

PAMELA PAINTER

ADDICTIONS AND/OR APPETITES

I Doing My Man

HER HANDS BREAK MY HEART. I used to rent *The Rose* once a week and fast forward to the frames where the camera also loves her hands. Toward the end of the film, there she is at what should be her moment of triumph — she's come home to play the sold-out football stadium in her hometown, arrived with stage sets and lights, backup bands, manager, roadies and groupies, the whole damn show. She can outdazzle the most popular girl, easily win away the handsome quarterback, oh she can sing.

But where is she — she is in a fluorescent-on-fire phone booth screwing the top off a bottle of bourbon, the bourbon a translucent liquid like air and by now as necessary to her as breathing. Her slender fingers are so practiced in the hold, turn release of the bottle's top — *hold turn release* — that she can do it with trembling fingers; she can do it with her eyes closed, with her mouth touching, moaning into the phone.

Her mouth is wet, glistening, the liquor stings as her tongue catches everything, and we follow her long swallows, but it is still her hands that the camera loves. Hold, turn, release. The pressure of her thumb and three fingers is so sure and graceful that not one revolution is ever lost. The pads of her fingers touch just above the top's rim, as if in boundaries the rim is everything. Oh Rose, you could have had it all.

You could have declined that needle, played to that bottle for a while longer. Over and over, around and above that rim. You had a taste for love.

My fingers know all about it.

I hold him and turn and turn, back and forth, holding, turning, releasing. I am breathing him in, swallowing him. Closing him down. My fingers can break his heart.

II Next Comes Soup

NOT RIGHT AFTER, NO, BUT SOON, I leave him where I did him and go to the kitchen to shift and clatter my pots and pans. Another satisfying sound that has to do with appetite. Sweet butter, an extra-virgin oil and chopped onions are sizzling away in a heavy pot before I have to decide which soup? This might be about soup. This might be about me and my man.

I consider black bean rife with cumin, or roasted eggplant and garlic, or a warm, thick vichyssoise. Or I could just as easily slide the pot off the burner, turn down the gas and have him do me again. I stop stirring for one long moment to think about this. I think about this scenario the way I sometimes imagine falling asleep with his fingers inside me, my back curved into him, my bottom leg straight, my top leg bent at the knee and pulled in toward my damp breasts, pulled impossibly high.

The dense smell of onions caramelizing in foaming butter keeps me with the soup.

Soup – what soup?

The butternut squash glows on the windowsill. I palm the round base of the squash and peel its narrow neck. Then I hold the moist slippery throat and shave its hard curve into peeled sun curl. Chicken broth floats the onions for seconds before I bury them under a sliced tart apple, all that chopped squash. Not quite too late I dry-roast cumin, turmeric, cardamom, and

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thyme. This is going to take awhile, this soup. Later, I'll blend it smooth and serve it to my man with a cold dollop of sour cream and a baguette we'll acquire on a stroll to the corner bakery. For now he's not exactly waiting, but he's still in bed.

So. I adjust the heat, turn the flame low – under the soup. Then I stand beside the bed. "I'm making soup," I say. And he says, "Hmmm, soup." I hold my fingers to his nose and he closes his eyes and breathes the onions in. I'll tell him apples and coriander and cumin and squash. "Maybe add a bit of ginger," he says, opening his eyes.

He pulls me down, presses my fingers to his mouth and his mouth will slowly open, opening me all over again. His wet sharp teeth and firm tongue nibble the length of my fingers, swell the cup of my palm, ply the sibilant arts of appetite. He'll teach me all of his. I'll teach him all of mine.