

SORRY AS I AM

Max Winter

You took off your stockings too slowly.
It was February. I had just met you.
You said your legs had not seen light for seven years.
And when I called from the downstairs booth,
you were planning out your own death.
When you said you'd forgotten how to read,
I read aloud a sentence from a book beneath your bed:
"Each writer ends by being his own least intelligent disciple."
You folded your knees to your chest.
Your dress fell open.
I had not slept the night before;
in a lecture that morning on the Luddites,
I reclined against blinds in a ceiling-high window
to find that nothing would stop me
from plunging from a building full of empty armor
to a street lined by alien visitors.
But I could not speak; you rose to wash two pears
and eat one of them.
When you said there were too many people in the world,
I crossed my legs and coughed nervously.
When you offered me a place to sleep,
I thought you thought I was too weak to walk.
I was ready to accept a hand around my shoulder
or four fingers tickling four of my ribs,
but all I saw were the clean and unmussed sheets beside you.
I could not lie in your blue-as-gas bed.
Car horns would spill all over us.
You might call the *Daily News*.
You might eat me alive.
You've revived the question since:

once on a sagging sofa, once through an open taxi door,
but I have always answered in the negative,
waiting for sweetness itself to fall on my shoulders
and cover me like an adjective, sorry as I am
in Mona's, where you have bought me another perfumed pint,
where you lean into me, saying

Listen: the seasons have changed.

Listen: I have combed my hair.

Listen: I have turned out the lights.