

FACE AMONG THE CHARRED RUINS
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MODEL

PREFACE

In 1972, Avon Books published what is generally considered to be the first North American mass-market romance novel. Kathleen E. Woodiwiss's *The Flame and the Flower* not only set the tone and tropes for a billion-dollar genre that accounts for nearly a quarter of the fiction market, but also established its reputation as "bodice rippers". This experiment is my modest attempt to address the genre's problematic relationship with consent, though I also acknowledge the irony of my manhandling words written by a woman.

Woodiwiss introduces her book with a poem, which informs both the title of this experiment and its procedure: a reduction of her original manuscript to sentences containing the word "face" and its derivations.

"Outside if we touch the living face of things, the beautiful
face all spun with life easily unfurls its roses"

~ Nicole Brossard, *Notebook of Roses and Civilization*
(trans. Robert Majzels and Erin Moure)

CHAPTER 1

The smile quickly faded from Heather's face, but she turned away murmuring an affirmative answer. His hands were gnarled and twisted with the years of backbreaking labor eking a shallow subsistence from the marshy land, and his weather-thickened skin held the pain of the passing seasons etched in deep lines that furrowed his face. His pudgy face was ruddy, with heavy jowls, and he possessed a protruding underlip which was constantly wet with saliva. The suit of soft gray, liberally piped with silver, and the white shirt and stock seemed to accentuate his pinkish hands and wheezing red face. Large, liquid eyes bulged from a round face and the nose was a short, flattened thing with flaring nostrils. When he smiled at her it was lop-sided, with one whole side of his face compressing into a tight, horrible smirk. She twisted, twirled, curled and pinned the glossy black tresses into a fashionable coiffure, pulling it up and away from her face. He had taken some time with his own appearance, changing his traveling garb for richer, more elegant clothes and curling short wisps of his thinning hair around his fat face, succeeding only in making it appear rounder. His eyes burned bright in his ruddy face and a repulsive smile twisted

his thick lips. His gaze roamed over her and he seemed to enjoy the fear he saw in her face. As his lips traveled upward she strained her face from him and tried to kick out, but his weight increased, pinning her legs against the table. In her mind she held a picture of a stern judge in a long wig sneering down from his high bench, and then the face beneath the white hair became that of Aunt Fanny, sternly pronouncing sentence. He had the look of a pirate about him, or even Satan himself, with his dark, curly hair and long sideburns that accentuated the lean, handsome features of his face. She was left breathless each time his mouth took hers and passionate kisses seemed to cover her face and bosom. Brandon opened his eyes and quietly studied the face beside his own, taking great pleasure in its fine beauty. It would have been better if she had stayed and faced the regency's men than to be here, deflowered and shamed to her very bone, or better yet to have remained where she was than to have sought the city at all. It dwindled gradually into sobs as tears streamed down her face. Her head fell back against the wall and tears made wet paths down her face and plunged to her naked bosom which quivered with her silent crying. His casual attitude toward her and the whole affair infuriated her

so much she wanted to shriek in rage and fling herself upon him and claw his handsome face to ribbons. She trembled before him as the color drained from her face. He dropped the strop on the table and wiping his face on a towel, came to the bunk and stood for a moment looking down at her. Her eyes bright and her cheeks flushed, she whirled around at a soft laugh from behind her and faced Brandon who stood in the open doorway. He had returned silently and without her knowing. His eyes dropped from her angry face to the sheets behind her, then he raised his eyes again as he closed the door and leaned against it.

“Do you think you could have remained chaste for long with the face and body you have, my sweet?” he murmured against her hair. She jerked angrily away and faced him. From the cabin door came a hesitant knocking and a black scowl crossed Brandon's face. George opened the door and stood red-faced as he looked across the cabin at them, shuffling his feet in embarrassment. Her face flaming with the shame of it, she wanted very much to die. Heather's face pinkened. Her face flooded with color and she jerked around with a moan, mortified.

CHAPTER 2

She began to take heart now and a smile broke upon her face. Her aunt stood in the doorway, a look of surprise on her face. Morning came for her in swift, harsh movements and cruel words when her aunt tore back the curtain and threw the old hand-me-down dress into her sleeping face. But that vision quickly faded when Captain Birmingham's face loomed up above her in the darkness. She heard his amused laughter once again, and with a strangled cry, she rolled over and buried her face into the pillow to smother the sobs that shook her, remembering too well the feel of his hands upon her body. Heather dumped the rest of the ashes into the wooden pail and stood up, brushing a strand of hair from her face. Aunt Fanny reached out and jerked Heather's face around, her fat fingers bruising her niece's tender flesh.

"Do you want me to take a stick to you?" she screeched, giving her niece a slap across the face. Heather fell to her knees, trembling violently, her face stinging from the blow, and began to pick up the shattered dish. Her face flushed with color. The expression on her face changed, and Heather shivered under the withering stare. His face had taken on a tormented expression, not so different from the

one that had been on Sarah's face. The look on his face plunged a sharp pain through her bosom, yet Heather knew it was best this way. The woman's eyes were wide, staring at her in horror, and her face had gone from beet red to ashen gray. Her eyes grew very wide and her face very pale. A look of enlightenment crossed Aunt Fanny's face, and she shoved Heather into a nearby chair. The flames from the fire illuminated her small face. The frown was wiped away from Aunt Fanny's face, and a slow menacing smile replaced it.

"Well, all you need know right now, missy, is that he is going to help you get wed," Aunt Fanny said, a cold, calculating expression on her face. A sigh of relief escaped the man, and a small, quivery smile crossed his face. With a growl, Aunt Fanny turned and viciously slapped Heather across the face, hitting her so hard the soft, bottom lip was bloodied and her cheek bruised. He strode across the room in long, irate strides, and Fanny fell back, seeing the tall form swathed in a black cloak and the angry face red in the glow of the fire.

CHAPTER 3

The sun came in rays of sparkling light through the water-speckled windows and touched on Heather's face to awaken her. Her face burned at the thought. The definite slant of her eyes fringed by the long, sooty lashes was made even more noticeable by the manner of hairstyle which was drawn tightly from her face. She came closer and the candlelight touched on his face, and for a split second Heather was halted by the cold, stark features. The Yankee stretched out a strong, brown hand and offered it to her as his leer brought a deep blush to her pale face. His long, brown fingers moved around the delicate bones of her jaw and gripped it firmly so she could not move her face away while his other arm slid behind her back under the loose, flowing train. He crushed her to him suddenly in a fierce, possessive embrace, and Heather's eyes widened and her face drained of color. His lordship faced him with an unwavering stare.

His taunting smile seared her and brought a rush of color to her face. Her face turned ashen under his careless gibe, and she swayed on her feet, feeling faint. He hurried back in to find Heather clutched in her husband's arms, her head thrown back, her eyes closed, her face very pale. She

glanced up at him, but he was staring out the window and the muscles in the side of his face were tense with anger. To save face she soon fell silent, afraid to trust her voice any longer. Lady Hampton's voice dwindled off to barely a whisper as she remembered the passionate embrace Captain Birmingham had given his young bride and the rock hard expression that had been on his face afterward. Her face flamed as she saw the door open, and then she found herself staring across the width of the room into his green eyes. He ignored the expression of relief on her face and went on.

"I won't be cutting my own throat to spite my face." Again he had taken up the stance of a sailor looking out to sea and the moon touched on his handsome face and broad shoulders. He was just above her in the darkness and his warm breath touched her face. He slept soundly, his face turned slightly toward her, relaxed in slumber. He stirred slightly and turned his face away, leaving her to stare at the back of his rumpled head and the broad expanse of his chest where her hand lay. His body lay bare to her gaze now, but she did not turn away though her face flamed with her own temerity. It maddened her and brought a bright flush of color to her face as she slid from the bed. In the midst of all

this, his eyes lifted to her own bright, angry face and mocked her, and she turned away smoldering. She ran the soap through the mat of hair on his chest and over his broad shoulders, her face burning under his casual scrutiny. Instead, she clamped her mouth shut and jerked her face away from his mocking gaze.

CHAPTER 4

But often Heather's eyes were drawn hesitantly to the stoical face of her husband who sat beside Lord Hampton across from her. Brushing the tears from her face, she opened the door and lifted her skirts to descend from the carriage. But as she faced the wind that brought the scent of the sea to her nostrils, so she must face life—head on, taking whatever small pleasure her husband allowed her and being content. There was a light chop rolling before the breeze and a chill spray of water struck Heather's face, snatching her breath and sending a cold shiver through her. She cast an uneasy glance to her husband who sat with his face into the wind, seeming to enjoy the feel of the salt spray, and pressed her hand to the base of her throat. Her knuckles grew white but her face gradually assumed the greenish shade of the sea. He looked for one brief moment at the pale, distressed face and the slender hand struggling for control and acted swiftly. Her hand slid to her belly with a will of its own and her face burned. His attention fell on her and a strange expression crossed his face. He was again studying the books, but now there was a black scowl on his face. The color flew to Heather's face and her eyes fell from his gaze. He drew the

cloak again over her shoulders and her face flamed as she lifted her eyes to his. Her fear doubled, and when the door opened, the color drained from her face. But the light in the hall touched on George's face and silhouetted her husband's tall, broad-shouldered frame. His face turned her way before he closed the door and they were again lost in blackness. He brushed her hair from her face tenderly and touched his lips to her brow to quiet her trembling.

"Turn it away from your face," Brandon directed.

"Heather, light the candle that we might set faces to our midnight visitors," Brandon urged. The glow of its flame spread over the room softly and touched on the men's faces, proving them to be the same two who had huddled across the room from them at mealtime. Brandon laughed dangerously as he stood up and faced the men. Heather felt the heat rising to her face. She jerked around to face him, looking very guilty with the brush in her hand. He gazed down at her for a moment, his face void of any expression, then suddenly the scowl reappeared. She obeyed as the color drained from her face, her eyes full of bewilderment. She could never face the manservant again, knowing this. A little groan escaped her as she hid her scarlet face in her hands.

"And were you pleased?" she snapped, her eyes flying to his face. She glanced past him and saw Brandon coming toward them, a heavy scowl on his face. Another woman might hiss insults at him anyway, or go beyond good thinking and slap his handsome face. Again Heather's eyes lifted to her husband's face.

"She has the look of sweet innocence in her face yet she is a temptress."

"Yes," Heather admitted begrudgingly with her face glowing pink. Even when his eyes lowered to her body, making her acutely aware of the transparency of her undergarment, she could not look away from his face.

CHAPTER 5

His leering grin sent the color burning deeper into her face and made her want to die. She flung an arm over her face. Brandon's face went rigid. His face was grim and his mouth was drawn downward at the corners. Holding Heather's hand behind him and walking just ahead to hide her tear-streaked face from the stares of the curious, Brandon led her through the room. Brandon closed the door behind him and glanced at his wife who was bending over the washbowl splashing water on her face. He eased into bed beside her, turning on his side to face the door. Heather faced the pudding and plate and shuddered as she pushed them away. She faced a great unknown with a man sworn to vengeance on her. Her gaiety was presented in full countenance, and a smile softened his face as he enjoyed her obvious pleasure with the unexpected gift. His gaze caught hers for a second, and amazingly his face flushed red. He retreated rapidly when he saw Brandon and the look on his face. His jaw clamped shut and the small tic showed in his cheek when he turned to face the light. Shamefaced, as if embarrassed by his own verbosity, George continued stacking dishes on the tray, and Heather smiled softly, holding Brandon's tricorn

pressed to her. He leaned toward her and peered intently at her face. When he did not she came a step closer and peered over his arm at his face half buried in the quilt. A small snide smile twisted her lips as she gazed at his handsome face. The water trickled down his face and into his beard but he made no move to wipe it away. He chuckled softly at her effort and straightened and his face was replaced by his hand holding a bar of soap. The soap hit the water in front of her face and the drenching splash left her spluttering and gasping for breath.

“Wipe your face, sweet,” he chided. “It's all wet.” He laughed softly and walked away, and when she again looked at him he was sitting in a chair with his feet stretched out before him, watching her with a contented smile on his face. The grin faded from Brandon's face and he rose and came to the foot of the tub. He wrapped her cloak about her and stood by the door as she rubbed the last traces of sleep from her face with a damp cloth. The sun was gone now, and a chill breeze stirred against Heather's face as she stood beside Brandon on the quarter-deck. He glanced up at her over his cup of coffee as she picked up her own cup of tea and stared down into it, her face still flushed.

CHAPTER 6

Under cover of the meal she glanced often to his face and pondered on his moods. Heather blushed profusely and turned her face from him, and Brandon's eyes ran to the nape of her neck where the fairness of her skin shone against her dark hair. Her face swam in a vision before him with eyes dark and sultry, and small tongue darting about moist lips. His face was reddened by the cold wind, and he wore a bulky seaman's sweater with a rolled collar, dark breeches and polished boots. She moved to the taffrail beside the helmsman, a sturdy youth with a fine fuzz of a youthful beard upon his face.

"Aye, aye, sir," the seaman mumbled, shamefaced and quite put down. Somewhat surprised at her tone of voice, Brandon glanced at her and saw the distraught face. It was pitch black and she could hardly see her hand before her face. At a knock on the door she dropped her hem and whirled to face the stove. He could just imagine their startled faces when he presented her to them. She brushed past him but whirled again to face him, her blue eyes flashing. He pushed the door open, his face black with rage, then stopped short, all anger draining away as he saw

Heather sitting on the floor with her head and arm lying limply in the seat of a chair, a quilt twisted about her hips and her other hand lying palm up upon the floor. The faces of William Court, Thomas Hint, Aunt Fanny and Uncle John bore down on her, all laughing loudly with their mouths gaping wide. She was caught and swung upward in sturdy arms, and laughing gaily she looped her arms about the man's neck in gleeful abandonment, and his face pressed close as he bent to kiss her. He smoothed her hair from her face. She searched his face, hardly able to believe what her ears had heard. Her eyes lifted to his face. Heather rolled her head to face the wall in embarrassment at having asked the question. She let him draw it over her head, and as he pulled it together over her breasts and fastened it her eyes moved over his face. He hadn't taken care of himself at all, and now she longed to reach out and touch his face and smooth away the lines of fatigue. His face no longer appeared gaunt, and the shadows faded from beneath his eyes. His cold scrutiny held his man for several seconds, then an eyebrow raised and a half smile softened his face. She dribbled water from the sponge across her knees and splashed it on her face. Obediently she slid into her wrapper and fastened it snugly

about her neck, keeping all emotion from her face, but inwardly she smiled. His eyes passed over her, and with face set he crossed to his desk. She raised watery eyes to Brandon's amused expression and nodded bravely, ready now to venture forth and face the crowd that waited on the quay. As her greeting subsided, Louisa looked into his face for a moment, somewhat taken aback by his coolness, then seizing his arm, hugged it close to her bosom. The color drained from her face, and she stared at him, open mouthed. Heather looked askance to her husband's lap and the possessive hand that had claimed it and finally raised her eyes to his face to see his reaction. No slap on the face could have hurt so much. Rather bewildered by his attentiveness to her in front of the woman, Heather lifted her eyes to his face.

CHAPTER 7

At the first sight of Brandon's face they scurried away, leaving a few moments of dead silence. Hatti's eyes roamed across Heather's face and she smiled with satisfaction. She pointed to a portrait over the fireplace of a man looking a great deal like Brandon and Jeff but with dark eyes and a much sterner line of face. Neither the light brown hair nor the small face resembled anyone she had ever seen before. Man and beast faced the house for a moment and Brandon looked up to see her standing there in her shift gazing down at him. His face was still red from the ride and he was slightly breathless. At the top of her gown his hands seemed to linger and he lowered his head until his face brushed her hair and he inhaled its sweet fragrance. Heather turned to face her husband but he had already stepped back and was unbuttoning his shirt. Shaking her head at his foul temper, she opened the sitting room door and found Heather perched on the edge of the bed with tears streaming down her face. Hatti's brown eyes searched her young mistress's face for a moment and reflected the pain she saw, but she hurried on in cheerful tone, seeking to allay the sorrow.

“Now you get that pretty face freshened and go get something to eat.”

“I fear more staple goods we must soon dine upon or face that cruel beast that would digest us both.” When he turned there was a scowl upon his face and Jeff raised an eyebrow in wonder at his turn of mood.

“Yet when she turns to face you, you act the husband scorned or greatly wronged.” He smiled down at her and smoothed her hair from her face. She smiled with pleasure and did not fear now having to face his friends. Bonneted heads came hurriedly together as the women whispered back and forth and grins broke wide on male faces. Her daughter was taller than she and fairly well proportioned, but her heavy-boned face with slightly protruding teeth spoiled the effect. She stood undecided for a moment, watching groups of women gather about the churchyard, feeling a little lost without a familiar face in sight. She had gained little and lost face with many.

His eyes went about the room and found his wife curled up in the chair with a wide, impish grin sparkling upon her face.

“I fear my simple gift to you will be outshone by your radiant face and seem dull in comparison.”

“You’ll ruin your pretty face.” She stared up at him in wonder at his reply, then finally dropped her eyes and laughed awkwardly as her face pinkened. He slipped the shoes on and brushing droplets from his face, joined the couple in the drawing room. She was passive to his amorous embrace, but Brandon’s displeasure with his brother’s free manner plainly showed in his face, and he glowered at the two of them. As he drew near, they could see he was covered with dust, and sweat made streaks down his grimy face. George turned his face away and coughed loudly as if seized with a choking fit, and then struggled to keep a straight face under his master’s angry glare. Heather’s face was pale and drawn when he finished his tirade. Jeff stood and stared into Brandon’s reddening face with a half sneer upon his lips. A small smile broke his face. He took a couple of steps toward her, his face grim, then stopped and stared up at her.

CHAPTER 8

Brandon guessed the woman's age to be no more than his own, but her face was deeply lined and shallow, and her red, gnarled hands gave signs of a hard life. The woman smiled quite shyly and cast eyes downward as the baby she held hid his face against her bosom.

"How can I approach that vixen when she so despises the very image of my face that she cannot accept the small thought of me slumbering by her side?" He relaxed, resting his head on the back of the tub, and the heat of the water was just beginning to take the aches from his tired body when there was a quick thump on the door and it was pushed ajar to reveal Jeff's beaming face. She jumped and dropped the broom and stood shamefacedly with her hands behind her back.

She nodded vigorously and made an effort to wipe her face on her apron. Angrily she pummeled his chest and face with her fists, demanding her release. The small one faced him from the porch with a feral gleam in her eye. He stepped forward threateningly and the huge mop whistled within inches from his face, leaving small trails of dirty water dripping down it. The man's next retort was startled from

him as he heard a rapid thud of feet behind him, and he turned to see the master of Harthaven coming toward him with an angry grimace distorting his reddened face. In that brief moment Bartlett realized what it was like to face death. The poor girl's eyes widened as she recognized him and the blood left her face. The man glanced first to her stomach and grinned, then his eyes rose to her face and he seemed surprised at what he saw. His face was expressionless as he made his reply. With a concerned frown creasing her black brow, she bent over the writhing Heather and smoothed her hair from her face. He sat down on the bed's edge and his hand moved to hers, and she saw that his face was grim and seemed suddenly lined. Brandon wiped Heather's face with a cool, wet cloth and brushed her hair up from her neck and looked a little paler than he did before.

"My God," Brandon uttered as he came from his daze to see the wrinkled, red face of his son before him. He returned his gaze to his wife's face and lost himself in the soft liquid eyes that beheld him. Heather cast a quick glance to Brandon and was amazed to see for the first time a dark blush on his face.

CHAPTER 9

He had purchased earlier in the week a small, fine chestnut mare with flashing white stockings aforefoot and a startling blaze across her face.

“Or you’ll be looking like that prune-faced Mrs. Scott.” Heather lifted her eyes to his face and her lips curved softly upward as she met his gaze in warm communication. He rapidly overtook Lady Fair, and Heather pulled her horse back to a walk as Brandon drew up beside and laughed at the worried frown upon his face. She picked at the fabric, pulling it away from her skin, not wanting to face Jeff or Joseph in this condition. Their mirth ended as they came face to face with Hatti’s disgruntled frown. She turned an almost tearful face to her brother-in-law. She turned to face him and watched his eyes drop to her bosom and widen with surprise. Her face flamed scarlet.

“Perhaps if we have some wine,” he said, gazing down at her apologetic face. Heather knew only that his arm was around her and his dark, handsome face above her. Brandon slowly lifted his gaze to his wife’s face and his agony was successfully concealed behind a dark scowl.

“So, you cannot face me.” Her face burned in embarrassed resentment at the callow crudeness of his ploy. He made a monacle of his forefinger and thumb and peered at her through it, allowing his observing gaze to move from her face to her dainty silk shoes and then back again, pausing a very brief but pleasurable moment on her breasts. He watched the two of them for a while wondering if he should cut in, then glanced toward the door and saw Brandon standing there, a completely blank look upon his face as he watched his wife in Matt’s arms. Brandon’s face was distorted with rage as he threw the man into the bushes and as Matt struggled fearfully to rise, Brandon firmly planted a foot upon his buttocks and sent him sprawling through the shrubs. Then his face was above hers again in the night and his voice husky as he muttered against her parted lips, their breath warm in each other’s mouth.

“How can I face anyone in this condition?” At the head of the stairs, Heather paused uncertainly, feeling eyes upon her and gazed back over her shoulder to find him staring up at her, an unreadable expression occupying his handsome, bearded face. His eyes moved slowly over her, resting for a time on her soft white shoulders and the pink hued nipples

that strained against that sheer cloth and finally returned to her face. Her eyes lifted slowly to regard the face reflected in the mirror, and her body quivered as she remembered his lips upon her breasts, his hand upon her naked flesh. Her eyes widened at the sensation inspired and in the soft light she saw her husband's face above her, his features sharp and hardened with his excitement. Her eyes were closed and a dreamy, contented smile shaped her lips as Brandon lightly traced his finger over her face, caressing her mouth, her eyes and the slanted brows. Heather sprang up with a start and searched his face. Brandon smoothed her hair from her face, and when he spoke it was most gently. He turned as if to go but faced them again. The woman stepped down with an eagerness and lightness of foot that belied the solemnity of her face. Her eyes mirrored that tender emotion, and she lifted her face to his that their lips could meet in a soft, unhurried kiss.

“Bald-faced lies!” Brandon declared angrily. Her blood stirring, Heather swept into the drawing room to find the three men standing and faced the stranger who stared at her for a moment in surprise then blushed profusely and hung his

head. Heather swept away from him to turn and face him with chin raised.

CHAPTER 10

He smiled and smoothed her hair from her face. With their faces close together there was no question they were father and son.

“Always before we faced doubt and dread with our lack of coin.” The garment’s stiff, high collar covered half his face, and the black tricorne he wore came down so low that barely a slit for his eyes remained. Brandon held her away from him and looked into her face. She glanced up to her husband and saw his face take on a black scowl and the muscle begin to twitch in his cheek. Stone faced, Brandon went to the bar to fix himself a drink. A brief smile crossed Brandon’s face as he regarded Louisa over his glass. When Brandon presented Heather tickets to a new play being featured at the Dock Street Theatre, she almost choked him in her excitement, spreading her thanks across his face with enthusiastic kisses. Their faces fell and they turned away in disappointment as Brandon, with some humor, presented his wife. She laughed with a light heart but her gaiety ceased when she saw Brandon stop and stare over her shoulder with an amazed expression on his face. Louisa’s face turned to stone and she looked menacingly at Heather, then smiled

trutely. She found an amused smile upon his face. The color drained from her face. She swayed against Brandon, feeling faint, and the hand she put to her face was shaking uncontrollably. Her eyes lost some of their wildness as they focused upon the face above her, the dark, handsome face of her husband.

“Aye, my face is not for the likes of a lady’s parlor,” he smiled bitterly.

“I’d never be able to face him if I thought he did.” Anger flared in her husband’s face, and he caught her arm and looked past her to the other woman. His jaw tightened and he opened his mouth to retort, but tears flooded from Heather’s eyes and she shook her head furiously, raised Beau and hiding her face against him, hurried from the room. She fled into the study to quiet her son, who had begun to whimper when he was taken from his father’s arms, and wiped the tears from her face. With a backhanded motion she tossed the wine in his face and smashed the glass against the floor. He wiped his hand across his face.

“I only tolerated you and like a lad I thought I knew all my mind could want until I faced a truth and saw a beauty never seen before and then I knew what things I really

wanted.” He bent close to her face and emphasized each word. He stepped to the table and took up Louisa’s hat and gloves and flung them in her face. The look on his face quickly squelched the greeting she was about to give and replaced it with cold apprehension. He turned and a strange mixture of emotions crossed his face, upsetting her more than any words could. She shuddered at the thought and went to the window where she pressed her face against the pane. She raised her face and found they stood in the shelter of the Oakley plantation house. Louisa would have laughed in his face. Mr. Hint smiled at her and showed a face clawed and bruised.

“I had to slap her face ‘fore she come to her senses again.” Tears were streaming down his face and he began to sob.

“She spit in my face and called me a freak, said I’d be seeing what a real man was when your spouse come.” Tears streaked down his ugly face. But this time its face was visible. Heather threw her arm over her face to shut out the aberration. Brandon’s face was pale. It was apparent from the surprise on his face that he hadn’t known of Brandon’s presence before he entered the room. He looked down at

her and some of the violence seemed to leave his face. Heather clung to Brandon tightly and buried her face against his chest. With a cruel smile, he sent a fist smashing into Mr. Hint’s face. The man flew backward, the blood flying from his face. The candelabrum she had placed nearby showed her that his face had definitely paled. Through his pain Brandon smiled at the satin coverlet heaped on the floor, and Heather dropped her face guiltily and continued on her way with him. Except for his moist brow, there was no sign of pain on Brandon’s face, and she marveled at the control he had over his body. She laughed and a light blush spread across her face.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Gratitude to Trystan Carter & Hannah Calder for gabbing about early versions of this experiment with me, and to ryan fitzpatrick for his generous, contemplative editorial guidance.

MODEL PRESS 2023

Toronto/Tkaronto, for now

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