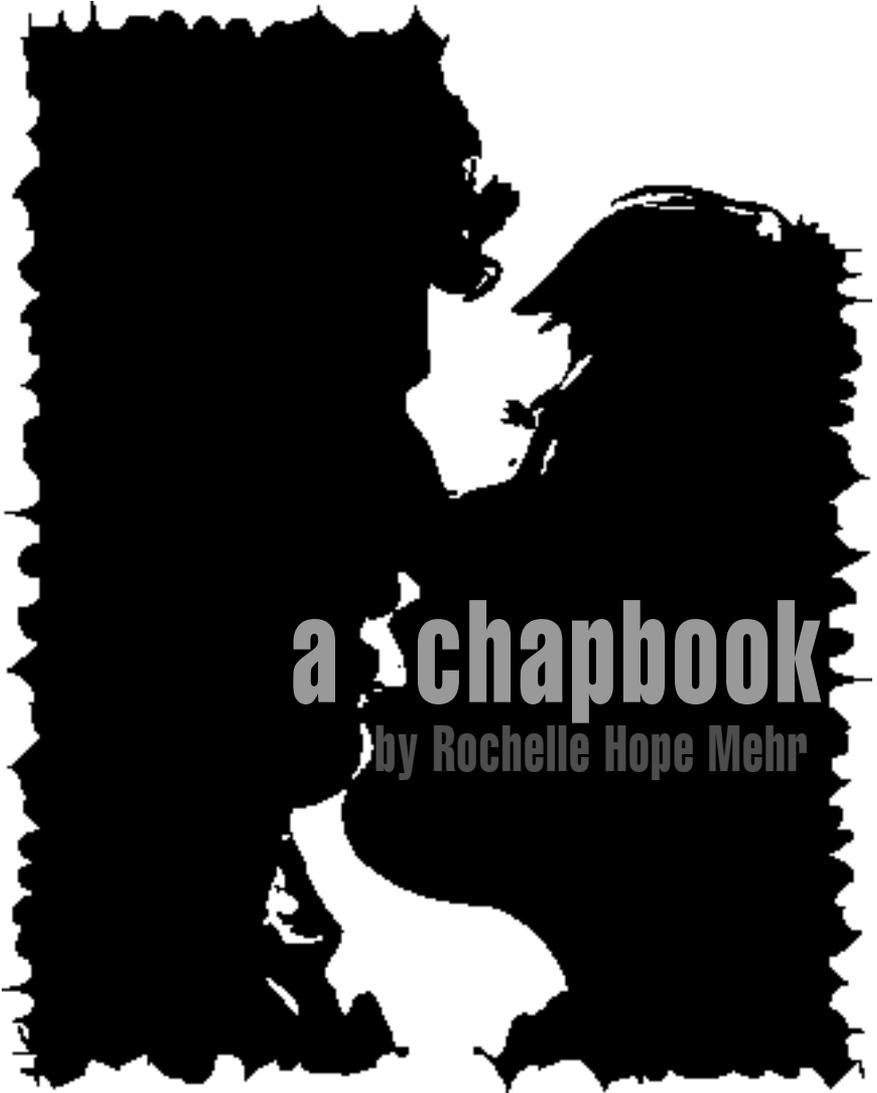


of the Affair



a chapbook

by Rochelle Hope Mehr

scarsuoijeajjnd 

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The Mean

Rochelle Hope Mehr

They'll always be the master of me.
The confident, shiny people.
The people who know the answers to all of the questions.
Or who at least ask the really impressive questions.

So easy for them to walk and talk.
They glide through the corridors of life
Off-limits to me.
Executing programs.
Following through with gracious ease.
Exchanging pleasantries.
Apparently human
But cogged into some mighty, Machiavellian machine.

They'll always be the master of me.
The confident, shiny people.
They're too much on the beam.
They're sleekly efficient.

And just too mean.

Deaf

Rochelle Hope Mehr

Impossible to write about
a woman who pretends
to listen but never hears.

“Oh, dear,” says she.
“Which do you prefer?”
“The light or the dark?”
“The bright or the stark?”

Only the truth, mother.
Only the truth --

For your little mudlark.

You will do anything to save me.
Anything but hear me.
Anything but stir.

Gone

Rochelle Hope Mehr

There is no way to pierce me until I bleed.

I am bloodless.

You tried to pin me down and I soared right into the flame.

Below Ground Zero

Rochelle Hope Mehr

What's apparent from the surface is a cavernous hole
agape and ghostly
as a jack-o'-lantern grin
illuminated by the fires within

It japes at us, it gets to us
when we least expect it
this absence
this space where the Twin Towers stood

Below
the seared off hubcap of a car
the pulverization of flesh

absence within the absence

The ATM in its eternal expectant moment
waiting for the next customer to log on

In the bookstore, books still on shelves
self-contained
unperturbed

The Detachment

Rochelle Hope Mehr

With a sick parent in the hospital.
Starting out with the noblest of intentions.
Still myself with Bach's French Suites sallying forth in my head.
Trying to break past
The grim scrim of beeping monitors punctuating the air.

Then (fatal consequence of sensory overload?)
Finding my legs lockstepped into the staccato rhythm
Which motors the place.
The robotic knee jerk
Which is - one might say -
The heart of the place.

Moving further and further into the march.
Farther and farther
From the more natural rhythms of Bach.

And losing my pulse

The New Reality

Rochelle Hope Mehr

You forget the blood.
But then you remember.

You stand erect
And salute the flag.

You go about your business
And take pride in your work.

You try not to smirk so much.
To be more sensitive.

Anything can offend now.
Dangers lurk in the most unobtrusive word.

You try not to think of risks
From terrorists

And hope that those in the know
Know what they're doing.

You don't have much of a stomach
For the ballyhooing.

Life is short
And you want it to be sweet.

You curse this new reality
Which attends you --

You are willing to be a patriot
But not a parakeet.

The *Other*

Rochelle Hope Mehr

Always this tug
between the outer and inner:
centrifugal lusting
after the other
the other sex
the other religion
the complement to
make you whole
the other course of study
the other ethnicity
Look outside
and fill your need
divert yourself
the other fashion statement
the other literary style
the other political persuasion
play devil's advocate
succor everything
as long as it is alien
familiarity breeds contempt
love thy neighbor more than thyself
despise thyself
place a mirror in front of thine eye
and see thyself only
as their tattoo

Washing My Hands of the Affair

Rochelle Hope Mehr

Trying to remember
what it was
who it was
what he said
what she said
the feel of the steel
the reel
the grill
the drub
the snub
the scrub

Lifting the Veil

Rochelle Hope Mehr

When she realized that there was nothing to go back to
That her memories may have been vivid
But that they were vivid memories of faulty perceptions
She smiled, even as she realized
That she had never really known any of the characters in the soap opera.

Nor had they known her
Because she could never act in concert with
Her inner harmony since there was no inner harmony --
Only mental confusion.
She was even more confused when people

Claimed to like her.
She knew they weren't seeing her
So long as the veil of illness
Lent her the mysterious allure which is what they really liked
And which distanced her from the self she so desperately wanted to know.

the anti pod es

Rochelle Hope Mehr

we are different (thank goodness)
we are not the same
wire us to the Internet
or to the ECT electrode (please, not that)
you'll never rewire us (thank goodness)
to be like you

we exult in tropes, not trophies (can't you see)
we walk the metaphoric mile
leading everywhere and nowhere at once

our feet are not of clay (can't be)
for we have no admirers
we are the antipodes
we are despised and devalued (heap scorn upon us):

our currency will only accrue
as we wear our soles to shreds

Food Court

Rochelle Hope Mehr

Little things set me off.
My mother throwing away the string beans
she couldn't finish at dinner.

I didn't grow up during the Great Depression
as she did
but I was felled by a great depression years ago
and had to live off welfare and food stamps.

The psychiatrist I was seeing told me my mother
didn't have to work when I was a child,
implying that she shouldn't have.

I immediately repeated this to my mother
and she denied the accusation,
insisting that she had to work, that there
were times during my infancy when our refrigerator
was almost empty.

I think I've always lived with these stringencies,
these uncertainties.
They bind me to the essential.
They form the fiber of my being, the string from which
I dangle

[http://www. impersonal. contact.edu](http://www.impersonal.contact.edu)

Rochelle Hope Mehr

if i could see you
after all these years

no, that wouldn't do
we'd need e-mail

to reacquaint
let me choose

the font
shall we HTML?

to whom do i owe
this attachment?

will you ask

"which rock have you
crawled out from under?"

are you still so drear?

what have you done
to plumb

the stratosphere?

Looking *and* Doing

Rochelle Hope Mehr

There are two kinds of people:
the people looking and the people doing.

The people doing are always looking
suspiciously at the people looking.

The people looking lick their wounds
and climb the closest tree.

I've wound myself tightly
around many maypoles.

I've tried to spring into action,
to leap into being.

But I always end up
relearning the same lesson:

Your place is here --
Don't budge

Taming *the Beast*

Rochelle Hope Mehr

I shall never be happy
barrelling through doors
which bar my way
as they open into new vistas,
knocking down the innocents
who happen to be
pausing idly
on the other side
never realizing they are
my impediments

If only I were less impetuous, less impertinent.
If only I were patient enough to knock.
Would they say, "Come in"?
Would they open the door
and lead me in by the hand?
Would the air smell as sweet
if I were more discreet?

After Two Months of Accompanying My Parents Through Their Hospitalizations

Rochelle Hope Mehr

I can't just bounce from event to event
Without trying to make sense of the sequence
But nothing orderly or meaningful
Emerges from the blur
Of white coats and IV's and stethoscopes
And stents and fine needle probes
Lumpectomies, endoscopies, hemicolectomies --
It's all a blur of white noise, a wish-wash
I cannot imbibe.

I'm thankful to leave the hospital
In one piece --
Alive.