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Prologue

by Adam Phillips

The dark corridor allowed for no shadow. What would have been seen was felt. What was smelled was acrid. The two women were pulled into the office by arms that appeared disconnected from the rest of their bodies.

It began when they were lost.

This trajectory of a first kiss that led to this was far from being preplanned. An interest in something different, a motivator to unlock the spiraling decay of their relationship, yielded a leap into the depths of the unknown.

Steady, steady as they come, the smaller one whispered into the larger women's left ear as they were led in.

'To be stripped and then dressed, to be stripped and then dressed.' It was a bit like a chant. What happened in between remains their little secret. So they think.

A large practical piece of metal would serve as a useful tool. Stolen from an abattoir, it had been fashioned in a way that was functional for another purpose.

The strip lights emitted an insipid sepia like glow that faded into near darkness after three minutes.

The generator and the noise of fast walking footsteps could be heard outside this room and occasionally a key would disarm a lock that budged a door open.

The cranking set off an echo that you might expect to find in a vast metal chamber.

Payment had been agreed and the machines were connected, leveled, finely tuned. A face emerged and a small mouth started a murmur that was incomprehensible and manipulated.

It began when the couple met in rehab, in California, on that desert plain twenty years ago. Dr Abraham and his fifty papers: 'Integrating the shadow self,' was an inspiration to the patients. He was expensive but Debbie and Francis could afford it with their new jobs. Better than Freudian dream work?

'A little red book makes a present to make your friend jealous.'

The dream and its rhyme were persistent, neurotic and costly for everyone in so many ways.