

5-1-2023

Learned Helplessness

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Recommended Citation

Cruise, Kendall (2023) "Learned Helplessness," *Gandy Dancer Archives*: Vol. 11: Iss. 2, Article 12.
Available at: <https://knightscholar.geneseo.edu/gandy-dancer/vol11/iss2/12>

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Learned Helplessness

I think the men on the street laugh. I think they shout, take false ownership because no one ever taught them how it ripples through. The women learn: bark, bite, heel. There is no right choice. The men will turn tales of you, make you bitch, nothing but stray, something to be turned out on the street. I have a hunger so deep that it can't really be my own. The face I picture never quite looks the same as the one I see in shop window glass. In my head, the nose is always slimmer, forehead smaller, cheeks more hollow. I know we can't both be right. I think when I said hunger you didn't really understand what I meant. I envy men; sometimes, I think I want to be them, but then, when I'm clear enough in the head, I consider that all I really want is to be someone that others are afraid to hurt. I wish I was something other than a thing begging to be plundered. In women, the body can only be as good as the scene of violence. What else is it good for? What use if not to be gawked at, poked, bruised? Most of the time, I'm not quite sure I'm real. I'm convinced that if I tried hard enough, I could push my hand through my chest like clay. There is a danger in me materializing; I might start to think of everything terrible that has ever happened to me as something that was done to me. Girls like that wind up dead, dismembered so far past recognition there is no one to cry over the body. Anger is not a luxury we are afforded. I have never met a woman who wasn't hungry, starved, scratching at anything she can get her hands on, her nails into. As a woman, violence is more like a test that you cannot pass. To be a violent woman is to be made crazy, to be a passive woman is to always lose; there is no other type of woman. If you were to slice a woman from toe to top you would find that it all led back to the stomach. You would find it shriveled there, and inside would be a body naked, thinned, and curled into herself. In men, the focal point, too, would be the stomach, but its muscle would

be gorged with things not belonging to them. Their blood tests would come back buzzing. To be that blind you have to be so sedated you can barely see. To be a woman is to have sight so sharp it burns. To be a woman is to claw and scrape at the hope that one day you could be fearless.