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## **Before I became a woman**

**Dominique Hecq**

**I**

Before I became a woman

I was god

I was (s)he who had no name

I was what I was

I was the dust blowing from the interior out

I was the interior ousting particles of dust and molecules of wind

I was the wind

I was the rain working through the cracks in the rocks right down to the sea

the sea eating away the faces of cliffs

cliffs crumbling onto the floor of the ocean

the ocean's undertow ruffling beds of coral

the coral alive under the weight of the waves

I was waves of weightlessness

I was the rainbow I made in the sky when light bounced around raindrops

I was sky blue shale grey violet vermilion cinnabar green turquoise emerald green  
orange

chrome yellow raw sienna scarlet flesh ochre purple pink viridian indigo cinereous  
grey

I was ivory black

I was perfect white

I was the light

I was *Notre Dame de la Belle Verriere*

I was the eyes of the world

I was the world

I was mouthless and I nourished myself on my pride

until I heard men say arrogant things about me

Blaise said I was the infinite

Karl said I was a weed—or did he say I was the void?

For Friedrich I was dead

For Jean-Paul I didn't exist

Georges, at last, said I was shit

At that I felt the urge to speak

I became Im, the incomplete, also known as Immanuelle

**II**

Though I've been married  
for seven years  
to a man I don't love  
some will tell you  
I'm happily married

Others will tell you I'm a joke. A myth.

*Immanuelle sits in a state, brooding on old, imagined, injuries. But worst of all,  
Immanuelle suffers from an addiction to words*

Isidoro, *The Negator of Miracles*

The truth is solitude has set in

And in that solitude is the most intense satisfaction

This, is the real addiction--an addiction which provokes the envy of men

### **III.**

Sometimes during sex I dream

not of making children

but of reading philosophy, theosophy, theology, or of making fiery political speeches

Sometimes I am in another world

altogether, merged into a unity foreign to the rest of my existence

Foreign to me

Making me foreign to myself

*With my mind's eye I see the rays which are both carriers of the voices and the poison of*

*corpses to be unloaded on my body, as long drawn out filaments approaching my head*

*from some vast distant spot on the horizon. I can see them **only** with my mind's eye when*

*my eyes are closed by miracles or when I close them voluntarily...*

Schreber, *Memoirs of my Nervous Illness*

But always at this point

that is when I might be about to ( )

entangled in streaks of sun

I tell myself the story of King Midas

#### **IV.**

Born of the union of Cybele and the legendary peasant Gordius who devised the Gordian

knot Midas rose to become king of Phrighia

A wise and pious king Midas also looked after his exquisite rose-gardens

And so it came as no surprise that one day he should reach out to a drunk who'd been tied

up and left behind Dionysus' rout on the banks of the river Sangarius

This act of kindness, as you know earned Midas the gratitude of the Gods:

Dionysius asked him to make a wish

So Midas asked that everything he touched be turned to gold

Nothing seemed simpler

Midas, though, soon regretted his foolishness for even the food he craved  
changed into gold

Dionysus, who saw that Midas was wasting away took pity on him--  
granted him pardon for his greed and sent him to bathe in the river Pactolus

The river has flown with gold dust ever since

Of course I am now, dear reader, willing to take your point:  
why Midas, the gold and rose lover?

V

Before I became ( ): an autofictional fragment

There is nothing frightful in us and on the earth and perhaps in heaven above except  
what has not yet been said.

Céline, *Journey to the End of the Night*

Nothing seems to have changed

since Immanuelle last walked in and ran out through this narrow passage

Nothing seems to have changed except that he who winced in horror  
at some gratification unbeknown to himself has passed away

The house, like its late owner is of generous proportions  
There is even a Georgian elegance in the semi-circular fronts to the west wing  
Yet it is the heavy, almost crude, porch that really catches the eye on arrival  
That, and the wicked fountain with the seven cupids spouting water to the side of the  
entrance  
But architectural appreciation is not what brought Im back to this scene

## VI

Now she stands with her back to the front door in the narrow corridor  
To her left, the front gallery is all muted shades of gold  
but for the crimson curtains looming on the far wall

The couches and the cedar grandfather clock are covered in white sheets  
and layer upon layer of dust

The Waterford glass chandelier has lost its sheen

In this room, the collector only displayed some of his antique collection and most  
precious

paintings: golden christening mugs, ruby glass lustres, *epergnes* and *chatelaines*,

Lorrain's *Coast view with Aeneas and the Cumaean Sibil*, a copy of Raphael's *Venus*  
and

Whistler's *Perfect White* painting.

The *Perfect White* painting is gone

but Immanuelle remembers

She remembers it so vividly it could be hanging in front of her as I write:

picture a woman dressed in a white gown

She is standing in front of a white curtain, and is holding a lily

Her face is quite dark

Her hair is long and red--the favourite shade of the Pre-Raphaelites

The effect of all the white is dazzling

but as you fix your eyes on the painting

the snow blindness has a curious effect

Two patches of colour begin to emerge from the canvas

like two heads framed in a foggy dream

There is the woman's head, of course

but then (as improbable as it may seem) at her feet is a wolf's head

*We do not know the reason for that which attracts us.*

Incognita, *The Entombment of the Sibelles*

## VII

To Im's right is another smaller room, filled only with half empty boxes and piles of papers

This was the collector's office, if you could call it that

This is where he would bring fellow collectors and traders, design cloths of gold, touch up

old panels with a judicious spot of gilded tin, or mix glues and pigments to fix his own

painting boards

This is also where he kept his records and his vintage wine

Immanuelle was never allowed in this room

Further down the passage is another set of doors

opposite one another

In the dining room, Im remembers a ten seat mahogany table and walls lined with shelves

crammed with crockery

She chooses to enter the library

It is still packed with bookcases facing every which way, not a single shelf left unoccupied

She recognizes the Scott section: *The Waverley novels*, *Scott's Poetical Works*, *Scott's Prose Works*, *The Life of Sir Walter Scott*

And now she is aware of the portrait of Henry Woodcock sitting on the floor

precariously propped up against the wall

Im feels spooked

She makes for the staircase to the left side of the front gallery, leaving the kitchen behind her

At the top of the stairs, she notices how stale and thick the air is

She moves on straight through the passage and turns left

She does not look at the paintings lining the walls--

paintings of moons falling behind clumps of trees, cows in meadows and sheep in paddocks, men smoking cigars, women shading themselves from the sun, apples and pears, a seduction scene--so many clichés in golden frames the collector had failed to interest her in despite his coaxing determination

In the master bedroom

where I suspect the master never indulged in the company of women

Im is shocked to see Immanuelle

hanging above the bed

a fragment of her life captured

in faded colours

framed in gold

as she is about to become

part of some other

collection

Immanuelle sits

stretched towards the sun

among asphodels--flowers of the dead; flowers of the shades

She looks thin and ethereal in front of the gilded fountain with its gilded kitsch cupids

spouting grey water

She looks lost in a river of white forgetfulness

But she does not know

the immeasurable sense of bliss

that comes from not being

herself

Not yet