

## often pastoral    often breathing

Read *Sexual Stealing* as you would a novel. Not the one from which its words have been excised, but a narrative of its own trajectory and ambience. A comedy of manners, a domestic drama, an escape caper, a revenge fantasy, a barely allegorical allegory. Above all, a ghost story: one whose ghosts are historical but also textual, because in a sense what's the difference.

Or watch it as you would a movie. Let its elliptical evocations flicker past at the pace it chooses for you, in the place it superimposes on you. The pastoral plantation setting and the quiet undercurrent of cruelty and menace coexisting, alternating, from the first minute to the last, still jockeying as the credits roll.

Or listen to it as you would a song cycle, a musical, an opera on a broken radio. *Hamilton* (Oneohtrix Point Never remix). The voices disembodied but distinct, swaths of primary-source gallantry and atrocity mixed in wholesale alongside a libretto in a language of which you understand one word in every dozen. Learn to chant the absence.

Or enter it as you would a childhood home, not necessarily yours but probably yours. A mansion fallen into majestic disrepair. Tiptoe over the floorboards that creak anyway, leave fingerprints in the fine layer of dust coating the peeling wallpaper, the brittle heirlooms and fussy antique fixtures, the chapter titles doubling as captions under the daguerreotypes on the wall.

Or visit it as you would a monument, now dilapidated, to some deathless struggle that seemed pretty much dead at the time of erection. Marvel at how much of its carefully hewn form has been hacked and redacted away: by time, by subjectivity, by whitewashing and forgetfulness. Drop a flower, trace the names that remain.

Or join it as you would an insurgency. Take up the struggle, the revolt. Erase the master text, and with it the very notion of mastery, until it is almost literally decimated. And remember that the systematic erasure that created this monument, this home, this opera, this movie, this novel, is still a system — that systems can be as arbitrary, as brutal, as people, as masters, as history. Remember that erosion is erasure is evolution.

— Daniel Levin Becker

# SEXUAL STEALING



## PART ONE