

The Whore

by Tyler Koch

The man and the whore lay in bed together.

It was a cold night and they were warmed by the heat beneath the comforter that they shared. Outside a car drove by splashing water on the side of a brick building. The sound reminded the whore of a paintbrush on sandpaper. Moonlight bled through the window and collected as an orb on the wooden floor, pale and white and luminescent.

The whore took a deep breath and stared at the ceiling. She was considered a great beauty by the men who paid for her services. Often they would comment on her long thick hair, the smoothness of her skin, the swell of her breasts, how they hung firm and round and perfect. In many ways she was every man's fantasy.

"Do you—"

"Stop talking," said the man. "You always do that. Why? I don't pay for you to talk."

He adjusted his position on the bed and turned to face the whore. Her eyes remained fixed on the ceiling.

"I like this side of you," he said. "I could almost forget. It's easier to forget when the lights are off. Why don't you go turn the lights off, make it easier for me to forget."

The whore reached out and turned off the lamp, the darkness scampered forward and filled in the crevices and empty spaces.

"That's better. Now I wouldn't even know." The man reached out and traced his thumb across her chin. "Tell me something you learned in school. I know you like to talk about that with the other men who care."

"I learned about John Galt today. He's a character in *Atlas Shrugged*, a book written by Ayn Rand. I had to write a paper on him, about what he stood for. My professor said it was one of the best papers he's ever read."

"So you think you're smart as well as beautiful?" The man smiled while shaking his head. "You shouldn't think like that. Whores shouldn't be deceiving themselves into thinking they're not what they are. Tell me, what else did you learn?"

"I learned about Suleiman the Magnificent and how he married a Christian woman who was converted to Islam."

"Don't they teach you any practical things in school these days? What's the point in learning all this useless information? It only makes you sound smart, just because you know a name somebody else doesn't know. What do you know about practicality, about making an honest living? You're not beautiful. You should focus on learning about the real world."

"What is the real world?"

"Money."

"I have some money," said the whore.

"Not honest money," replied the man. "Whoring isn't honest. You need to understand that, otherwise I can't come back here anymore. I'll be forced to find somebody else. Maybe somebody closer to home. It's not easy for me to be here you know, my wife asks all sorts of questions. It's not pleasant for me."

"I'm sorry."

"You should be."

He took a breath and pulled the comforter higher so that it covered the entirety of his chest. Below, he reached out his hand and cupped one of her breasts.

"Why do you live here?" he asked. "Why don't you use some of that money you have and buy a nicer place?"

"I don't have much money left over after paying for school. This is all I can afford."

"You should work harder then. Where you live is a direct reflection on who you are. Have you seen my house before? Of course you haven't. My guest bathroom is the size of this entire apartment. I have a picture in my bedroom painted by Picasso. Have you heard of him before? I bet you haven't. He's one of the more brilliant painters of this generation."

"He was one of the creators of cubism," said the whore.

"Don't say nonsense. Picasso didn't draw cubes. Weren't you listening to me? I would know. I have a picture of his hanging in my bedroom. And that's not all. I could sell my house for over five million dollars right now if I wanted, right this very second. How much could you sell this apartment for? You'd be lucky to get fifty thousand. It's sad to see you living like this."

"But why would you sell your house?" asked the whore. "I thought you inherited it from your grandfather when he died."

"Of course I wouldn't sell my house. Do you think I'm stupid? I was trying to explain the value of money."

"That's what I'm trying to do," said the whore in earnest. "I'm trying to understand the value of money by going to school."

"Why didn't your parents give you any money? You should blame them for making you have to earn so much on your own."

"I don't know where my parents are. They haven't talked to me since . . ." The whore ran her fingertips along the crookedness of her lips.

"Don't have excuses. Whores shouldn't have excuses. Let me tell you something, money is easy to understand. I have more money than I know what to do with. I couldn't spend all of the money I have in one lifetime. If you don't want to worry about money, you should have more than you need."

"How do I do that?"

"What's the point of going to school if you're going to ask me all these foolish questions?"

Outside another car drove by, that same sound of a paintbrush on sandpaper as water splashed on the brick façade. The man stared out the window with an annoyed look upon his face.

"It's too noisy here. How am I supposed to sleep?"

"I'm sorry," said the whore. "I tried closing all the windows."

The man stood from the bed, his naked form walking across the room to the dresser where his clothes were neatly folded, next to his wallet and gold watch.

"I'm leaving. I can't stay here tonight." He began to dress. The paltry moonlight in the room cast cruel and twisted shadows of his figure on the opposite wall. "I need to sleep. I have a big meeting tomorrow. I'll have to sleep in the office instead."

When he was dressed the man opened his wallet and threw a lump of crumpled cash on the bed, which began to unfurl like a flower in bloom. The whore looked at the money, back to the man.

"That's less than we agreed to."

"You talked too much tonight, and it was too noisy. You're lucky to be getting that. You're not beautiful you know. You shouldn't charge so much."

The man tucked his wallet into his back pocket and checked his watch. Without another word he opened the front door to the apartment and left. His footsteps rang down the hall, and then they were gone. The whore pushed down the comforter and looked out the window as the man hailed a taxi. Her reflection shone clear as a painting on the glass, her upper lip which connected to her nose, a grotesque malformity, a jagged imperfection. She caught a look of herself in the window and turned away.

The bed wasn't as warm without the man by her side but the whore didn't mind. She slept so that the imperfection lay on the pillow, so that to the rest of the world she was as flawless as they wanted her to be.

