

The Hetaera Confesses In The Whispered Dark

I wish, therefore, to prove to you convincingly from the very beginning that this woman Neaera is an alien. There were these seven girls who were purchased while they were small children...

Demosthenes, *Against Neaera*
343 - 340 BCE

What do you call that thing you do
when you are young? When you so desperately trace
shadows in the fire, when
you count the stars and pray someone
will hear the pleas fall from your lyre?

I reach — up that blackened tent towards
the moon, my distant dream of light.
I feel the candle flickers above my fingertips,
I see the Corinth sand stills
and I think I can taste childhood on my lips.

Good audience, what is my name?
To mistress I am *daughter*
an epithet to earn coins.
To those men, *I am animal/bitch/skin* —
it's sincerity when I tell you
no-one has taken anything from me, meaning:
no man has taken anything I claimed.

My body, my stink, my rusted hinges;
it's never about the price of fish.
Palms upon palms, wielding the flesh into fantasies
like gods on stolen land.
His teeth, his wine-stained breath, his property;
I lay awake like a carcass, like
a ghost possessing my own tears.

(if I am still enough, perhaps the beasts will tire of
this game)

I say, *of course, help yourself*

and try to mean it.

I say, *I'll be your dirty secret*

and it's all I can do not to weep.

Some nights, I can feel his touch linger

on my skin, and

I am struck with the filthy knowledge that

somewhere, some place out there

he will destroy another girl's dreams.

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