



Maria Scotti, (Left) *Fiorenza*, 1989, 60 x 84"; char, china marker, o/c; (Right) *November 1966, 1988-89*, 62 1/8 x 82", char, o/c. Photo: Earl Ripling. Installation Michael Walls Gallery.

TWO HOURS

Julie Gesin

My room is full of sun, as I wake up. I see the pink-orange summer sky over the city. You, at your desk, can't see what I see. Coffee, bitter, thick as mud, is my energy. The thought of you is an alarm clock connecting me to today. I will see you for two hours.

I change my hair three times, put on a summer dress; black, with lavender roses, shoulders bare. For you to think about. I miss the first bus, second one gets you to me on time. You sit looking down at the desk, knowing it's me who just came in. I'm nervous. You look at me like a camera, summarizing the whole situation of my being with one shot. Your face, perfect with imperfection, shows no feeling, but I feel pleasantly confined by the ropes that spring from your eye sockets.

We walk to your car, keeping a secret with a precision of spies. Underneath the words, our minds go over every detail of being within each other. I take you to my favorite place. There are trees, one can see the ocean, and we're the only ones here today. The

grass is not cut, but the flowers are perfect, light exposes thin veins on their bodies. A few years ago there were no flowers, grass was the color of hay and I thought demons lived here.

You tell me about her, it was me—who brought up the subject. I just want to know how you think of me when she's there. Once I thought of you when I was with someone else, and he became a waste of time. I'm free to be with you when I'm brave. You won't let me be brave. She is not a phantom anymore, I know her name now. It enters my mind and spreads out like ink in water.

You say you want to take off my dress. I'd let you, but now we only have one hour. The ocean and the trees are with me now, so are you. Your hands are beautiful, instead I let you read my stories.

We walk back to the car, then drive through the park. We can't stop here, we broke all the rules as it is. Take me to an obscure street, I say. I want to be unknown, to sit quietly thinking of you. I can't write you letters because they're visible. Very slowly we separate in different directions, my eyes fixed on you to draw in every detail, so it can last me until next time.

A man in a café tells me I'm beautiful. I want to tell him to sit down and listen to a sad story about me wanting you, and you

being with her for seven years, and me—living with a longing like a schoolgirl with a twisted crush on a teacher, eating away at her through four years of high school. Or longer.

But I feel too happy to be sad. I walk to my next destination. I notice people observing me. I'm a stranger in this part of the city. They don't know I'm harmless, so I smile to them and take off my shoes. I pass small, white houses with perfect lawns. A girl is practicing gymnastics in a driveway. Her body is muscular and her hair is blond. She spins over a blue mat, through the air. Her movements are precise, not rushed. She stops, looks at me, across the street. "That's really good!" I shout. Suddenly she smiles. "Thanks, thank you." Two strangers connect.

I walk on, barefoot. Following the train tracks. I may be poor, but I still have nice shoes. Green in color. The lawn in front of a church is soft and cold. I walk across it. The grass feels like the ocean, even better. The sun is bright and it's hard to see. I'm floating, not walking. I was with you today. People can be together for years and not realize how I made the best of seeing you for two hours. It was art.

I reach my destination, must stop here—reality. You're unattainable, but I was with you for two hours, I am happy.