

## Three Excerpts from The Laundress, A Novel

1. George has seen her face, has molded her with his hands, has fashioned the smoothness of her skin without ever touching her. He has sculpted the small blemish and made it beautiful, moving the contours of the earthen clay. He has seen into her soul. No one has ever seen her this way, been this close to her. She can almost hear his heart beating, like soft wings. And yet she can't stand this feeling erupting within her. It feels like she might explode, break open, and even cry. She doesn't want to, so she turns away from him and covers her eyes and mouth with her hands, smothering her silent sobs.

2

With each change of music comes a mini crisis for her. As one song ends and before another unknown piece begins, there is a pause or transition during which she feels in limbo. Where to go, how to move, what to do? Day turning to night, in the in-between times, always makes her anxious. But the dancers still move. She shifts her weight from foot to foot, trying to anticipate the next new and different beat so she can ease into the flow. But she only feels uncertainty. Restlessness replaces safety. A man who dances through the space like a galloping colt scares her. She doesn't understand his beat. Again, fleeting thoughts of leaving or going to the bathroom compel her.

3.

But, I'll need to know your name if we're going dancing.”

“Mario,” he says. “And yours?”

“My name is Lavinia Lavinia.”

“Lavinia Lavinia. First and last?”

“Yes, an old custom in Italy.”

“Well, I’m pleased to know you, Lavinia Lavinia. You so fit your name.”

“How so?”

“Lavinia was the name of the daughter of King Latinus in Roman mythology.”

“Ah, yes, she was a princess. I’ve heard of her.”

“And then a queen. Did you know that Ursula Le Guin wrote a book from Lavinia’s point of view, published in 2008?”

“No! Wow. You astound me, Mario. I’ll have to go check that out. Thank you.”

“You know, Lavinia married Aeneas, the son of Aphrodite,” he says.

Lavinia can hardly believe how much he knows about this myth, one that she’s never bothered to look into even though it’s her namesake. She just stares at him, feeling overwhelmed with happiness.

Somehow it fits that you’re a laundress, Lavinia Lavinia. I’m glad you got a job in the neighborhood.”

She smiles. “Me too.”