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*Disintegration*

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Translated by Tina Kover

I don't remember when the summer stopped being vast. I don't remember when everything started to go wrong. I don't remember when the spotlight went on, then off. I don't remember when the two horizontal lines appeared on my belly, like the ones old women get as they begin the slide toward transparency, invisibility. I don't remember exactly when the tone of my editor's voice, his words chiming like priceless golden bells when he came to tell me that my second book *was perfect*—and the question of the price to be paid for a so-called perfect book has lately become one of the nagging questions that starts to plague me as soon as I wake up every morning—changed from a warm and supremely bracing one into a piercing siren song, or when I began devising all those complicated strategies to avoid running into him or saying hello. I don't remember when the idea that I had some value,

even within a strictly limited sphere, stopped being a source of comfort and motivation and began to terrify me instead. I don't remember when the reasons why I do what I do started to seem murky and liquid, elusive and nightmarish by turns. I don't remember when I stopped pouring all my anger and my rage and my frustration into the difficult, punishing, never-ending labor of creating myself. I don't remember when beauty lost its power to interest me or move me, or when the charm of a glimpsed face ceased to have any importance. I don't remember when I rejected that man who wore a mother-of-pearl dolphin around his neck, because—among other reasons—I despised him for obeying my rules so quickly, and especially because it was ridiculous. I never imagined myself turning into someone so superficial, so focused on trivial things and appearances—except that, when I think about it, there's nothing trivial about wearing a necklace that looks from a distance like a shark's tooth on a leather shoelace, especially on a forty-four year old man, even a sun-bronzed former record distributor. I don't remember when I stopped bothering to read all six lines of yes/no questions (all answered with “no”) in my private area on update day, focusing instead only on the last one, the one where answering “yes” was non-negotiable. I don't remember when really good-looking guys, the kind who pretend to be asleep so they can be stared at, lost all attraction for me, or when the idea of doing anything at all with any of them totally stopped being

a matter of interest to me, when it just faded away to absolute nothingness. I don't remember when I stopped masturbating for good, simply because I didn't have anyone to think about anymore, no fantasy, nothing but nostalgia for what I'd lost, clutched in my stupefied fists. I don't remember when the fact that I'd never really figured out how to dress stopped being a daily embarrassment, as did the thought of emitting any kind of body odor or smell of sweat. I don't remember when I went from showering daily to once a week, or when I stopped eating anything fresh and consumed exclusively factory-produced foodstuffs, microwaved, and then heated less and less, and finally not even microwaved at all, the packaging left to rot in dirty water, attracting ever-larger clouds of gnats, the speed of whose proliferation was startling to say the least. I don't remember when I started leaving the house exclusively at night, because it was only under a certain kind of electric light, and at certain, very specific times, that the city still felt even slightly bearable to me, and I don't remember when I lost the last shred of contact with another human being. For a long time the only person I'd still hold in my arms occasionally was my little brother Thomas, but then he decided to retreat to New Zealand for an indefinite period, and then the last person I had left to call was my dealer, and even then there was no glamor, no rock and roll, nothing glittering or particularly destructive about it; I only bought weed from him, and it was just to sleep—but at

least, at least for the forty-five seconds the transaction took, at least for those few seconds, I had some minimal human interaction. I don't remember when compulsively scrolling through the mass of famous names that had multiplied like sticky buns in my smartphone's contact list the moment my face began to be recognizable and my name became something separate from me and took on a life of its own—that is, when people started to recognize me in restaurants and cocktail bars and salons (and when people began exclaiming “Oh!” when we were introduced and they heard my last name)—stopped being a source of dazzled wonderment. I don't remember when I stopped being amazed by the flattery showered upon me by an army of powerful men with well-known, well-proportioned faces, an army of powerful, systematically ambiguous men. I don't know exactly when I realized that going to private showrooms with famous actresses to try on expensive, trendy clothes for parties you didn't get into unless your name was on a list of invited guests doesn't change anything—that hanging out with all these people of a certain social standing doesn't change anything, doesn't ever actually make you one of them; that you can never be one of them unless you're born into it, and even when you are, what good does all of that really do? Does it help you to find even a tiny scrap of direction, or a reason to keep playing the game? I don't remember when I stopped believing that the welter of trophies would make me

likable, or help me find true love, lifelong love, because I didn't want all men anymore; I wanted one man who would belong to me, who would stay with me to the end, and vice versa, through free choice and not obligation, and I don't know how what had always seemed like the bleakest, dullest thing in the world to me suddenly became the only thing I wanted, the only thing I considered priceless. I don't remember anymore when it was that I tried—and failed—to treat my total and permanent lack of interest in the most basic aspects of life by consuming hallucinogenic mushrooms mail-ordered from a foreign country. It was on my brother's well-considered advice, after he'd read an article in *Vice* about the benefits of microdosing, after the man I loved had left me, the man whose hands I used to kiss in bars, the man who ended our relationship over the telephone, because he overestimated my strength and my personal emotional resources, and also because of his oversized ego. I don't remember when money, which had never interested me enough to make me do what it took to earn it, suddenly began to seem indispensable, urgent, burningly necessary; when life without it began to seem unlivable. I don't remember when I stopped being able to cope with summer and its interminable stagnation, its unbearable temperatures and too-bright colors and damp heat, its overly scarlet strawberries and its plums and peaches, its heaps of red fruits, much too red and gleaming, and me, blinded, shielding my eyes with a forearm in

the middle of the seasonal fruits and vegetables and their obscene organic shininess. I don't remember when I started dreaming of the North and its pervasive rains, its evenings that fall so early, just after five o'clock, of hot toddies and the constant hammering of water from the sky, washing the household windowpanes. I don't remember when I finally stopped hoarding Monoprix underpants—probably when I stopped hoping that one day I'd meet that special man, my ass tight in those Monoprix panties; that's what he'd say, their cotton simplicity molding my perfect little ass just so perfectly—or when the ones I already owned started to get washed out, their topstitched threads unravelling as easily as overcooked ramen noodles. I don't remember when I started frantically searching Google and Wikipedia for the birth-years of all those young girls, the women, nymphets, it-girls, extras, dancers, backup singers I'd spotted in a film or a commercial or a clip, and all those young people “in general”, girls and guys, who were “doing something with their lives,” most of them prepared to do anything to make it, to kill for it, like I was, not too long ago. I don't know when I started crossing paths with them in bars, listening to them bitching and carping, watching them pop up like mushrooms after a rainstorm, swarming, crawling, surrounding me, invertebrates creeping out of the walls, hordes of cockroaches in turtle-formation; they were all doing something, they all had some talent or desire in their

back pockets, some headshot or brightly-colored razzmatazz they'd whip out if you spent more than thirty seconds talking to them. I don't know if it's the city with its neon-light possibilities that has that effect, but in any case I'd underestimated their numbers, their tenacity, no less iron-clad than mine, back in the day. I don't remember anymore how long the new privileges kept coming; the gifts, the favors, the inevitable all-you-can-drink champagne that I've always personally found disgusting, the concerts with their backstage carousing, the afterparties and the breakfasts on the avenue Montaigne and the invitations to preview screenings I allowed myself the luxury of not attending, the readers hysterical as groupies, the letters, the truckloads of letters I didn't read anymore, the huge black taxis waiting downstairs to take me to this radio station or that television studio, my name everywhere like a rumor in the city's arteries, the shooting sessions during which I'd indulge in a sulk, the meetings I always showed up to late—what do you expect; I was a writer, so everyone assumed I was crazy; I could get away with anything; what do you expect; I could have showed up on any channel spouting any old bullshit about an identity crisis; nothing really mattered much anymore. I don't remember anymore when everything I'd fought tooth and nail to get, everything I thought I'd never want to let go of, stopped mattering to me, when the possibility of

backtracking, of changing my life, became impossible. Is impossible.

I don't remember when the summer stopped being vast.

I don't remember when I lost everything that touched me emotionally, everything dear and important to me; when, in spite of it all, any kind of life other than the one I figured I'd now attained became unacceptable, and the idea of leaving it all behind, absolutely out of the question.

I don't remember when the only clear thought I had left when I woke up in the morning became that phrase by Don Carpenter: "None of it's worth anything, dammit. When you don't have love," superimposed on garlands of abandoned swimming pools like so many forlorn and empty steins, impossible to fill, in the hell of my mind—which was otherwise horribly blank, behind the slamming door of a bar overlooking the sea in summer.