

## Gentlemen Callers

**Corinne Hoex**

**Caitlin O'Neil, Translator**

Dalkey Archive (Feb 1, 2022)

Softcover \$14.95 (143pp)

978-1-62897-368-6

Evocative and erotic, Corinne Hoex's *Gentlemen Callers* seduces its audience with dreamy vignettes.

The unnamed narrator shares her dreams via thirty-three short stories, each preceded by a suggestive epigraph. She dreams of seduction and transformation: a bite of a baker's cake turns her into a fly, and she then teases him; she is a cloud flirting with an aviator; she coils at the bottom of a sexy mailman's bag. The epigraphs, by luminaries including Charles Baudelaire, set the mood for each short chapter, suggesting a theme or tone for the sexual play.

Not every encounter is consummated; the narrator rejects a geographer as boring, while a young priest comes back for seconds. Some of the encounters are tantalizing and teasing, while others result in consummation of a sort, since the narrator spends time as a forest, a house cat, and a wave in the ocean. The language is artistic and evocative rather than explicit or crass, and the tone is inquisitive, suitable for the shifting realities the narrator experiences, akin to magical realism.

Without an overarching plot to unite the chapters, the pacing is mostly found within each chapter, in the enigmatic interactions that the narrator has with her dream lovers, the eponymous gentlemen callers. They tempt her with sensations that range from brutal (one caller being an executioner) to chaste (another caller being a guardsman who protects her dreams from interlopers). A comet whisks away a lecherous astrologer before he can make his move on her. Throughout it all, the narrator remains hungry for bliss and gratification, revealing herself to be greedy for the touch of almost all of the men in her dreams.

*Gentlemen Callers* delights and entertains with its teasing short chapters, hinting at the pleasures to be found in playful encounters with imaginary lovers.

JEANA JORGENSEN (March / April 2022)

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