



Pity the Animal

Chelsea Hodson

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Pity the Animal, an essay by Chelsea Hodson, explores the concept of human submission and commodification by way of window displays, wild animals, performance art, and sugar daddy dating websites. "How much can a body endure? Almost everything." Chelsea Hodson is a 2012 PEN Center USA Emerging Voices Fellow. She is also the author of the chapbook Beach Camp, published by Swill Children in 2010. Her essays have been published in Black Warrior Review, Vol. 1 Brooklyn, Sex Magazine, and elsewhere. She lives in Brooklyn, New York. Watch the trailer here: <http://vimeo.com/88997155>

Pity the Animal Details

Date : Published May 20th 2014 by Future Tense Books

ISBN : 9781892061676

Author : Chelsea Hodson

Format : Pamphlet 32 pages

Genre : Writing, Essays, Nonfiction, Autobiography, Memoir

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Tobias says

Fantastic stuff.

Dan says

I know I'll be thinking about this essay for a long time. Craft-wise, really well written. It's a story told through a series of episodes as well as quotes from books... I found the themes wove together really nicely for a short piece.

The narrator doesn't expressly say her, can I say "fundamental" wants/motives (if she knows them) which makes for a somewhat disorienting but intellectually compelling read as the narrator takes us through what seem like social experiments (or research for this book). Some of the passages were disturbing and felt violating, as the narrator purposely put herself into situations with an apparent lack of self-protection. However, I felt like the narrator deliberately wanted to dissociate from society, its contracts, power dynamics, and, of course, men's expectation to objectify and possess, at the same time as she investigated society (or perhaps as a means to investigate it). I really felt a sense of powerlessness through the narrator, one that made me squeamish at times, especially as the narrator seems to invite this position in order to gather research, but through this artistic piece (and her dissociated stance, which is like a piece of performance art in itself), it's as if she ultimately gains a sense of power and subverts society's contracts.

Troy says

This little book is just too fucking awesome. I can't really sum it up. Let's just say, if you are into essays, art, and odd little anecdotes, you will find it all here--woven together quite beautifully. A thought-provoker, for sure, and I love it.

Dottie B says

This book is not a good value. There are not very many pages inside of it. Also the font is too small. It is also a rectangle and I think rectangles are really "played out." I hate them. I am a circle girl. I don't like things that are sharp. Except for Cheddar Cheese maybe. And that's only on a sandwich. I don't like the color green, either. Makes me think of Car Sick. Roger sometimes really mashes them brakes when going around those curves (and I am not talking about in the bedroom heehee I hope my kids aren't reading this). Don't drive with him on a windy road, just saying. But the writing inside redeemed it somewhat. I like this girl. She's got spunk. She also reminds me of something that rhymes with my favorite dessert. S'mores. Sometimes a girl just wanna have fun. HAH! But I'm here to tell you Chelsie that I've got years of experience and sometimes there's not much difference between a man and a toothbrush. They might be good for you but sometimes you forget to bring them on a trip and therefore you have to use one of those icky ones. But those get the job done to. But what I'm trying to say is this. Sometimes there's not much difference between a man and a Chili

Cheese Dog. Enough said. Pity that animal. You said it Chelsie. Go Chelsie, and go buckeyes. P.S. What is up with that art woman? Madonna Abrayvitch? Who named her? Why'd you want to stare at something you can't even pronounce? This is america. My name is Dottie. You can say that easy. Just like chelsei.

Catie Disabato says

Visceral and moving, I'll return to this one a lot, I know it already.

Angela says

This was atrocious. A string of pithy observations jumbled together. Declarations begging for objectification while simultaneously mewling for, nay, demanding pity. I read this on a bus to Portland, Oregon, and was strongly tempted to fling it out the window. Sadly, it was an e-book, so I just trashed it asap.

Wendy Ortiz says

1/11/15: Wait wait wait. I read this beautiful thing last summer. I just realized I never added it to goodreads. This is 6 of 5 stars. Do it.

Vincent Scarpa says

Update: five stars because now Chelsea is my friend.

I didn't want to love this book because Chelsea Hodson doesn't follow me on Twitter and I really want her to, but of course I loved this book because Chelsea Hodson is a fearless badass. PITY THE ANIMAL is a great missive from the place she thinks from, and I look forward to a full-length book someday, as there was so much material here I would've followed much further. Four stars until she follows.

Leesa says

I am always looking for something like this to read. Superb.

Michael Seidlinger says

32 pages of searching--an undoing of the line drawn down the middle made to make a person seem simple, symmetrical, categorical, an object. That symmetrical line is an excuse, but it's good to know that this essay is an explanation. One of the best I've read in quite some time.

Jason Diamond says

I'm anxiously awaiting a book full of Chelsea Hodson's thoughts after reading this.

Zan Romanoff says

"I was pretending to be a neutral observer, but I kept trying to override my heartbreak with poignancy."

"If I'm sold as an object, I'm no longer a threat."

"Fear breeds fantasy."

"I realized I wanted to pass his test just because I could."

"It must feel good to have that much money. It must feel patriotic to hold it. I must be crazy to let a man do that."

"I knew which rooms were bad, and I entered them anyway. It was a sort of power."

"I wished his question was, wanna know what it's like to be the one that enters? because I do, and I wish that knowledge was as simple as holding a man in my hands. I want to see my desire as a protrusion leading me into dark rooms. If I can't have that, then I can attempt to reduce myself to the most vulnerable object possible."

Kevin Maloney says

There's a good reason this tiny book containing one lonely essay is garnering Chelsea Hodson so much attention in the literary world. She walks a tightrope between opposites: first person confession and abstract philosophy, patchwork collage and linear narrative, journalistic directness and poetic lyricism. You can't pin this essay down, which is exactly why it's so good. If this is just the tip of the iceberg, then I fully expect Hodson to be one of the great literary voices of our time.

Kevin says

It was probably less than a year ago that I discovered Chelsea Hodson's writing. Then I was lucky enough to read with her in NY late last year. Then I read everything of hers I possibly could. And I wanted wanted more! And I told her so. And she wrote this. And it's some amazing Best American Essays-caliber stuff. And now it's a beautiful little book on my press.

Hodson isn't afraid to reveal herself and she does so in an artful, cool, and sexy way. There's an eerie, almost detached approach that she has when confronting subject matter that most people flinch at. And I love how she blends in Marina Abramovic, the Seeking Arrangement website, and weird book excerpts from the 1920s

and 30s. Hodson works some serious magic here and I think this is just the beginning of a life full of abracadabra.

Cari says

Deft and beautiful and brutally honest. I read it in one gulp, then read it again. I'm eager for a full-length book from Hodson.
