**The Transaction**

E.B. Cotenord

 What is it about the transaction that fascinates people so much? When you tell them a story about sex, the story is about sex. When you tell them a story about sex for money, the story is about money and the fascination of pairing it with sex.

 Sex for free. We all understand that. It’s fun. It’s sweaty. It’s scary. It’s love. It’s hate. It’s defiance. It’s commitment. It’s procreation. It’s intimate. It’s ruthless. It’s satisfying. It’s painful. It’s the motivation for war and diplomacy. It’s betrayal. It’s honesty.

 We put a lot into sex. But sex is not the question people ask when it comes to money.

It’s never, “How could you sell sex?”

We get that. Everyone gets that. We buy and sell sex in every transaction and every purchase we make in every store. Sex may not be the product. But sex is the experience we’re buying. The reality is, that deep down, we all understand that, in the act itself, all sex is transactional.

We are all giving to receive something, and that’s not selfish. That’s beautiful. Caring for others to take care of ourselves. Fulfilling others’ needs to fulfill our own. An exchange. Your love in exchange for my love. Your pleasure in exchange for my pleasure. I satisfy you and, in exchange, you accept me. Exclusive access in exchange for a life together. We all sell sex. We don’t all sell it for money.

So I don’t get asked, “How could you sell sex?”

It’s deeper than that. The question people ask is a glimpse into the psyche of a society fascinated with the transaction and what it means—what it means to me, and what it means to them, and what they think it should mean to me. The question is dense with shame and intrigue and self-imposed ignorance.

The question is, “How could you sell *yourself*?”

It pulls me into my head for days while I ponder this. How do I sell my *self*? What does that mean? And how did anyone get to the point where they think my *self* is stored in the penetrable holes of my body.

I don’t sell my *self*.

I don’t sell my *body*.

At the end of every day at work, I go home, and my *self* and my body come with me. I don’t have to summon them. I don’t have to collect them. I don’t have to search under the bed. They don’t get strewn around the room with my panties and condom wrappers.

I sell less of myself than anyone I know. I sell access to my body. I sell experiences. I sell a human greenscreen for you to project your fantasies on. My lips and my thighs are destinations. And I sell journeys. I sell excursions into my hips. And guided tours to the hidden gems inside your mind. I offer touch. I offer repentance. I offer absolution and I offer acceptance. I offer reassurance. I forgive your fantasies when you can’t forgive yourself.

And I offer anal.

But my *self*? That’s not on the menu. Self is the mind. I’m not telling you anything profound here. You know this. Except when it comes to my job and your job. My job is selling access to my body. Your job is reaching into your mind and producing new content and giving it to your boss, your company, your investors, your clients, your customers. You sell them your thoughts. You sell them your ideas. You sell them your mind.

Everything you think. Everything you write. Every intangible that passes from you to another person is you. Even the lies. Even the stolen ideas. They cannot enter you and pass through you and be moved out of you without being filtered through an experience that is uniquely yours. It is imbued with you.

What you give of your mind to your job—that they can and will use to make more money—is what you’ve sold of yourself. It’s theirs now. They own it. They can take it and use it. And, in exchange, you get money and fifty percent off contact lenses every year.

I leave behind nothing. Maybe a trinket or a hope or a memory. Maybe my scent lingers, burrowed under his pillows. Maybe there’s a smudge of my lipstick inside the buttonhole of his jeans. A once warm clean towel, now damp and sticky and cool on the floor. A large late-night charge on his credit card statement. But none of that can be capitalized on. It can’t be re-consumed. He is left with no part of my body and no part of my *self*. Not even my first name.

To say I sell myself is to say hotels sell homes. If anything, I sell you a version of your self that can only be filtered through me. I sell your self back to you.