

Slender is the night, long is the blade.

Gleaming, once a center of someone's mind, now ash and dust. These were the echoes that darkness brought to Jude. Deeply and darkly, these words created a stratosphere of echoing that only seemed to repeat itself. Jude looked up; she didn't see anything. She looked around and all was darkness, cold to the very touch. She was laying in the fetal position, not able to fully move yet. She groaned with pain, that echoed in front of her. All she could think about was being trapped in some place she did not know, but that whatever she was feeling was quickly becoming succumbed to by the crippling and lingering darkness that surrounded her. It was overwhelming her, like an envelope being wrapped around a piece of paper that one had sent to another loved one. But in this envelope, there was only cold, biting touch. Illumination began in her limbs, and she felt like she could move her body, even if it was only a half a twitch. Her flesh felt like a balloon that had been stretched over her body, one creeping inch by inch. She was now on to her knees, and she could see light, somewhere above. Dark turned to indigo and indigo turned to cerulean. She saw the opening getting wider, but there was no light. There could not have been. All was a ripple of blue and black that seemed to get lighter.

Chains crackled. Bones creaked. Blood stood coagulated, not departing. It looked like something was approaching her, not through the dim opening in the roof, but through the darkest part of the room. The first thing Jude saw were red lips, voluminous and soaked red. Dripping, dripping, dripping red. She next saw the slender eyes of a woman, shining in the darkness. She was smiling, from what Jude could see. The silhouette moved closer, it seemed like it was moving side to side. She could see the hands that were encapsulated by cuffs, and chains attached to it. The figure moved closer, then paused and knelt down to Jude. Within a few inches of each other's face, the figure seemed to be consulting whatever power was telling her to get

closer. Jude could see that the rest of her clothes were draped over her slender shoulders and waist. At the hilt of her right hip, there was what looked like a steel blue blade, with etchings carved down the side. You might have wondered who I am, Jude heard in her mind. She did not feel fear, because well, it was such a constant to her; in this, and in her life. She was always running, running, tripping, falling. Falling into a continuum of darkness. I do, Jude said. I am nothing, nothing, but everything. I am the man who follows you home after dark. I am the cold chill you felt at graveside of your parents. I am the doubt that creeps into your mind when you are alone. I have no name. You made me. Then, the woman touched Jude on the cheek. Jude felt memories flood back to her. She felt the disappointment in not being invited to that slumber party. She felt the smile of her uncle when he touched her. She felt the agony of watching her brother die in front of her. Jude was then constantly falling. Not through a time period but being picked up softly and sweetly then being let down, again and again.

The woman reached out to her, looking at her not with a smile anymore, but a look of sadness. You, Jude, are flesh and blood. Only human. I am what has brought you back every time. The voice picked up in aggression and tone. It was I, that allowed you to achieve the things you did. The heights that I accompanied you on, they were only because of the darkness you see around you. This is you; I AM YOU. The woman pulled her into herself, she saw now the scars that glittered across her body. She embraced her tightly. Jude felt oddly not terrified anymore. A calmness washed over her, like an eye flitting shut. The Darkness was her. She knew who this was, because whoever it was knew who she was. She felt acceptance and understanding now, even though it was a dark, sadistic twin of where she had been a minute ago. There was a mirror to the side of her, she looked ethereal in comparison to the woman, who she could now see was licking her lips. The lips of which were dripping with blood. She heard the slight murmur of a

heartbeat, perhaps hers. She felt now lifeless and the woman stepped to meet her. She pulled out the blade on her right hip and noticed that this was the blade in her pulsating, glowing right hand. The woman looked her directly into her eyes, her pupils black as night.

Jude woke up, she was in a damp hotel room. All of a sudden, she could see that her clothes were off and near the floor. There was blood, as red as the one that had been on the woman's lips. She was covered in it. There was a man, who looked around 50, to her left. She realized that he occupied the pool of blood. The pool of blood that had covered her, sanguine, congealed, twisting as it pulsed out of his body. Like a generator, or a pump, it kept belching out the red iron laden life force that was in his heart. She turned the man over and looked into his eyes. The gleaming knife was in her hand, a chef's knife from the kitchen, dull but keen to still cut through like steel. His eyes were black, black as night. Black as the vacuum of space she had just occupied. Black as the eyes of the woman, the knife glistening like the scars that were beneath her clothes.