

Home	<h2 style="text-align: center;">Come Back to Me</h2> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>by Melody Chan</i></p>
Autumn/Winter 2011	
Summer 2010	
Spring 2010	Come back to me, Harry.
Winter 2010	I want to be taken by you in a dank closet of the Hotel Del Coronado, with muffled sighs and limbs entangled everywhere. I want to be filled by you, by the heady exuberance of youth, of possibility, of no commitments and no consequences.
Autumn 2009	
Summer 2009	I want to believe this is more than what it is: the lure of the flesh. A shameless indiscretion, brought on by the scent of sex and the absence of my husband. You sensed the opportunity and, like the interloper, you set your eye on the prize.
Spring 2009	
Autumn 2008	
Summer 2008	Oh, you played the part so well, with downcast eyes, but inside, you planned your move—and it was bold—to entice my unsuspecting heart into your trap. You pretended to understand, to have what no man can have: a noble purpose, a pure heart. As you know by now, you made me believe I was special.
Spring/Summer 2008	
Winter/Spring 2008	But I should have realized men are slaves to primal instinct. They savor the conquest.
Editor's Note	
Guidelines	This is human nature, if we are descended from animals, as Mr. Darwin proposes. Should it surprise me? No, for I am an exploiter of souls, a sham. My fatal mistake: to read a goodness there that did not exist, by divine imprint or otherwise; to think I saw, and there it appeared, a cool oasis in the middle of the desert, a place where I could safely rest my weary head and love-starved heart.
Contact	<p>As I stepped off the carriage to this paradise, you came to me, dazzling in your smart white coat with shiny buttons. You offered me your hand and let me savor the warmth of it, drawing me alongside. You spoke to me, polite and eminently helpful, your swift and pleasant thank you, miss; and, a pleasure, miss. Is there anything else I can get you, miss?</p> <p>I choke on those words now. Once as soothing as a quiet brook, they burn like acid poured over the cancer growing inside me.</p> <p>Am I so bad, to want a man who is loyal as a dog, who would die for my sake, to love and protect and selflessly serve me all his days? My husband was a handsome cheat who swindled me out of my life and my reputation, and left me with nothing. Now I long for the simplicity of a love without condition.</p> <p>It was my fault for ringing you to my room, asking you to please dry my hair for me. The towel was heavy, and my grief over my husband leaving had fatigued me. You looked at me with those nearly colorless eyes of yours, compared our reflections in the mirror, told me you were the sun and I was the moon, a dark mystery waiting to be revealed. You said my hair was so beautiful, like a black silk ribbon you could wrap yourself up in.</p> <p>The way you caressed my neck—so sensual, like nothing I'd ever</p>

experienced before. You knew what I wanted before I wanted it. Every thrust of you inside me, like dying and being resurrected again, and again, and again.

And afterward, when I was spent and you were still breathing hard, you buttoned up your uniform, put your hat on, tapped your heels together and said, Will that be all, miss?

You watched me fall to the ground, unable to breathe. You held out your hand—not to help me up but for the gratuity you thought you deserved for your extraordinary level of service. If I did not already love you, I would have killed you then and there.

In this respect, you are lucky, my dear Harry. My father taught me how to handle a pistol, and my aim is true. I've bought a box of bullets, though I don't know why. I'll need only one.

The pain in my gut gnaws incessantly. I can hardly eat anything. I watch you tend to the other ladies on the oceanside veranda, fluffing the pillows in their rocking chairs, bringing them tea and bonbons. I wonder how many of them you've serviced in bed, and the pain flares like the cry of a phantom child inside my belly.

In my room, lacing my corset gives me a bit of trouble, but I manage well enough to put on my best petticoat, my black woolen skirt, my white silk blouse. I pin my hair in neat curls on my head. I press the button to call you, knowing you will come.

You rang, miss?

I open the door wide, hiding the gun in my skirt. To gaze one last time on your flaxen hair, to see the way your eyes crinkle with good humor is almost enough to deter me. But your expression becomes serious when you see the pistol pointed at you.

You look so beautiful tonight, you say, raising your hands. We circle each other slowly, sniffing each other's fear. You move closer, pressing the pistol to your chest. You observe my trembling fingers and pierce me with your gaze.

Miss, if you shoot me, you'll never get what you want.

Then you reach up and take the pins, one by one, out of my hair. With each pin, my resolve falters, until I know you still have complete power over me. I want you to love me, and so I imagine a depth in your eyes that I know is only the reflection of my own dark desires. I descend into this madness willingly, because I would rather be in hell with you than in heaven alone.

We fuck like animals. But then you kiss me with a tenderness that speaks the truth of who you are. I am a reader of souls, and I see you, Harry. You are a fraud, too. A man trapped inside the lie, because the lie makes sense to you, and love does not.

You button up your jacket, more slowly this time, as I rest on one side of the bed, looking at you.

Come back to me, Harry.

You pause at the top button, and for an instant, I see a flash of the man I love. Your eyes, not hard like quicksilver, but soft like moonlight. Then that man is gone, hidden behind a curt little bow.

Always a pleasure, miss.

You check your pocket watch, tip your hat, and disappear without asking for money.

A few seconds later, I follow you down the darkened breezeways of the hotel to the north side of the building, where the wealthy ladies stay when their husbands are away on fishing expeditions.

In my dressing gown and without my shoes, I am stealthy as a ghost; you don't even notice me until after you've opened the door to a woman's room and I hear her say, Har-ry, you're late....

You stop and look at me, perhaps at your personal crossroads. The woman inside asks, Who is it?

You shake your head at me, your eyes wide. No one, you say to her. Just another guest.

The cold wind whips against my body and makes me shudder. I lean against the railing for strength, stretch my arms out to you.

Come back to me, Harry.

After a moment, you arrange your lips into the empty smile of a man inside a jail cell. Good night, miss, you say, shutting the door behind you. You've made your choice.

Putting on mourning attire in the dead of night seems fitting, given the departure of my husband, and now, the loss of you. I am a coward when it comes to pain, and I cannot let you continue to hurt me this way.

The moon is high in the night sky when I pass that woman's room to descend the steps leading to the beach. I think I hear you Harry, making sounds that should only be made with me. I need to escape those sounds and the memory of your skin next to mine.

The roar of the wind and the waves drowns out the sobs rising from my chest. The pistol is with me, filled with an entire cartridge of bullets. In case I miss the first time. But how can I possibly miss?

Perhaps I am the moon, and you are the sun, and my life and my soul revolve around you. Or perhaps I'm just a little black-haired dog, nipping at your feet, ready to lay down my life to show you how much I believe in the man you could one day become.

I hold the pistol to my temple, feel the coldness of the barrel, raise my eyes to the moon, and pull the trigger. My body falls; my spirit rises like smoke into the wooden rafters of the hotel.

This is my place now, where I will forever wait for you to come back to me.

Melody Chan holds a master's degree in comparative literature. Her work has appeared in the Spring 2009 issue of the *Southern California Review* and has received honors in numerous national contests, including the *Writer's Digest* Annual Writing Competition and the *Nimrod* Literary Awards: Katherine Anne Porter Prize in Fiction. She recently completed a literary novel about a time-traveling genie and is looking forward to seeing it in print. Learn more about her at www.melodychan.net.

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