On the Floor by Cusi Cram

Izzy lies with her head on the floor. She is in a very upscale bathroom in someone’s house. She winces in pain. And then hums a few phrases from Suffragette City. She struggles to reach for her handbag, while still keeping her head on the floor. She swats at it a few times. She stops trying.

IZZIE

Ha! When you’re old enough to actually need a pain killer, you’re in too much pain to reach for it. What I did to get a Vicodin in the early 80’s! Back when there were still dinosaurs on St. Mark’s place. I say that to my students. Back when there were people who were real drug addicts and not just people wearing drug addict fashion. Back then, I was positively acrobatic. Splits and twists and back bends. A Romanian gymnast had nothing on me when I wanted to dull out, or pep up or pep up and then dull out. So many subtle variations.

I miss having sex for drugs! I do. And don’t be all shocked and appalled. Most women are prostitutes at some point in their life. With drugs, the transaction was so clear. Now, it’s muddy. It’s divorced people who could be 42 or 53, fumbling in the dark, hiding their mottled parts and talking about conferences and noteworthy articles, and lovely holidays spent with estranged children on the Mayan Riviera. It’s not:

“I’ll fuck you for that black widow.”

“If you have speed, I’ll blow you.”

“I won’t shoot it but I’ll sniff it, only you get naked and watch.

A light tap on the door. Izzie bolts upright. The sitting up hurts. She winces.

CELESTE (O.S.)

Isabel.
IZZIE
Please call me Izzie, Celeste. You have such a lovely bathroom. It’s so wonderfully clean. It smells like..St. Tropez. I’ve never been to St. Tropez. But you know what I mean?

CELESTE (O.S.)
Are you quite alright, professor Franco?

IZZIE
Perfect. It’s wonderfully clean and hopeful in here. And you have a bidet. Look at that. It’s so rare to see a bidet in Manhattan. One of these days I am going to try one Not, now, today. Don’t you worry, Celeste.

A moment.

CELESTE (O.S.)
....well Bernard is serving the cheese course.

IZZIE
How continental! You and Bernard and your Professor friend from Montreal, Hugo...well the three of you seem like you have spent a lot of time on all sorts of continents. Tell Hugo I said that.

CELESTE (O.S.)
...Alright. Hugo said he found your work, your work to be so interesting.

IZZIE
Don’t leave Hugo and the cheese and Bernard awaiting. I’m just...I will be out for cheese and continental conversation. Bonsoir, Buongiorno. Sayonara. Just need a minute to...

A moment.

CELESTE (O.S.)
Brandy?
IZZIE

Is she here?

CELESTE (O.S)

Brandy with the cheese? I’ll pour you a glass.

*Izzie reaches for her bag and takes out a bottle of pills.*

*She swallows a large pill without water.*

IZZIE

I wish Brandy was at this tasteful and numbing dinner, where these vaguely French people are trying to set me up with their other vaguely French-Canadian friend, Hugo. Brandy had the most amazing tits. They were endless. They seemed to be in three places at once. Everyone was always doing something to them. Gnawing, licking, bouncing dimes on that vast expanse of her fleshiness. Someone who I bumped into in Thompson Square knew a guy who told him that Brandy was managing a health food store in Mystic Connecticut. If I were her I would have done porn, or something with bustiers.

*She looks at the audience.*

This is not as bad as it looks. I promise. It reminds me of the good old days when the pain was self inflicted. Cool tile, dirty or clean. Mud Club or Racquet Club. Some people suck their thumb or twist their hair. I lie down in bathrooms.

*She takes out a compact mirror and looks at herself.*

It takes a toll. The nervous system in overdrive, the skin crawling with pinpricks, the muscles screaming like a woman betrayed. Mostly, I am just tired all the time. They don’t tell you that about the middle part of life, how exhausted you feel. And how you don’t necessarily want to end it all but rather take a nap that goes on for a very, very, very long time.

*She puts the compact down and looks at the floor longingly.*

I just want to put my head down and have someone stroke it.
She takes out some lipstick and puts it on looking into the compact.

I don’t want to have sex with Hugo even though at some abstract level I know it would be good for me, the way flax oil and quinoa are good for you, yet I make a point of avoiding both on principal. Hugo’s more interested in what I do than what I am. How do you fuck a job? I never slept with someone because of their job. Unless they were a drummer.

She looks at her face in the mirror. She has put on too much red lipstick.

I look like the god damn Joker. Riddle me this: why do the young twenty somethings who work at cosmetic counters always manage to sell me the most horrendous shades of red lipstick when I tell them again and again, I do not look good in fucking red lipstick?

Izzie tosses the lipstick across the bathroom. A moment.

It’s not your fault lipstick. I want to stay here in this clean, clean bathroom that feels like France forever. And if Hugo from Montreal came in here and promised he would listen to me and hold my hand when I was frightened and make me poached eggs on Sunday and pay the bills when I want to nap for a week, I would ask him to join me in my French bathroom life.

It’s impossible to be alone and in pain.

What if I refused to ever move again? My mother did that. She pooped in a drawer and stayed put. You stay still long enough, you stop moving.

Izzie gets on all fours. She does the cat/cow yoga pose.

Just so everyone is up to speed. This does hurt but my relationship to the pain has changed. Opioids do that, they make you immediately enlightened. You feel the pain but find it rather interesting. Wow, my knees are puffy and tender, cool! My shoulder sockets are creaking like an ancient wagon, neato! If and when I stand my spine will feel uncertain and fragile, awesome!
Hugo knocks at the door.

HUGO (O.S.)
Isabel?

IZZIE
Hugo?

HUGO (O.S.)
Bernard and Celeste...we are all wondering

IZZIE
What?

HUGO (O.S.)
Are you OK?

IZZIE
Are you?

HUGO (O.S.)
...Bernard and Celeste just put out an outstanding Mont d’Or.

IZZIE
I don’t speak French.

HUGO (O.S.)
It’s a cheese, quite unusual, rare even. Listen, maybe after the cheese... after the cheese, we could walk somewhere. I dunno. You seem...

IZZIE
Crazy?

HUGO (O.S.)
Interesting.

IZZIE
I am. I am very interesting Hugo.
HUGO (O.S.)
I know. So...

IZZIE
Yes.

A moment.

HUGO
OK.

Izzie stands.

IZZIE
What if you said the truth to someone you hardly knew?
You looked into their unknown eyes and said: I may have had enough sex for
one lifetime.
I want comfort and someone to stop me from talking to myself all the time.
And you should know, pain interferes with a good part of my day.
I sometimes take bad pills to make it stop but sometimes I ride it out, stoically.
What if you said: I want to sleep next to someone to be reminded that there are
other people in the world asleep and breathing in the bleak hours before dawn.
I can care a little but mostly I want to be cared for, held, consoled. I’m wickedly
funny and have lived five lifetimes, so I am not judgemental unless people are
snobs.
I think Bernard and Celeste are snobs.

Would Hugo get into his Batmobile and race into the night toward the big bosom
of someone generous and better who knows about healthy grains, someone just
like Brandy?

Izzie picks up her bag.

This is not the story of an addict. If I were an addict, I would be checking the
cabinets for s pills.

(MORE)
IZZIE (CONT'D)
Everyone has spare codeine or Vicodin floating around from a dental surgery five years ago.

This is a story of pain. Your story. Everyone’s really. I just like to tell it in the bathroom.

Izzie reaches for the door. She looks back toward the bathroom.

Blackout.