipulative power. Damage control has the night off. I'm in charge. I choose. I'll fuck the David's in a heartbeat.

I am Somnambulism. I am Impulse Control Disorder. I am Confusional Arousal Disorder. I am Sexual Addiction.

7 am, Latte-slurping drones out in force, bonding with their dogs before work. Walk of shame. No sunglasses. No underwear. No buttons. Blood running down my legs and pooling in my boots.

Creative, violent, messy, illegal, immoral, hurtful sex. David is a connoisseur, an explorer. David likes the road less traveled. David enters my body like a four-wheel-drive through a forest of glass. David goes where he wants, does what he likes, uses his cock like a fist, his fist like a kiss.

7 am, and everyone knows, everyone stares, everyone averts. I walk slowly, carefully, trying to keep a straight line. I trip on curbs, jump at imaginary bicycles. I hurt all over and I'm too shocked to cry. Hours later I am curled up on my kitchen floor, glassy eyed, staring under the refrigerator and taking quick, shallow breaths.

Now this. Forced to answer questions from Doctor Nobody with the cute chin and carved sideburns. Forced to sit on a metal chair in a concrete office next to a filthy two-way mirror. Forced to have a

conversation, fully dressed, with a man I would not even stoop to fuck.

"Were you surprised?" he asks, running his tongue along square, whitened teeth.

I met David four days ago.

The gray man sitting across from me fantasizes freely about cheerleaders, about incest, about sex with young, twelve year old girls in glass handcuffs. I exist briefly in his fertile mind, pinned beneath him, crying in that pristine combination of pleasure and pain that exists only in the mind. Somewhere beyond this cold room, beneath his waxy, buttoned up exterior, he is violating me in unimaginable ways, dazzling me with his unique talents, alternating speed, rhythm, depth, pressure, fucking me to death. He is Casanova; he is my danna, my don, my sexual god. I can see myself writhing, screaming, just beyond his sparkling blue eyes, begging for more. I can feel his pulsing nervousness, his fidgeting, can see the tiny beads of sweat before they even form.

He stares through his greasy glasses as though he is so deep in thought that he cannot be bothered to speak, as though his supercharged-intellect only occasionally slows down enough to allow his mouth to latch on for a short jaunt. Perhaps he is paralyzed by his inner activities and does not dare open his maw for fear of what reeking beasts may fly out unescorted by the proper psychiatric framework. Perhaps his batteries are draining and he cannot remember enough words to form a sentence. Perhaps he is just stupid.

He does not intimidate me.

Four days ago I left a reception with David. Four days ago I thought I knew where the bottom was.

I could simply stare back at him, and I would, indefinitely, if he were not so frighteningly pleasant in both appearance and demeanor. I would not even be in this situation, suspected of God knows what, had the policeman who originally questioned me been more like the good Doctor. As it happened, the inquiring officer was so freakishly ugly, so unnaturally, illogically repulsive, that I fumbled

the first few questions. No, of course I don't know any Davids. No, I'm not in the habit of going home with men I've just met. I'm a doctor. A hundred people saw us together? Really? I'm speaking to a physically repugnant, hypnotically soft-spoken cop. I'm relaxed. I'm not wearing a bra. I'm still bleeding a little. Words fall out, careless, unsupported, unrestrained.

Now a psych eval.

I've given them enough times know what to expect; but still, I wish it had been Don Johnson coming to my apartment to ask if I owned any candlesticks or revolvers. How many people roaming the earth have port-wine stains on one side of their face and a burn scar on the other? Had my father and his brother been thus afflicted my life would no doubt be utterly different. I would have learned to open my mouth instead of my legs.

I am Selective Mutism. I am Social Anxiety Disorder. I am Tourette's Syndrome. I am Apraxia.

We are attracted, addicted, to the effects of bipolar relationships. There is a power to being victimized. We participate, we enable, we *need*. Then we bleed, we strike back, we become violent, angry, irrational, mean, cold. Then we miss who we were and we become soft again, open, nurturing, accepting, understanding. We accuse, we forgive. We use our sensuality as a salve, as a blindfold, as a scalpel. We are the target, then the arrow, then the target, over and over again. Then we become old and we die alone.

Men do the same thing. No one notices.

Four days ago, I saw sex and violence together, draining through me onto \$1500 Monaco sheets. Four days ago I felt terrified, violated, lost. I cried in shame, hid my ecstasy.

"No, Doctor Ranford, I was not surprised," I snap angrily. I close my eyes and count slowly backwards from ten, squeezing my hands together until I can feel the bones creaking. "I met him at a reception, we talked a bit and he walked me home. I really don't know anything else about him," The words roll out in a steady, measured monotone laced with just the right mix of loathing, contempt, and impatience. I want to lick my lips and tell the doctor

how hard we fucked, how much it hurt, how he left me bleeding on a sidewalk and moved on. How much I've cried since. In my world, this is as common as dirt.

But it's not his job to listen.

People like David disappear all the time. They get bored, or restless, or angry, or dissatisfied. They use up one place and go on to the next. Perhaps David had an unfortunate boss or mother; perhaps he had an infestation of lice or one of his tattoos began to itch. Perhaps his wife came home to find him getting stuffed by a strapped-on woman while he himself was stuffed into his wife's favorite silk nightie. Men often make life-altering decisions after such episodes. Nothing so improves a man's life like getting caught. *Well, honey, at least it's finally out in the open. Now we can discuss it and move forward. I'm relieved. How are you?*

I am Intermittent Explosive Disorder. I am Malingering. I am Munchausen Syndrome. I am Dissociative Fugue. I am Trichotillomania.

Four days ago, David showed me his scars and his sadness and his rage.

Doctor Ranfiord, curse his trimmed nostrils and lice-free scalp because the urge talk is swelling inside of me, removes his glasses for a wipe, leaving them noticeably grimier than before, then slides them back up his small nose before continuing his evaluation. "So you were not surprised when Officer Trumble informed you that the man you spent a recent evening with is now missing? Am I correct in saying that, *Miss Sarrow?*"

"Why would I be surprised, Doctor Ranfiord," I answer sweetly, doing my best to look at his square face and not the two-way mirror.

He stares for a long, long time. He's not very good at it.

Four days ago, David put a gun in my hand and pulled the trigger as he forced his cock inside of me. Four days ago I could have killed anyone.

I am Panic Disorder. I am Shared Psychotic Disorder. I am Depersonalization Syndrome. I am Schizophrenia.

David told me about the cigarette burns. A slight variation on the usual story. It was his mother, and always an accident. She blamed him for his father's disappearance and would burn him as he walked by. Fall into him in feigned drunkenness and the cigarette would be the last part to break contact. Nine years old, pretending not to notice. Impressive pain threshold. Hasn't spoken to his mother in 11 years. He's driven, successful, moved beyond it all. Rarely even thinks about it, he says. Slams me into an elevator wall, bites me, sodomizes me.

I always tell my patients when it's time to cry, when to allow or even force a breakdown. I actually pick up a clock, point to it, and say *now*. I encourage them to open up, to trust, to release. It is the only sure path to resolution, to growth, to peace. If Doctor Ranford was a woman, or at least a disfigured, eggplant-shaped eunuch, I might have lost it right then. Sailed across the table on a river of tears and begged forgiveness. But he isn't.

David didn't even introduce himself. Said the best time to catch a woman is that little space just between boredom and sadness, when their imagination suggests possibilities but reason whispers retreat. There are countless moments in a woman's day, he said, when absolutely anything is possible. Timing is the only thing that matters, he insisted. Passion is fleeting, temporary, slippery.

Three days ago, I sat crying in the shower until my skin boiled.

I felt I was acting out my aggressions, of course. I felt I was cheating on my heterosexually challenged ex-husband who I have not seen in six years, punishing my father for the things he did and my mother for things she didn't do. I felt I was punishing myself, soiling myself, abandoning my rigid catholic upbringing, tearing up the soft, silky parts that had been locked away, protected without me ever even knowing they existed.

I haven't traveled enough, haven't taken enough chances. I haven't cried enough, fucked enough, I haven't made the right friends, haven't forgiven my family, haven't had my own family. Some women turn to a career in porn or an addiction to drugs or food or money, some fall into marriage and children with weak men they can

barely tolerate. I drown my sorrows in the wee hours with illiterate, tattooed, pierced men like David while imagining both my husband and father, bound with gaffer's tape, watching in horror from a cage atop the dresser.

We talk about murder, cruelty, love, hate, sadness, violence, regret. We talk and we fuck and we bleed.

My father watches in the mirror.

Three days ago I was a suicide with no knife in a vitamin-filled, rent-controlled, first-floor studio on the Upper East Side. Three days ago, I understood.

David said I was beautiful when I cried. He wiped my tears gently with my fingertips, touched them to his tongue. Waited until the tears pooled against my upper lip and sucked them softly. Sometimes he would catch them halfway down my cheek, lick each drop as they slid slowly, steadily, like wax on a church candle. Then he'd yank my hair back and hit me with his fist, with his palm, sides of his wrist. Force my mouth open, spit in me, throw me off the bed onto the wooden floor. Carry me back to the bed, kiss me again, caress me until I felt secure enough to cry. Then he'd hit me again, harder. Wipe the blood with my hands. Bring the tips to his tongue, kiss me again.

I can still taste the salt.

I am Agoraphobia. I am Amnestic Disorder. I am Delirium. I am Dementia.

Men have always noticed me. Since I was young. Somehow, I never learned to appreciate it. I've learned other things though; things that made me angry. Things that can't be unlearned. The anger makes me ugly and the ugliness makes me alone and the loneliness makes me reckless and the recklessness makes me unlovable. David liked it. So do I, maybe.

There is a narrow space between wanton, unromantic bliss and the addictive edges of sexual violence. It is one of many forks in the road, dimly lit intersections undergoing perpetual construction and rerouting; victims of former collisions mangled and rotting on the sides, everyone dizzy from the stench of indecision.

Assholes like David are the rest areas, filthy, unremarkable, climate controlled stops on nameless roads where you can rest, refuel, and obtain horizontal refreshments. Some are lit up, safe, patrolled. Some are not.

Stay to the right, keep alert, buckle up, don't drink and drive, don't talk on the phone, don't masturbate, don't turn around and slap your kid, don't stop for hitchhikers. Drive as fast as you can.

My patients pay me to cure them, never knowing that the payment itself is the cure. And I hate them for it; I hate their innocence, their easy escape. I hate my patients. My apartment. I hate David. I hate the medications that make me irrelevant. I hate that men bore me and I hate the fact that I'm not bisexual. My patients hate. I hate. They pay me, I pay my doctors, we all move along the road to nowhere. David leaves a mark on me and I feel better for a few days.

I fell in love with pain when I was a child. I fell in love with disappointment when I was older. Later, I fell for anger, resentment, cruelty, pettiness, loneliness, despair. I fall in love every day. I fell in love with David, loaned him my body to cover his flaws, to soothe his rage. I learned his name later, from the short, afflicted policeman.

I am Codependence. I am Women Who Love Too Much. I am Narcissistic Personality Disorder. I am Paraphilia.

Doctor Ranford spent an ungodly amount of time preparing for his big move, the trap which, once sprung, would have him a semi-famous, once-published, *attractive* doctor and me incarcerated indefinitely for whatever. He hovers, stares, salivates. Pretends it is awkward for him. Pretends it pains him to be the small, mean person his tasks require of him. Finally, having properly adjusted his large frame and reshuffled papers to his apparent satisfaction, he let the question slither slowly from his mouth like an eel. "Does he have any identifying marks on his person that you would recognize?"

I half expected the good doctor to smile and slide across the scarred desk a sealed glass box containing David's shriveled penis, which in all honesty was not impressive enough to remember even while engorged with blood. But the doctor knows I am guilty. Even if

David were currently lounging in a casino in Vegas, with his penis still attached and properly inflated, the doctor has already decided. I am guilty of hideous, unspeakable crimes for which I need to be punished again and again and again.

I have killed David a thousand times. I have killed all my relatives and friends and associates and patients and teachers. All the store clerks and waiters who failed to give me the proper attention, the dog-walking perverts who refused to shimmy their beasts aside and let me pass. My silk-wearing, ass plugging, sexually confused husband who fucked everyone but me. I have killed so many times and with such creativity that Hannibal Lecter himself would gladly offer me an apprenticeship so he could spend more time cooking.

Two days ago, I went back to Tribeca to look for a body. The door was locked. I didn't smell anything. I went to Starbucks and had a mocha and cried all day.

Later that night, I sat in the shower again, shivering.

David had a plan, sort of. David needed me. David chose me.

Doctor Ranford shuffles his papers once again, and experience tells me it is the final shuffle. "I think we're done here, Miss Sarrow," says the good doctor. "I'll send in the others," he says, getting up fluidly from his padded chair. "Can I get you anything?"

I am Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. I am Dysthymic Disorder. I am Catatonia. I am Zen.

"No, I am fine, Doctor," I say. "Let's just get this over with." My voice is gravely, hoarse, exasperated yet throaty. I simply cannot help it.

I'd like a look at his notes, of course. Professional curiosity. Probably just doodles, childish scribbles of pumpkin heads or crude fishing boats or imaginary penises. The artistic side of most men peaks at around three, I think.

Maybe have another look at the photos.

Maybe have a weak coffee and take a nap.

Maybe tear off my clothes and lick the mirror.

Yesterday I broke into David's loft and cleaned for him. Changed the sheets, towels, washed dishes, clothes, walls. Vacuumed. Found

the gun but no body. Scrubbed and scrubbed until the tips of my gloves were filled with blood. Left with a bag. Hoped it was enough.

Yesterday evening I slept.

This morning, a short, ugly policeman comes to my door and asks me if I know someone named David. Shows me a picture and waits. Seems perfectly happy to wait indefinitely. Shows me another picture, this time a woman, dead. Shot in the face three times at close range and dumped in the Hudson. Blue/black/brown pictures of a bloated face with exquisite bone structure; a face once beautiful. Shows me a picture of them together. Says I look a little like her. You could still see some of the lines. One prominent cheek, half of a full, sumptuous, flirtatious lip. He waits, staring at me through dull, misaligned, bovine eyes.

I haven't eaten in four days. I want to vomit, but there's nothing.

Later he says they found blood, semen, other fluids. Says they were diluted, hard to classify as to date, etc. Technical stuff. Asks if I'll take a vaginal swab. I don't. They can't force me.

They won't find him there, anyway.

When I was a child my father got me a watch. Cheap, Rite-Aid stuff, transparent plastic band and all, but somehow it stuck with me all these years. He left me forever at 2 pm on TUE the 9th of some month. My mother took her own life at 1 am on SAT the 13th of some month. I know this because my watch tells me. For years afterward I would reset it to the 12th every month, hoping to go back, hoping my magic watch would let me live in between for as long as I needed to. Then I went to high school, tried pot, lost my virginity, started to forget to reset the watch. There was no magic, not for me, anyway. Time marched on and took me with it. Some years later, I found out my father had died of cancer. I never learned the time.

The good doctor vanishes into the mirror and I notice for the first time that he is fat. One of those sexually ambivalent physiologies, chesty, aggressive male on top, dumpy housewife on the bottom. Probably the fatness makes him sad but the sadness makes him

comfortable and the comfort cripples him and it affects everyone he comes into contact with.

I am bones covered in skin and I am sad too.

Maybe time itself is simply a death clock counting backwards, telling you how many seconds you have left, how many heartbeats, how many steps, how many tears. How many chances. I'll never wear it again.

Four days ago I went home with David, let him abuse me, rape and beat me. I screamed in pleasure, clawed in horror, terror.

Cried in guilt, fear, shame.

Yesterday, I cleaned up after a murderer.

There is no psychiatry to crime. No psychology to love. If you let someone love you you've already killed them. If you love them back you are criminally insane.

Maybe it's a suicide clock, counting the drops of blood on the bathroom tile. A cancer clock counting the number of good cells still willing to fight. Maybe it's a justice clock, counting the remaining days of freedom you have left.

Maybe you're in the wrong time zone and are already dead.

We are all mice in a blender, bouncing and colliding like floating popcorn. We form temporary alliances and search parties; we confer and plan and execute laughably complex schemes, but really it is plain, simple luck that keeps us from the blades. And we *know* that. We'll pay the doctors anyway, just like we will pray to a god we know does not exist. Still, we seek. We pray. We pay.

The men angle about behind the mirror, setting the scales, adjusting facts, opinions, possibilities. They'll never see David again. Neither will I. Justice is a blind, obese, learning-disabled bull dyke who's too strung out to care.

And prisons are filled with men, mostly.

Stare in the mirror and ask one last time, Doctor. We're all missing. Find a body and he won't be missing anymore. I won't cry for guys like David. Maybe he ran through me and got lost. Maybe I was the fork in the road and he just couldn't go on. Maybe he's

simply rotting somewhere on the side of a road, adding to the stench.

