

On Discerning That a Woman Had a Nose Job Before He Met Her

by Con Chapman

You probably shouldn't have shown me that picture,
he said, the one of you at some Hillel hootenanny,
with you holding your guitar, smiling
beneath a different nose than the one you have now;
I find the old one, by comparison, more beguiling.

The new one--I won't ask how much it cost,
but something's been lost,
and more than cartilage. I won't say innocence--
we all lose that. Maybe the secret sorrow
that hid behind your laughter and formed a different face.

Your eyebrows then seemed bowed down at the corners
with what looked like universal empathy;
now you are sharp-featured, whippet-thin,
then you were aquiline. How bad could it have been?
You were a tapir, now you're a greyhound.



I knew another woman who had it done, he said.
She'd had many men but none had stuck;
she kept taking courses, dropping them, the degree
ever-receding like the horizon. I imagine she thought
there was something amiss that spoiled her luck.



She went to the west coast for the cutting, then to Mexico, to be with her mother, to recover. A daughter of Iberia, she had dark hair and sloe eyes. When she came back her friends were instructed to pretend that they noticed nothing, or if they did, that she looked much better.



I'm sure it hurt at first, and you were puffy for weeks while you recovered, your eyes black, then purple then yellow. You probably checked the mirror each morning for some change, put on dark glasses and a hat if you had to go out outside, averting others' gaze.

I tell you this—make of it what you will: I had a friend,
the son of a Park Avenue plastic surgeon, who claimed to
be able to tell, as we sat in the student union, who'd had their nose
bobbed and by whom—he even knew each doctor's address,
and gave the prices they charged. You gathered it wasn't a guess.



Each had purchased an article for sale
off-the-rack but thought of as bespoke,
for something that was lacking.
The soul that would change its own body—
I don't know that mine could live with her.
I understand, she said, and they parted.

