

T H E C O N S U M E R



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE CONSUMER (1993 – 1994)

EMPATHY	10
THE DOG	19
THE COWARD (II)	27
WHY I ATE MY WIFE	35
THE ORGY	39
THE CONSUMER, ROTTING PIG	42
1) My Prescription For Happiness, By The Rotting Pig	
2) How I Learned To Speak, By R.P.	
3) Notes On Coitus, By R.P.	
4) Homage To My Former Self, By R.P.	
THE YOUNG MAN THAT HID HIS BODY INSIDE A HORSE, OR, MY VULVIC LOS ANGELES*	60
THE SEX MACHINE	82
THE MUTE DWARF SINGS	87
HOW I LOVE HER	100
THE GREAT ANNIHILATOR, OR, FRANCIS BACON'S MOUTH	103
IF I WERE HIM	106
A SACRIFICE	112
DEFLOWERED	127
THE YOUNG BOY	134

*With greetings to B.K.

VARIOUS TRAPS, SOME WEAKNESSES, ETC. (1983 – 1986)

A CONTRACT	138
BLOODSUCKER	146
A WOMAN	149
YOU	151
THE INITIATE	154
THE IDEAL WORKER	156
THE WHORE BOY	157
DEFEATED	159
A MAN	161
RAPING A SLAVE	164
BLIND	167
THE BOSS	169

A COWARD	172
A GRAVE	173
A TRAP	174
ANOTHER TRAP	176
A GAME	177
MONEY'S FLESH	179
BASTARD	182
A SCREW	185
PUNISHMENT	187
BAPTIZED	188
FEEDING THE ANIMAL	189
HER ONLY LOVE	191
HIS CHILDISH GAMES	193
SOME WEAKNESSES	196
THE CAREGIVER	205
DAYDREAMS	210
THREE NURSERY TALES	213
TELEPATHY	217
FRIENDS	219
I'M AN INFANT, I WORSHIP HIM	222

THE CONSUMER
(1993 – 1994)

EMPATHY

When my sister was released from the mental hospital, she came to live with me in the tilting and crumbling one-bedroom house I'd bought with the small amount of money I inherited when our parents died. She arrived one afternoon unannounced in a taxi. She must have known instinctively that I'd take her in. I don't know how or why they released her. Probably due to overcrowding, and they had her scratch her name on a form, then pushed her out the door. Or maybe she just slipped away when no one was looking (who'd notice in a place like that?) — she never did tell me and I didn't ask her. I was so happy to have her with me again that the last thing I wanted to do was break the spell by letting reality intrude. Ever since they'd dragged her away weeping with laughter and reaching out for me with our parents' blood still coating her hands with shiny red gloves, I'd felt amputated, like they'd pulled her kicking and

screaming and insane out of my guts.

My house sat beside the freeway in a cluster of upright rectangles laid out in an orderly but grimy grid directly beneath the flight path of the LAX. The living quarters formed the upper half of the rectangle, squatting on top of an open-faced garage. As the relentless chorus of rising and falling howls pounded down on the house from above, the garage would resonate with a deep rumble like a kettle drum, rattling the flimsy stucco walls and sending an accord of low-frequency sound waves surging through the slat wooden floors.

Sometimes, before my sister came to me, I'd stand naked in the center of the floor for hours, dreaming of her and feeling the house rocking and resonating up through my bare feet into my bones, as if my body were a hollow bell, tuned and vibrating in perfect sympathy with the frequencies that coursed through the world outside. My blood hummed with pleasure. She was singing through me, calling out to me over the distance from her cell, forgiving me my secrets and washing my mind clean. But the air inside my house smelled foul, like the inside of my body, as if I'd extruded a growing shell out the pores of my skin and I was now huddled inside it, stinking and rotting and feeling sorry for myself because I couldn't be near her.

I never went outside anymore, except to buy alcohol and meat. I'd get drunk, loosening my attachment to myself, and I'd eat the meat raw, pretending it was my sister, planting her flesh inside my stomach so she could grow inside me and live through me, like

a cancer. When they sentenced her to that place, my own life started to drain out of my body immediately. As I walked away from the courtroom out into the poison sun of Los Angeles, I felt the light shooting straight through my eyes into my skull unfiltered, causing a tumor to grow in the center of my brain. The tumor was shaped like a rose and its petals were as sharp as razorblades. With each new thought, a petal would spiral away from the body of the flower and slice a passageway through the meat of my brain, slowly boring out large sections of my identity.

I hadn't seen her in three years when she arrived. It was the middle of summer. A constant regurgitation of corrosive yellow soot spilled out over the houses from the elevated freeway, burning my skin and eyes and tinting the neighborhood with a golden pigment that sparkled like sharkskin in the sun. The heat clung to the smog. It was heavy and painful going down into my chest, infesting my body with toxins with each breath. I was mildly drunk, sitting inside the house with the lights off and the curtains closed, sweating. I watched the blank screen of the television reflect the glow of my cigarette and imagined the hovering red ember was me, and I lived in the arid world of tubes and electronics behind the glass.

I heard a horn blaring up from the driveway. I looked out the window and saw her in the back of the cab, sitting up rigid, looking around, confused, uncertain what was supposed to happen next, maybe not even sure she'd come to the right address. She squirmed in her seat as if it were alive and she were

trying to escape its grip. She seemed to have forgotten she could simply open the door and get out. Her hair was stringy and matted to her head, so shiny with grease she might have just stepped out of a shower. She yanked at the strands that stuck to her forehead, plucking at them with pinched fingers as if they were long black worms she didn't want to touch. But she still looked beautiful to me. Her neck extended high and elegant, like a swan, just like our mother's neck before she cut it open. It presented her face, like a smooth white oval sculpture on a sleek pedestal. It was the face of a superior, chosen being, with eyes so black and flooded with cruelty and remorseless intelligence that when I looked down at her now, I felt like I'd always felt when she was near me, like a cringing, one-dimensional cut-out figure — a second-hand shadow peeled up from the outline she cast on the world.

The driver hit his horn again and looked up annoyed at the parted curtain in the window. But I stood hypnotized, watching her lower lip tremble exactly as I remembered it used to do when we'd lie naked on the cool sheets of her bed, locked inside her room as our parents slept, caressing each others' electrified skin with the peacock feathers we'd collected from the fields beyond the back yard. Her lip was a shuddering animal then, and she taught me to bite it and play with it and torture it, as if I were a predator and it was my game.

I ran down the stairs, drugged with happiness. The memories of our life together congealed, then broke like an egg in my throat, spreading her helplessness

ness through me and charging me with strength. I fumbled in my pockets as I tried to pay the driver. She got out of the cab, bunching her eyes up defiantly against the sun, as if daring it to try to slap her down with a wave of smog and heat. She stood shaking in her pink institutional bathrobe and slippers. One of her legs was meticulously shaved and polished with cream so that it reflected the sun like pale pink marble. But the other leg looked like something freshly dug up that had been decaying while buried in the dirt. It thrust down into the light from beneath her robe like a simian arm creeping out from a dark damp cave. It was covered in a coarse fur that stopped abruptly at the delicate bones of her ankle, as if the blood beneath this tighter skin was too thin to fertilize its growth. The skin beneath the fur was a gangrenous reptilian hide, shedding patches of white scales that adhered to the hairs and flickered in the sun like sprinkled flakes of pearl.

She leaned forward and kissed me on the cheek. Her lips were cold and wet. I felt myself weakening. I smelled something decomposing beneath her robe, like the smell of my own trapped insides. When she pulled away from her kiss, a silver thread of her spit connected us, strung like a fragile translucent nerve between our skins. It moved with the heat that rose up from the white concrete driveway. I felt her love pulsing through the liquid wire into my mind, telling me secrets and injecting me with her loneliness.

Her robe had opened slightly with her shaking. A breast sat matter-of-factly exposed, plump and vul-

nerable in the sun. The cab driver noticed it but pretended he didn't see it, and so did I for a second — I could feel the pliant nipple between my teeth, sucking the sweet healing milk into my mouth. I finished paying the slimy bastard and told him to get the hell off my property. I pulled her robe closed and helped her up the stairs.

We stood on the landing just outside the door and leaned on the rotted wooden railing, looking out across the freeway. The haze was a thick veil of brown blood. I held her close to me. The sky was a dull blanket pressing down on us, not leading up into space but defined in-close by the wall of sound and vapors directly above us. The air stuck to our faces like syrup. The bellies of the airplanes passed so close overhead they were like the undersides of giant boats seen from beneath the water. As they glided over us, moaning and shaking the house, we could see the faces of the passengers looking down at us in wonder, as if we were miniature animated mannequins in a sprawling amusement park landscape.

I reached my arm out towards the freeway. She followed it with her eyes. It was raised up to the same height as us, so near I could almost touch the guard rail. But the drivers in their cars, tightly sealed in the air-conditioned environment behind their windows, were traveling in their capsules through another world, completely enclosed, as if the glass walls of an aquarium separated us from them.

She laid her head on my shoulder as we watched. Her tears soaked through my shirt and stung my skin like acid. I kissed her moist forehead and

noticed her eyes scanning back and forth with the passing cars. She was trying to make eye-contact with each driver as they scrolled past us. Trolling rays of concentrated hatred shot out from her eyes as she tried to connect with their unguarded minds. If anyone had met her gaze, she would have instantly boiled the grey sponge behind their eyes. But no one would look at us. The world beyond the freeway was invisible.

Inside the house, it was dark. As our eyes adjusted to the absence of light, the details of the room emerged, slowly advancing in the darkness like lost memories approaching through a fog. She stood in the center of the room and spun her body in a circle, reaching her fingers out for the air like a sorceress conjuring up a hidden world, sucking my essence into herself through mouths cut into her fingertips. Gradually my weakness without her revealed itself to both of us. The hollowed husks of the bodies that I'd shed hung from hooks secured in the joists of the ceiling, dripping down in rows throughout the house, melting in the trapped heat and darkness and saturating the air with their rotting, like lilies wilting in a suppurating garden.

My sister let her robe fall to the floor. Her flesh grew up out of the offal and blood iridescent, like a night flower straining towards the moon. She danced nude among the entrails and garbage and beer bottles as if she were wading joyously through a foaming red sea. The scent of her insides seeped out from beneath her skin into the closed air of the room, gradually augmenting and replacing the smell of my misery

with the familiar balm of her glands, a perfume so close to the smell of my own body, I was drawn to it like a species of insect honing in on its queen. Her face radiated a submerged glow like a magical orb stealing stored light and heat from its surroundings. I flowed into her. The energy my body contained was sucked through a stream into her eyes. She held out her arms and enfolded me in a kiss that both drained me and simultaneously filled me with a warmth I recognized as her life seeping into me. Her tongue was a velvet slug that burrowed into my mouth, then wound down my throat into my intestines, where it prepared the nest where she would grow.

She loosened my pants, cooing the same song into my ear she'd sung to me when we were children, like a secret greeting-call, long forgotten. My exposed erection burned against the cold oily skin of her stomach. I was hardened by her strength. She'd reached into me and was flexing inside me. As the first spasms of hot white fluid jerked out of me, she cupped me in her hands and guided the flow across her belly, smearing it up onto her breasts and over her neck and face, sealing herself inside a second crust of skin, like a nascent cocoon standing upright in a sunless forest of pendulous flesh.

We nailed the doors of our house closed from the inside. She lives on the meat and blood growing everywhere around us. The sun filters through the closed curtains like urine. She probes and crawls through my guts, mining me. I'm an inert object, but I come alive with her touch. Each time she finishes fucking me, less of me remains in my body. Soon I'll

be emptied — a dead shell of loose skin, like the others. The sounds of the traffic and the airplanes passing overhead beat against the walls and soak the insides of this house with pleasure. We're coming, lodged in the bowels of the world as it screams. I'm moving into her, so I feel good. I'm vivid and flooded with love, dissolving like a breath steaming in the cold air, hovering. My sister is inhaling me into her body, digesting me.

(1994)

THE DOG

The two boys sat on rocks in the dry streambed that emptied into the wide black mouth of the drainage pipe. The blond boy dug with a stick into the stones and pebbles on the floor of the bed, revealing a greasy damp layer of fine sand mixed with bits of colored plastic and broken glass. The fertile smell of trapped urine and polluted gutter water rose up from the fresh tear in the hardened surface. Giant reeds of wild grass and bamboo formed a meshed jungle wall on either side of the bleached rocks. Woven into the dense latticework of foliage were dried tumble-weeds, yellowing newspapers, the shredded unraveling pink sweater of a child, a rotted bird carcass crucified in the weeds, a torn and faded tennis shoe — all washed or thrown in towards the drainage ditch from the road above. The road crawled with an unbroken chain of traffic that stretched from horizon to horizon and gushed a low-hanging mixture of dust and opaque black exhaust.

The older boy squatted high on his rock like a starved panther. His long black hair gleamed with sweat, smeared and glued to his purple leather cheeks. He sprinkled an industrial solvent from a can onto a rag and covered his face with it. Sucking the fumes deep into his lungs, he held them in as he stared vacantly into the oily blackness of the pipe, unconsciously fanning his face with his hand to keep the growing cloud of gnats from landing on his tear ducts or lips. He passed the can to the blond boy, stood, and spread his wiry body out into an X across the face of the tunnel, just barely able to grab the upper circumference with his fingers as his mind spun and drained into the vibrating patterns that formed in the cool blackness before him. As the younger one inhaled the fumes in an exaggerated show of seriousness, like an asthmatic desperate for breath or a diver coming up for air, the older one wailed nasally into the pipe, like a demented foghorn droning notes that bent from one pitch to another without discernible pattern, echoing with a gradually disappearing springing-sound into the abyss. The younger one collapsed backwards among the rocks, his body sprawled out in incongruously wild angles, like an epileptic frozen in mid-seizure then drugged into a stupor where he lay. He looked up through the permanent curtain of matted and greasy hair that hung across his eyes into the diffusing white sun that seared through the veil of dirt and smog down to his place in the streambed, engulfing him, then spitting him out, cackling gibberish in a burst of numb and blinding flames. He found himself standing, swaying perilously on a large rock, watch-

ing his friend disappear down into the blackness like a long-legged spider sinking into its hole.

Following the resonant click of his friend's bootheels and adding to it the responding clicking of his own, he descended into the pipe, guiding himself with one hand along the cold ridged wall and carrying the rag and can in the other. After just a few feet, the light that sifted in from the entrance was swallowed completely and the darkness around them was total, snubbing out with its sheer weight any possible memory or connection to the outside world. In regular short intervals, they stopped and squatted side-by-side against the curved metal walls, passing the rag and can back and forth. The blackness writhed with hallucinated creatures and phosphorescent rushes of color, swirling and lacing through the enclosed snaking void that ran beneath the endless industrial complexes and the chaos and dust of the ruined city.

After a half hour of descending mindlessly, they came to a joint in the tunnel where another pipe led off emptily to the right at a steep upward angle. They felt it pumping dense hot air down into the main tunnel. At first, they explored this new blackness, but the increasing steepness of the incline and the growing presence of a noxious odor — a mixture of burning plastic, viciously stinging chemicals, and organic human or animal waste — augmented their fear of losing their way and they inched backwards to their original course. Soon after, as they slowly spiraled down, randomly howling and shouting echoes into the dead silence, they heard a distant low rumble

building behind them. As it increased in intensity to a roar, the older one barked at the younger one to jump onto his back and hold on. Spread out as a single creature, the younger one clinging like a blind infant sloth to its mother's back, the older one pressed out with all his strength against the metal spiral. They screamed but heard nothing as the torrent of filth engulfed them up to their necks. A rage of liquid chemicals, mixed with blood and offal, rushed with impossible force against their backs, trying to pull them under. Small chunks of tin, metal shavings, soft clumps of fecal matter, and once the ensnarling full length of a cow's intestines, washed over them — the regular overflow of waste from the factories and slaughterhouses above.

When the onslaught subsided, they collapsed laughing on the freshly slickened surface of the curved walls. The younger one discovered he'd held onto the can of magic fluid like a peasant holding up a crucifix standing before a firing squad. They shared the last of the fumes and threw the can back ricocheting into the blackness. They went on staggering and sloshing in the mush that now filled their boots. Sometimes the older one screamed suddenly at the dark in short dry-throated bursts like a tormented psychotic tortured in his straitjacket. The younger one inserted his grimy black fingers into his mouth and whistled a shrill response into the reverberating depths. He blankly imagined he was being led down into hell, a place where the darkness would fill his greedy lungs with a thick river of ebony scum. He felt no fear or any other emotion as he proceeded, apart from the sense of

poisoned euphoria that came with inhaling the vapor, and his submerged total helplessness, immersed in the narcotic hallucinations that grew in the buried absolute-absence-of-light in their tunnel beneath the city.

Gradually, a fog of ochre light could be seen filtering into the darkness around a curve ahead of them in the tunnel. They felt their pupils shrinking in their eyes as they approached the grated metal gate that guarded the mouth of the pipe. Dripping green clumps of matter too large to pass through the grill clung loosely to the steel webbing like toxic carnal vines in a subterranean jungle, infused with fresh light. Each boy saw the other was coated up to his neck in a thick brown shell of slime, like a soft scab grown out in a parody of body armor. Bits of fiber, cigarette butts, clumps of hair, and fly larvae clung to the stiffening muck.

They squeezed through the sides of the gate, scraping off some of the black mud in the process. Yelping like savages, they leapt out into the sun and rolled down the white sandy banks that descended on either side of the putrid stream that regularly spilled from the pipe and blackened the sand and rocks in its path with a coat of slime before engorging the sea.

The incoming waves rolled silently in the thick black water of the deserted cove, depositing back on shore the indigestible litter that had flowed into it along with the sludge — scattered piles of granulated styrofoam, knotted mounds of horsehair fiber, a cluster of oversized veterinary syringes — some broken and some still half full of blood, various small plastic

molds used in manufacturing machine fittings, a torn polaroid of an obese naked woman splayed obscenely on a frilly bed as she mock-leered up at her husband behind the camera, discarded rubber sandals, a tangle of cheap glow-in-the-dark child's bracelets, and innumerable other objects too buoyant to be sucked under in the spreading quicksand of waste beneath the water. The debris was deposited along the beach in ghost-patterns of the waves as they retreated with the tide back from the rocks and sand that fed out from the base of the cliffs that enclosed the cove.

Balancing and slipping from rock to rock, they made their way along the shore. When they came to a deep pool of trapped rainwater, they jumped in and rinsed the scum from their clothes. Sitting on a rock, drying out in the sun, the older one took a still-sealed baggie of brightly colored pills from his jeans pocket and emptied a handful for himself and the younger boy. They found a smaller, clean pool of water, and washed down the assortment of amphetamines, synthetic hallucinogens, and barbiturates with tepid water drunk from their hands. As they lay back among the rocks watching the smoke shifting above them, sealing the sky closed, they listened to the seamless folding of the viscous waves, barely audible beneath the rumbling and groaning of the trucks conveying along the road that abutted the cliff edges up behind them. The trucks shook the earth down through the cliffs to the beach, migrating along the road like a thundering diaspora of stricken prehistoric beasts, roaring their agony up at the sinking sky. As the sun traveled behind the ceiling of smoke and tarnished

clouds, the shadows projected on the underside became the drugged anthropomorphisms and apparitions of their chemical dreams.

The older boy lay curled on his side, baking in the sun like a discarded and emaciated fetus left for dead in the rocks by its wandering, mutant giant mother, as she'd scavenged among the washed up trash of the ruined city. His eyes rolled sightlessly in his head as sand flies worked at the gummed saliva in the corners of his lips. His fingers were bunched in against his chest and twitched as if typing out a frenetic description of his dementia.

The younger boy strayed along the thin hard strip of sand between the water and the rocks, oblivious to the punctures and gashes in the numbed flesh of his feet, made by the broken glass and shards of metal embedded in the sand. Out in the stewing black water, just past the line of lethargic waves, a mass of churning shredded flesh drifted southward with the current. Ahead of him up the beach, he saw a dark pile, shaking as if alive. As he came near, he saw it was a large mongrel dog, panting maniacally in quick, steady rhythms. One of its rear legs had been torn away, probably by a truck, and it had then rolled down the side of the cliff and dragged itself through the rocks onto the beach. A murder of crows watched it from the dried branches of a tree at the base of the cliffs.

Without moving its head, the dog looked up at the boy, smiling, its tongue hanging loose from its mouth onto the sand, culminating in a billowing pile of foam. The sand-flies danced in shifting herds from

its eyes to its mouth to the pile of foam to the open wound to the expanding pool of blood. Three hand-sized crabs gripped the wound, eating the exposed meat.

The boy found a stick in the rocks and flicked the crabs away. Pressing the stick into the wound, he twisted it until the dog shrieked its last breath of pain, drowned out by the sudden cacophony of the crows, echoing like the schoolyard cries of excited children against the walls of the cliffs.

(1994)

THE COWARD (II)

The sun steamed through the window and soaked the air with bitter yellow gas. I lay twisted and naked on the bare stained mattress in the center of the floor. Without opening my eyes, I reached down and pulled the crumpled blanket up around my face. Behind my eyelids, pools of yellow pain throbbed, then mixed with red. The heat from my breath curled beneath the blanket and sweated my face with humidity. Inside the sealed container of my skull, my brain lay soaking in a stagnant solution of urine and ammonia. I forced myself not to breathe deeply, which would cause my heart to race, then explode in my chest. The accumulated poisons of the night's drunkenness cohered into a constricting black hole between my eyes. My breath was ripe with the baked aftertaste of vomit and the sour leaked residues of an anonymous woman's vagina, now turned to paste in my mouth.

I threw the blanket away from my face like someone drowning, as if I'd been inhaling the dry felt material down into my lungs. I could still smell the woman's scent on the nylon rim, like a territorial smear. So that was it — the sweet, red licorice taste when I'd chewed her neck. In my delirium, I'd thought her sweat was flavored, as if her body were fueled with candy, draining sugary clear syrup from her pores as we undulated and invaded each other on the raw altar of the mattress. I'd licked her skin for the taste like a naked, groveling cretin at a salt-lick. Her eyes reflected the red situations of the lava lamp on the desk. The lamp cast a pink glow over our slithering flesh and mimicked us with gobs of writhing plasma, as if our greedy souls had been extracted from our bodies, then encased in the lamp, transfigured into liquefied abstractions, performing suspended in the glass. She moaned like a tortured inmate in a padded cell, in long unbroken exhalations unencumbered by consonants, possessed by a satanic force, spread-eagled and pushing out at the beast-demon struggling and clawing to get born from her cunt. I licked her underarms. The mouthfuls of hair were caked with flaking deodorant and roped with sweat. I licked her belly, sipping the sweat from her navel like absinthe. I licked her back — washing over the ridges of her spine, flicking my swollen tongue over moles and pimples, working down to her ass, diving into the vault of fermented hair and musk like a dog rooting for something buried in the ground. Finally, still craving and thirsty, as if each mouthful of her sweat had parched my tongue with ascorbic acid, I

subsumed my face in her cunt and sponged-in its weeping juices like a dazed wolf at a wound disgorging blood. As I sucked and probed, I realized I couldn't remember what her face looked like, that I had no idea whose womb this was. She squirmed and kicked, gurgling catch-phrases like "Oh! I love the way you do me, yeah yeah yeah, chew on my little clit, oh yes! Oh yes!..." as if I'd applied the correct sensory stimulus needed to engage the behavior-response mechanism of a sexual episode, leading to a possible spasmodic release of tension.

I recall passing out down there, in and out of consciousness, chewing on the inside of her thigh, sucking on a button of the mattress like my mother's tit, then realizing she'd left. In order to be able to sleep without spinning, I'd stumbled into the bathroom and kneeled at the toilet with my finger down my throat until I'd jerked out the night's beer and junk food and vodka. I made my way back to bed and sank immediately into blackness, technically dead until awakening now with my tongue hanging out the side of my mouth, the sun coating it with dry powder.

Little Monica came jumping onto my mattress. "Uncle Dave-ey! Uncle Dave-ey! Daddy called from work and wants you to push me on my bike-ey!" She knocked out my wind as she straddled my naked stomach. Then she giggled, digging her delicate little bird-fingers under my arms.

"Dave-ey's ticklish! Scoogoodoodooloo! Dave-ey is tick-*ickle*-ish!" Then, discovering my reeking sweat on her fingers, "Yooooo! You're all stick-eeey!" she skipped out to the bathroom to wash her hands,

as if she'd just been in the garden playing, digging for worms.

While she was gone, I snuck a taste of vodka from the pint I kept under the mattress. I covered my exposed piss-tumescence with the blanket and drifted back into miserable sleep. I remember her trying to wake me again, flicking at my nose with a strand of her hair, poking my chest with her finger in play-authority like Shirley Temple pretending to be a policeman.

"You-must-get-up-now-because-I-say-so-and-push-me-on-my-trainer-bike-because-I-say-so-you-meany!" and for a second, not realizing where or who I was, I ground into her as she sat lightly on my crotch.

She sensed something strange and ran out. I was submerged again, the stinging fumes of the sun invading my pores, and absorbed through capillaries into my lungs, cauterizing the exposed membranes inside me with cold white flames.

Little Monica (I always called her "Little", as if she were an alternate, toy version of a more fully developed self) was six years old and was the only child I'd known since I myself had been ejected from the freedom of childhood and incarcerated in the prison cell of adulthood, where daily my imagination and potential drained down a hole in the floor as my perceptions and body were slowly stripped of resonance and mystery, leaving me stupid and drunk. As such, in her unguarded infatuation with herself and everything around her, she was a source of curiosity, and even amazement. I experienced an occasional rush of religious awe (followed by the bitterest, most

pessimistic self-hatred imaginable) at her divine innocence, which ran through her dreamy soliloquies like a fragile piano — riding her trainer bike in obsessive circles out in the driveway as she sang a breathless song of free word associations, as if her consciousness were spilling out through her mouth in waterfalls of misting lullabies; sitting on the couch reading from her book out loud in her tiny aerated voice, and if I'd come sit beside her, she'd shush me earnestly as if any behavior beyond total reverie would destroy the spell (and it would have); or narrating like a child newscaster, the story of her mother and father, as she took a bath, locked in by herself for hours sometimes as I listened at the door, draining the cooling water a little, then warming it with hot water that tumbled like music from the faucet, accompanying her voice as she half-talked, half-sang to herself: "...and-Mommy-was-an-artist-and-she-would-have-been-famous-all-over-the-world-and she-painted-giant-pictures-with-colors-all-mixed-together-like-the-stars-in-the-sky-and-Daddy-loved-my-Mommy-so-so-much-as-much-as-he-loves-me-and-that's-more-than-anything-but-the-paint-made-her-sick-and-hurt-inside-her-head-so-she-went-to-sleep-and-I-was-just-a-intsy-baby-and-now-Daddy-loves-me-for-Mommy-too-and-he-says-I'm-special-like-her-and-just-as-beautiful-too-except-little...."

Her father was my brother and didn't know that I'd also loved his wife, that it was just as possible that Little Monica was my child as his own. When Veronica had been diagnosed with a brain tumor, I'd just disappeared from their lives. Even though I'd never left Los Angeles, I might as well have been in

Spain. Now I was mooching off my brother until I could get a job and enough money to set back out on my own, drunk every night and not even bothering to look for work so long as he was handing out the cash. He'd been moved and very emotional when I'd returned, hugging me longer than we ever had as boys and certainly never had as adults. So long and forceful in fact that I began to wonder if he knew about me and Veronica and was now deciding whether or not to snap my neck, something he could have easily achieved without much effort, being twice my size and a diligent sheet-rocker these six years, earning money for the child. He hadn't asked for any explanation regarding my sudden departure, and had only ventured a few polite questions about what I'd been up to all this time. He pretended not to notice my degeneration in his house and even trusted me with the care of his (my) daughter sometimes — a fraternal nostalgia we'd both have cause to regret.

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There's a point when you wake up from a drunk, in perfect clarity. The synapses in your brain feel greased, and the distinction between your subconscious and conscious mind evaporates. A point where everything is hyper-vivid, your intelligence humming at maximum capacity, like a meditating Buddhist acolyte overwhelmed with sudden white-light attainment. And at that instant, you see everything charged with energy — the past, present and future spread out in front of you, blissful and meaningless and simultaneous, every microscopic detail in

every object drifting through your eyes, along with panoplies of stars and universes, pulled together through the woven fabric of your flesh, so that while disintegrating, you're invisible, while seeing everything, you see nothing. And then you return to sleep, like I had done when Little Monica left me, and you wake up feeling as if your body were a living corpse and your mind reduced to an ache, to a moronic agony, which is how I woke up now, pulled out from my dull oblivion by the absence of a sound.

The wheels of her trainer bike had ceased to wheeze and grind on the asphalt driveway, and the disjointed silence had not been answered by her feet running towards the front door, then inside and down the hall to my door. It had been quiet for a while now, I realized. I thought I heard something in the living room, at the other end of the house. Something repeating rhythmically, like it was underwater reverberating, something stifled. I wrapped myself with my blanket and got up to investigate. My cock was now hard as concrete, packed with pressurized urine. I padded silently down the hall like an escapee from a ward for terminal patients, wrapped in a tattered regal robe, a cloud of bad breath and sweat-stink following me as I went. The front door was wide open. It swung in the dry breeze, ushering in the unforgiving California sun. The sunlight was increased in intensity by its encounters with stucco and asphalt and car windows along the way, its maniacal desire to reveal everything magnified and searing. It spilled in through the door theatrically, flooding the living room with titanium fog, illuminating the scene like a movie set.

They were on the couch. He was kneeling behind her with his back to me as he pumped into her. He'd pulled her dress up around her neck — the miniature version of a hippie smock, like her mother used to wear — and he was choking her with it in rhythm with his pumping. I presume she was screaming for me, but he'd put masking tape over her mouth so it came out distant, like something leaking through from another dimension, a place where little girls were raped into infinity, a place where hell was the tedious norm. Please forgive me, I didn't do anything. I just stood there peeking around the corner, watching, unable to move as he tore into her and her eyeballs widened in her face, as if the lids had been cut away, as she twisted her head around and saw me. I could smell him, a drinker like myself, that rotten smell of the body eating itself alive, and I could hear him grunting, as close as if he were whispering in my ear, with foul breath like cancer spreading. As I stood there, I imagined I could feel the tight wrongness of her flesh, and I was unable to move until he finished and she went unconscious. I crept back into my room and shut the door silently.

Eventually, I heard the front door shut. Curled on my mattress beneath the blanket, I felt the urine rushing from my penis, thick and pounding, forming a warm sea of sickening pleasure between my legs.

(1994)

WHY I ATE MY WIFE

Everything merges eventually — everything is organic. It's impossible to distinguish one thing from another thing. When your mind is emptied of selfishness, it crumbles and dissolves in the water. If I cut at my body and concentrate correctly, I won't feel it. Each time my heart beats, it jerks violently and whips my spine loose, tugging at the base of my brain. Memories move through the clotted and rotting forest inside my head and crush the present beneath them. My memories don't belong to me. They're as unknowable as a centipede fluttering its legs in the dark corner beneath the sink. When an image moves through my nervous system, it's with the predatory greed of an intruder. My body's laid open, transparent, defenseless. Each second of time is an individual insect feeding on my blood.

When my wife and I joined our bodies together, I fell into her body and wore her skin like a

rubber sheath. She protected me from the outside. Because she's dead now, I'm certain to be eaten soon. I'm a skinless body, my muscles drying in the sun. I feel myself shrinking.

I used her as a process, a system through which we could blend with matter beyond our selfish thoughts. When her hand stroked my leg, when her mouth wet my skin, the arousal I experienced was the first wave of a current which would ultimately erase us both. I love her more than I need my own identity. Though her body lies here on the table before me, I don't need to open my eyes to see it in detail, to feel it physically saturate my senses. Love allows microbes and viruses to pass through my body without resistance. In loving her, I lose the will to live. If I eat her body now, I'll take her back into myself. But with each mouthful I swallow, I'll remove a commensurate amount of myself.

Her fragrance lifts up shimmering above her in a mist and flavors the air with honey. Her breasts have now begun to slide down the hill of her ribs, rotting, no longer firm with arrogance or inflated with the promise of fertility. The nipples I once took into my mouth and sucked and chewed, stand straight as if in defiance against the retreat of the body of her breast down her side. Gravity is pulling her down into itself like quicksand. Her belly is shifting, emitting obscure demonic incantations from inside its depths as it breeds gas while decomposing. Looking down at her open mouth, I can still remember the taste, the slightly caramel flavor of her saliva, and feel the rubbery resistance of her tongue slipping into my

mouth, circling across my teeth, wrapping itself around my tongue. But now, an open cave in her face displays the dead thick leather tongue like the cadaver of a beached sea mammal, crawled into the dark space of her mouth to hide from the sun and the swarming flies. Her lips, which were once a rare fruit I sucked for juice, are now shriveled and cracked like a dried apricot. Her eyes stare back up at me, searing my face with corrosive acid. My tears drain slowly down the corners of my eyes, thick as mineral oil.

Seven days ago, she stood secretly in the doorway of our bedroom watching me, curled in the bed reading, unaware of her presence, until she had silently approached and breathed warm breath against the back of my neck. Now her flesh lies here devoid of gesture or empathy, reduced down to a process, like yeast reacting to water. The molecules that comprise her body are moving, detaching from one another, rearranging and dissipating into the surrounding chemical stew of biology, no longer held together by the adhesive material of her individual will. I feel my own body churning with particles, genetic material, atoms, parasites....

The smell of her sex crawls into the womb inside my brain where it gestates, forming a perfect memory, a hard red core of impossible lust that glows and warms my thoughts. I bend down to her for a last futile kiss. The inside of her mouth excretes a sticky white glue that smells as if it came from a place deep in the earth — a cache of animal compost hidden in a lightless tomb. I take a serrated kitchen knife and remove her fingers carefully, catching the draining

fluids on a white bath towel. I eat these possessed fragments of her soul with empirical care, transfixed by her unblinking eyes. I'm intoxicated with the finality of her memory and the transmission of her taste, odor, and texture into my mind and body.

As weeks pass, each day brings the ingestion of another piece of her essence. As the substance of her being enters me, I'm transformed into an entity beyond myself, and beyond her too. This evolution is just the first step in my own slow decomposition, as I blend with the infinite organisms that will in turn feed on me, ultimately mixing me with the atmosphere...

(1993)

THE ORGY

Watching the performance of the children across the room, the members of the orgy inched forward slightly in their seats and released a sigh of appreciation. The naked boy and girl were kissing, sitting up with straight backs, like two attentive students overcome with sudden passion. The girl was stroking the boy's erect penis, lightly with the tips of her fingers, as if it were a frightened bird, poised in his lap. The members of the orgy turned up the corners of their mouths in a communal leer as the blood flowed to their own genitals in empathetic response.

As the girl sank to her knees, gently fellating the arching boy, the spectators inhaled fully, drawing in the drifting sexual aroma the children exuded, towards them from across the distance. They could taste the intoxicating juice concealed just beneath the tender surface of the children's pale clear skin, could see the blood and muscle radiating in pink hues through the smooth milky film. Absorbing the spec-

tacle with the abstracted engagement of an audience hypnotized by the light of a television screen, they moistened their lips, smearing them with an attractive sheen. These glossy strips of meat — plump with collagen injections — now whispered appraisals of the young lovers' anatomy, detailing possible uses for their innocent bodies as the scene unfolded before them. They massaged each other with scented oils as they watched, more interested in the visual effect of the oil on their skin than the sensations it produced.

Soon the spectators were laminated with a thin coat of sweat and oil like clear vinyl. Their tanned skin gleamed like the shellacked hard outer shells of expensive automobiles. The abdominal walls of the men were as solid as knuckles. The women's thighs were sleek and tensed with strength and shone like the flanks of straining horses. Arranging their bodies comfortably over the luxurious suede furniture, they spread their hewn limbs out in languorous poses, consciously imitating the idealized models displayed like Greek athletes in the mirrored pages of the upscale consumer magazines through which they now browsed. They sat masturbating lazily as they shifted their eyes from the magazines to the boy and girl, performing for them there on the carpet.

The girl was splayed out on her stomach as the boy thrust deeply in from the rear, kissing and chewing the back of her neck with what appeared to be genuine affection. With each thrust, the girl pressed back towards the boy, as if she were trying to open herself further with each encounter, trying to bring his body inside her entirely. She twisted her face up

and around to him, and he locked his open mouth against hers. They seemed to be breathing life into each other as they kissed, their joined bodies writhing in a circle of heat and blood that flowed unfettered between them, like a single creature in the thralls of its metamorphosis, gorging itself on its own nourishing plasma.

The spectators' arousal spread through their bodies like alcohol burning into the walls of an empty stomach. They curled their toes in the lush abundance of the white mohair carpet as they stroked and fingered between their legs. Their lips pursed silent words, opening like red velvet curtains onto arsenals of bleached polished teeth that stood in even rows like white credit cards, slicked with thick saliva. They rolled the spit in their mouths, building it up — they'd use it later to lubricate the sensitive edges of a torn and abused orifice, or to temporarily soothe the sting of a freshly described wound.

Later, it would please the members of the orgy to imagine the children were enjoying the rigors of their ordeal, which tonight would finally cross the line from extended sexual games to murder and blood. But for now, unaware themselves of the evening's eventual outcome, they let the moment draw itself out, watching the boy and girl on the floor as they embraced, as if they actually loved each other, and were tragically aware they were holding each other for the last time.

(1994)

THE CONSUMER, ROTTING PIG

It's 100 degrees in my room. There's no windows here. The air conditioner's always on and blows in hot moldy air. I leave it on because the thick ripe quality of the air feels good — it's alive, creatures breed in it. The mechanical droning and rattling of the machine drown out any sounds that might otherwise infiltrate from the street — out in the sickening yellow sunlight.

I'm in my bed under the covers — the flattened damp quilt, the nappy brown blanket, the mushy sheets infested with crumbs and half-eaten pieces of candy. My smell is trapped and insulates my sweating body. My head protrudes from beneath the covers like a severed pig's head on the pillow. The light is off so the darkness is black and solid, made more physical by the density of the heat and smell. But the television is always on, sending a tunnel of light boring towards me through the darkness, flashing spectral shadows

and signaling to me the infinite wonders of the universe. I feel myself communing with everyone from here inside my hole. I'm part of the infinite mind. My huge eyes, like polished black stones set in rubbery pig's flesh, are fixed greedily on the fanfare of images on the screen, none of which I recognize as relating to anything beyond itself, as it exists there, formed by the light. The "face of a man", for instance, is not the face of a man — it's a discrete form with its own life emanating and constantly transformed by light. I'm not aware of myself watching it. I'm afraid to move because I don't want to destroy the balance. I've manipulated myself into losing control of myself but I'm also able to remain aware of the loss of control and derive pleasure from it, like an extension of the second just before an orgasm. I can see my soul hovering there in front of me in the flood of light and color, above the dull matter of my body. It's an animate cloud, a swarm of demon insects, bad breath made visible. It's sucking into itself like light and matter retreating into the vortex of a black hole. It slips into the drain behind the air, a disgusting blubbery white fetus with insatiable needs.

I'm melting, a mound of fat in the heat. The fat hangs off my body in great slabs, shifting with each breath like the tectonic plates of the earth responding to a subterranean disturbance. My eyes don't blink. They take everything in but also reflect back out like black mirrors. My breathing is a deliberate act. If I don't concentrate, I'll suffocate. I feel everything. The thin layer of sweat that coats my body serves to increase my efficiency in conducting electricity. I'm

an amoebic, flabby version of Frankenstein's monster, laid out on my slab, drawing the howling chaos of the universe into myself, driven forward by its power like a sentient corpse bent on revenge. I'm hungry as a tapeworm in my black and flashing stomach-room.

A shadow figure on the wall is cutting off the head of a little boy. The huge and looming murderer is holding up the head like a Viking showing off a war trophy. He's swinging the head above him by the hair. Shadow-blood flies through the air in a black swirl. A handful of the boy's brains land in my face like warm cottage cheese. There's a fisheye close-up of a terrified eye in the TV screen. An oiled young stud does sit-ups on his Soloflex machine, eviscerates himself with an impossibly honed and gleaming kitchen knife, flings his dangling intestines over his shoulder like a sashaying transvestite in a mink stole and walks straight into a day school room full of naked shit-smearred children, who devour him in a bloody tornado of razor-sharp teeth. They're led away yapping and screeching like a pack of dogs on a multiple leash by their teacher, who wears a neon yellow leotard, purple high-heeled shoes, and has the slicked hard flesh of someone who obviously works out six hours a day herself...

Tomorrow I have to go outside and buy cleaning materials, disinfectant, rubber gloves. There's blood and shit everywhere. My bedsores hurt. I stink. I have a neurotic fear of my heart exploding in my chest. My bed is rotted through in the center so that my rear sinks down into a living whirlpool of scum,

the arcane entrance to another dimension, wherein everything rots perpetually. I don't dare look under the bed. What horrible life forms are down there looking up at my filthy white globe?

My bed sits in the center of the room, a steaming sarcophagus in a dim pagan tomb. The television is on a platform at my feet, washing my swaddled and bloated living corpse with ethereal blue light. Looking to the left, the wall is covered with the desiccated shell-bodies of cockroaches. Each time I catch one (and there are thousands, millions living in the walls, under the floor, in the ceiling — I hear them shifting like the waves in the sea in my sleep), I dry it slowly at low temperature in the oven, then I pin it to the wall. The wall glistens in the flickering light with the sheen of their armor. I've pinned them in spiraling primitive shapes that map out the cosmos, landscapes, stars, jagged lightning bolts, skulls, knives, fat hermaphroditic fertility symbols. The designs are difficult to discern, due to the fact that everything is the same brown-on-brown color scheme, but they're there, if you look closely. I watch the wall for hours each day, like a mandala. The dancing shadows of the television give the detailed beadwork of the wall a sense of grandiosity. I pretend I'm in a cave beneath a jungle burial ground examining, awestruck, an ancient African mural I've discovered, cool and perfectly preserved beneath the malarial humidity.

Turning my head to the right, I've made a wall which registers time. It's the repository of the evidence of the incremental progress of my tenure here on earth. I expect others to find it someday, to spend

years deciphering its code. It also relates in a more mundane fashion to the sexual fantasies that pass through me at random, haphazard confluences of images generated from the television, which I use functionally, like a primer, to set off a chain of chemical reactions inside the jelly-blob of my body. The result is a masterpiece, a wall which consists of hundreds of small glass vials, corked, and each containing an amber jeweled dose of my sperm. Each vial is labeled neatly with a coded typewritten description of the inspiration, and hence the necessary interpretation of, its contents, i.e., "Old lady covered in rags in park feeding pigeons in news magazine show about the homeless . . . I fumble beneath her dank wool dress, sniffing decay," or, "Cut out heart of shirtless pouting rock-singer with washboard stomach on MTV and use it like an Acujack in my fist," or, "Pepsi-sucking sex-goddess in skin-tight bathing suit puts out cigarette on my forehead while I kneel weeping and farting in the white-hot sand, naked, my raspberry bedsores like a hundred red eyes on my stretchmarked white baby flesh as the mob of California superhumans mock me from the volleyball court..." This wall is an archive, a monument, a sacred treasure, potentially capable of answering any question one puts to it, like the I Ching or the hidden libraries of Babylon. It's growing, a living crystal relief sculpture, a physical cryptography of an infinitely peering mind. As it grows, it covers the surface of the wall like a glass fungus, reflecting the chaos of lights from the television like distant torches congregated at the dark edge of the earth. Conversely, it sometimes seems to

stand out mute and resolute, an austere minimal slab, an implacable testament to the impenetrable phenomenology of time. Milk from my fat body, squeezed from my worm...

Sometimes I'm able to lose myself for days in here, drifting through a universe of disconnected images, shining flesh, brightly colored consumer products, blissfully escalating waves of anxiety. My mind is washed clean with light. I heroically refuse to allow any "real" memories or desires to enter me. I go with the flow, floating through the neon plastic stream, cannibalized and carcinogenic, my veins rushing with toxic chemicals. When I sleep, my dreams mingle with scenes generated from the screen, like sewage discharged into the black sea inside my room. Last night, for instance, in order to revenge the perceived indifference of my lover — a self-composed, confident, and buxom lawyer, as seen on a weekly "gritty and realistic" cop show — I stalked her as she walked a path through the chaparral in the hills of Topanga Canyon dressed in high heels and a power suit, searching for a used condom as evidence in a divorce case turned violent, her architecturally massive hair flowing in the dry baked breeze like the flag of an elite nation of gods. Then she turned, at first in shock at the sight of my glistening slugbody, but then facing me resolutely, mace in hand. But I was quick, and slid the butcher knife into her solar plexus, pushing it deeper with repeated force, grimacing coldly at the pleasure this gave me, and felt my erection growing with each thrust. As the flies gathered, not around her wounds as might be expected, but drawn instead to the sweet

stink oozing from the expanding needle holes in my skin, I dug out a shallow recession in the dirt with my flipper-hands and covered her over, leaving the area around her cunt exposed. Then I fucked my lover through the dirt, my cock sliding into her mystery hole like a slithering white ferret. Birds chirped behind me. The wind sang in the thistles. A drunken spider crawled across my ankle. Bees sucked on the wildflowers. Worms screwed through the subsoil. A man in a shiny suit and perfect stiff hair licked my ass clean as I ejaculated. I woke up disgusted, lonely, satisfied, and more in love with my lawyer than ever... Another dream mingled with a daytime talk-scandal show. The subject was husbands who have lost their wives to cancer. I snickered at their misery and their whimpering compulsion to air their grief in public, as if seamless happiness was a gleaming product to which each consumer had a right, and it had now been stolen by an unwashed thief. Masturbating, I imagined stabbing each one of them, then fucking the knife holes. As the studio audience, dressed in uniform gold cashmere jogging suits, applauded, I came, washing us all away in a foaming sea of jism. They all drowned, bobbing to the surface, but I surfed the tide like an inflatable sow, racing through time with my cheeks flapping in the wind...

Every possibility can and will be realized, in every possible variation and nuance, subgroupings, opposites, mutations of mutations. The fact that I do or don't exist exists itself simultaneously in mutual confirmation and negation. This means there's a parallel world to this one, in all possible aspects and

history the same as this one, except that in one instant it does or doesn't include me. Or I have 20,000 hairs on my head instead of 19,999 etc. A world with creatures that have tongues growing out of their ears, working like the wings of giant birds, lifting them up into the crimson sky, pus shooting out in thick jets from the lubricated and masticating membranes in the backs of their heads. A river of blood in which infants are nurtured, flowing through the burning fields of steel grass, their succulent flesh harvested at the lake by cyclopean fat men with hooks for hands, all of them my identical shape except that they're nimble and in a state of sustained ecstasy. My hands, suddenly prehensile and fifty-fingered, reach out into this scene from my bed and with a slurping sound, I snatch a pair of identical blond 13 year old twins, a boy and a girl, pulling them squirming into my cave. As they try to escape my gummy grip, I slam them to the bed and force my prelubed fists into their anuses, clutching and choking their guts as they scream in a lovely duet of harmonious agony and pleasure, their mingled arias as sensual and hypnotic as the soundtrack to a commercial for an eerily modern and seductive automobile. As my excitement increases, I'm fellated with savage but gooey fervor by the President of the United States, whom I casually reprimand for not slaughtering enough Germans in the recent race wars by gouging out his eyes as I ejaculate nitric acid into his belly....

I'm symbiotically connected to the living tissue of my bed, decomposing alive. Infinity is suffocating me. Time is a closing hole. At some point I'll know

everything and at that point I'll cease to exist, having exhausted possibility (the word "possible" is itself an oxymoronic impossibility, as is the word "impossible")... All of this excites me sexually, but the energy has no place to go, so it eats me alive, making me fatter.

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I have a philosophy of life. It came to me in a dream, or during orgasm, or grew like a bluish tumor in the swollen pit of my stomach, kicking and screaming for release, anxious to spit its juice out at the world. I cut it out with a shard of glass and stood it up on the floor beside my bed. As it dripped placenta in a puddle at its feet, its four heads shimmered in the light of the TV, each one telling me a story as I lay reverently dying. I wrote them down, plagiarizing:

**1) MY PRESCRIPTION FOR HAPPINESS,
BY THE ROTTING PIG**

In order to solve the problem of my mind's awareness of itself and its persistent refusal to be completely disintegrated, I've developed an idea that would allow me to lose any sense of where I begin or end: I'd be suspended naked in a container of warm blood, kept at body temperature. My mouth would be sewn shut, my ears sealed with wax. I'd be completely submerged in the blood and would breathe through tubes running down my (otherwise sealed) nostrils into my lungs. A machine would pump my

lungs for me, so no effort would be involved in breathing. My eyelids having been removed, a set of eyepieces would be secured over my eyes and then sewn directly into the surrounding flesh. These eyepieces would transmit images directly into my eyes, straight into my brain without distraction. The images would be triggered or generated by me, but without my awareness of the fact I was doing so. There would be wires and electrodes leading into my brain, which would in turn lead to a computer. The computer would interpret the electrical impulses as images, events, visual scenarios, and eventually histories, civilizations, galaxies, emptiness. My brain would immediately and involuntarily respond to stimulus before the interjection of my will and would instantaneously signal new stimulus and response endlessly. My body would be fed intravenously, and my feces and urine would be allowed to slowly fill the tank in which I'm suspended, displacing the blood. Eventually I'd float as if weightless, submerged in my own waste. Animals would grow in the waste and would ultimately consume me alive. I'd feel no pain, having lost all sense of connection to the perimeters of my body. I'd feel nothing, the locus of my being now dissolved into the interface between the computer and the images I grow, emptied out from a fixed point into an evolving process... In this way, I can conceive of true happiness. At the moment of diffused reality when I become liquid, my body will die, but I won't notice. As my body rots away, the images will continue their interaction without my interference.

2) HOW I LEARNED TO SPEAK, BY R.P.

I can see inside my skull. I know the exact spot where each thought comes from. I see it being born, an insect crawling out of a damp cave. Ideas, imagination, and memory are parasitic intruders that live on the nourishment of my passive brain. Soon they'll eat everything.

The interior of my skull is flooded with light. All definition's disappeared. I've left my body. My mind's exhaling out from my body like the last breath of a corpse. I'm naked in a chair in a dimmed silent lead room. My arms are strapped to the arms of the chair, not to keep me from escaping but to force me to concentrate. My feet are strapped to the legs, my waist to the seat. A strap runs around my chest and pulls me tight to the back of the chair. My flesh squeezes out between the straps like bread dough. I'm fused, inert. I can't even move my fingers. Each one fits into an individual leather strap, cinched and secured to the chair.

My mind vibrates outwards. The initial panic and adrenaline of my paralysis eventually transforms into a trance. Slowly the room fills with water, at body temperature. As the water rises, my attachment to the portion of my body which is submerged disappears. As the water reaches the level of my chin, it stops. At this point, I have no body. My eyes are opaque. The darkness fills me up. The only specific sensation is my tongue. A silver hook runs through the tip. Several more run through each side and further back as far as the entrance to my throat.

Attached to each hook is a thin line of optical fiber which runs straight out and connects to a series of computerized pulleys and levers at a luminous computer screen terminal in the far upper wall. In moments of extreme perfect concentration, the terminal glows faintly, casting a shimmering blue-green across the black water towards my skull. The pulsing glow is a direct physical response correlating in degrees to the level of concentration I'm able to achieve. As my concentration flags, the computer instructs the pulleys to tighten the line — the hooks tugging gently at the meat of my tongue. This in turn sends pulses of pure white pain through the synapses in my brain, which in turn leads me to a flux — a perpetual motion equation wherein I am intensely self-aware as I simultaneously cease to exist. There's no time between the two perceptions. They exist in perfect contradiction and balance each other. When I reach this state of mindless mind, the computer screen glows bright blue-white — a distant prism of rainbow colors shifting deep in its center in direct correlation to the rhythm of my breathing, my heartbeat, my nervous system. I relax, and I feel the tension ease in the lines and hooks that connect to my tongue. This pause allows memory, anxiety, desire, to invade my mind. Because of this the hooks tighten again, etc...

3) NOTES ON COITUS, BY R.P.

I'm scared to breathe the air because I know it's really liquid. When I breathe in, I drown. My body

drifts in it like a slug in black water. It pours down into my lungs and falls over itself, filling me up with claustrophobia. It seeps through the fibers of my lungs, dissolving me. I scratch my face until it's bloody and formless, trying to rip apart my boundaries. A worse revelation unfolds: My body is liquid, a temporary swarm of molecules (each with its own separate identity) that will eventually disseminate into a wider sea of shifting and blending liquids. I focus my mind on the space between the molecules that comprise my body. I'm swollen, ready to burst. Fear rushes through me from the inside out. I'm infested with otherness. My breathing is less an act of an individual body than an arbitrary slide of molecules from one place to another. Every thought that advances through the greased tunnels of my brain carries with it its own hungry negation. I'm flooded with empathy. When I drink a glass of water, it's thick and crawling with life. My mouth leads to the interior of my body — a caldron of disease, germs, and perversions of biology. I don't exist individually. I'm made of millions of living creatures, eating each other, decomposing, eating each other. There's a gelatinous pool of grey sperm between my legs in the bed. If I leave it there, it will germinate and rise up in an incongruous parody of human and animal shapes, sprouting from the bed in a nightmare cartoon of biological potential. I'll begin a diligent program of masturbation in order to spread the growing tide of disease that is breeding inside me outward into the liquid world.

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I'm inhabited by the thoughts of others. If I cut off my finger, I cut away generations of history, stimulus that has passed through me and shaped me. I'm made of lard, energized, but the energy isn't mine. I'm used as an instrument so electricity can sing to itself.

When I'm dead, my body will lie in chunks on the table, cut up by the surgeon. Energy will continue to breed inside it, but with a knowledge that excludes me. My identity, contained in the inert meat that now lies on the slab, will be food for foreign microbes and agents of decay. The sum of my life's experience at the time of my death, and the accumulated evidence of my thoughts and awareness, will pass on in the form of another language into the bodies of the feeding world that is consuming me.

In a lonely room where the attendants wear rubber gloves and surgical masks and the air is sharpened with disinfectant, the pile of matter that was me will be pushed into a plastic bag, then taken out in the woods and mixed into the dirt. As you walk, carrying the bag, the earth is spongy, dense, and resilient beneath your feet. It has the consistency of a corpse. With each step, your feet press down on generations of dead ancestors. Their bodies, their rotted and transmuted flesh, have become the substance of the earth. When you eat, you ingest their essence — the fertility that survived their decomposition. In this way, they live through you, by your consumption of air, food, water. When you breathe, you breathe in a mixture of gases their bodies exuded in the process of decomposition, reassimilating into your body.

The air, being blood, is hard to inhale, but I learn. I relax and let it in. My body floats through it, subsumed by it. I breathe, swallow, and think blood. My imagination stops where blood ends. Blood surrounds me, drowns my sight, so that when I think, before an image forms, it's consumed by blood. I'm withered, ancient, a child drifting through a thick red universe, pulsing and gorging myself on my own sentient blood. This blood knows me, licks me, keeps me in a perpetual drone of self-negating orgasm that sends waves of pleasure through the furthest pools of pumping red consciousness.

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I can't stop my urge to disintegrate. My skin is pulling apart. I can see through the cells, linked together in a web, and differentiate them one from the other. My skin isn't a protection — it's open. The wind blows right through it into my insides. It moves through me, takes parts of me with it, puts new parts in their place. I'm drowning in light. Light is a fluid I inhale. My eyes are closed, so my body is lit from the inside out, glowing like a jellyfish in the sea. The cool blue vapor pours through my veins, pumping through my heart, saturating the capillaries in my lungs, filtering into the tissue of my muscles. In the center of my brain is a vortex of light and color. The pit of my stomach is boiling with light. My flesh burns like magnesium. My sperm is thickened light. It contains

false memories, the seed of a new race, a civilization, a plague, a flood of poison oil and dead subaquatic blind monsters. The tips of my fingers shoot light out across the universe and write my name on the sky, then suck it back into a black pit of antimatter. A mute surge of selfless lust grows from the root of my cock out into the dense compact emptiness in the center of space. Sucked into this hole, I regress backwards into a single molecule of agony. The drugged stupidity of my self-awareness gestates in a sealed womb like a seed trapped in a lead container buried in dense impenetrable silt at the bottom of the sea. From here, deep in the comfortable blackness, I expand outwards, spitting sperm at the stars.

4) HOMAGE TO MY FORMER SELF, BY R.P.

The spherical featureless body — my fat living flesh — is suspended dead center in the red room by metal cables hooked into it and running out taut in eight directions to the four corners of the ceiling and floor. The shapeless globe of my flesh is five feet in diameter and my heart beats in its center. Directly beneath the suspended flesh a naked infant squirms and cries in a cool vat of black oil. From a thin wire in the center of the ceiling, directly above my circular body, hangs my severed pig-head. My eyes scan the room but are unable to focus. My head senses that the body beneath it is its own absent body, and it wants to reunite. My mouth moves and my tongue signals, aping words, but no sound leaves my mouth, there being no lungs attached to pump air to my lips.

In each corner of the room, a small pile of my intestines is packed neatly against the glossy red walls, attracting a concentrated cloud of black flies. A few flies venture to other areas of the room, landing at random on the suspended sphere of my flesh, my head, and the infant.

The confining surfaces of the room are moist and marbled with an interlacing network of veins, nerves and tendons. Though the shape of the room is geometric and precise, the substance of the walls is organic, raw pink meat. The walls swell in and out in a regular pattern of breathing, and with each expansion, cool oxygen can be felt rushing into the room.

The heart in the center of my round flesh pumps a clear jelly through a complex web of transparent plastic tubes, supplying nutriment and genetic material to my body. Out from my heart, a large, central tube runs upward out of my flesh and feeds my hanging head, entering the bottom of the sliced neck. An extension of the same tube runs downward from my body into the infant, entering down its throat. Through this large tube, the three entities — my head, my body, the infant — pass sensation, thought, and feeling to one another, “communicating”.

Out from each entity run thousands of translucent strands connecting with each other, with the intestines in the corner, with the moist red walls. These fibers quiver and send a sensation of pleasure through the entire circuit when grazed by the wings of a fly, in a feathery light shudder, like wind caressing the downy hairs on the back of the neck. The energy

created by this event charges the oil in which the infant lies with electricity, jolting the soft white flesh and causing the child to squeal helplessly in the silence. My severed head hears this and imagines it's the sound *it* makes when it moves *its* lips. Everything being interconnected, there's no reason for my head to doubt the sounds the infant emits are the syllables of my own thoughts transformed into language.

(1994)

THE YOUNG MAN THAT HID HIS BODY INSIDE A HORSE, OR, MY VULVIC LOS ANGELES

The young man was a strip of struggling flesh carried along by the crowd, surfing the heaving waves in a boiling pilgrimage of genetically enraptured insects. The insect mob emptied suddenly into the mouth of a department store and he was left swaying on the corner in the stabbing sun, attacked by the screaming reflections of passing cars and plate glass windows. He pinched his eyes up at the dry hills. They arched above the city like the gnarled backs of drugged lions, stretching up into a heaven that was itself descending in thick sheets of sulfuric mist. The sunlight filtered through this levitating powder and felt more pernicious for it, as if the sun's rays were transformed by chemical reaction into malevolent x-rays, nutriment-seeking carcinogens that penetrated the open pores of unprotected skin and would eat any living thing from the inside-out. The Hollywood sign stood in the hills shrouded in noxious vapor and dust

like an arrangement of tombstones carved in dry bone, spelling out in subliminal code an advertisement for slow suicide. His forehead was oiled with sweat and flashed light back at the traffic. His shirt was painted onto his torso like a thin secretion of crusting red slime. His mouth was a bird's nest, releasing fluttering globs of gas redolent of curdled milk, erupting stomach acid, and malt liquor. He licked his lips with a dirty sock. He tried a deep breath then regretted it. The smog made a fist in the center of his chest. He hacked up the fist, a shimmering tumor the size of a golf ball. He puckered his lips into the shape of a cannon and shot it out into the belching flow of mirrors. It clung to the shiny chrome rear bumper of a Mercedes like a light-sucking leech.

The fires glowed orange behind the hills where the suburbs burned uncontested. Roiling golden brown goliaths of smoke lifted up to feed the burgeoning overhang of fumes that swept over the city and trapped the exhaust that billowed from the endless river of cars beneath it, painting the sinking heat with mustard-colored chalk. A cacophonous symphony of conflicting frequencies and rhythms rose from the advancing procession of metal and glass like the evolving soundtrack to a schizophrenic's trance — snatches of insipid melodies mixed in with shrill declamations of greed and lust, swallowed in a whirling apocalypse of random bass drums and shrieks of desire and feigned violence. The young man stood absorbing the sound and heat like a lobotomized witness at a roadside atrocity. His arms hung boneless at his sides as he attempted to form a thought. At 5

A.M. this morning, in an irreversible shock of panic, when surprised while going through his drug connection's desk after silently removing the screen to the open window of the Melrose bungalow and creeping inside, he had grabbed the baseball bat that leaned in the corner and smashed the ex-aerospace engineer (who now carried a gun) in the face until his features were a bloody, unrecognizable goo. The dealer lay slumped with his seeping head against the wall as if he were listening for his life inside it. The young man had stuffed his pockets with thousands of dollars in crisp hundreds and a huge baggie of methamphetamine powder, and fled.

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Across the street beyond the inching wall of traffic was a movie theater painted pink to look like flesh. It grew weightless from the incandescent white sidewalk like a fantastic attraction in a pornographic Disneyland. The rose-colored dome looked organic and alive, like an obscene monument fashioned from papier-mâché by an evil child into a gigantic replication of the flushed and abused buttocks of an obese infant. The pink flesh-paint had peeled back in bed-sized sheets, revealing the previous color to have been a deep leprous yellow, like a gaudy underlayer of pus working beneath bubbling, tender skin. The dome steamed a rainbow of glittering gold-pink hues that arced up above it, made luminous by the heat as they mixed with the sifting brown smog. The marquee was a sideways monolith tiled with a mouthful

of dull plastic teeth, ajar as if smashed by a fist. Spelled out in candy-red building-block letters were the attractions offered inside: "Triple Feature! 24 Hours!... Body To Body... The Autopsy Feast... Lubejobber... Purified Air! Air-Conditioning!" In the lower right hand corner, scrawled on butcher paper in black ant-sized letters and stuck to the sign with duct tape was another message: "Room for Rent — See Teller".

He threaded his way through the maze of stalled and fuming cars like mercury pulled through a crack, a hypnotized vulture drawn unconsciously forward by the scent of decay.

The beautiful teenaged girl's face inside the scratched glass booth had been machine-gunned with marble-sized pimples, as if the public face she presented were a mask she wore to protect her true artificially perfect good looks from the corrosive effects of close scrutiny. Each mound was a fury of impacted poison — a hundred inflamed knuckles scattered like primed red land mines across the battlefield of her face. Her hair was a blazing display of colors unfurling in a chromatic fan that blended from silver to gold to sun-bleached California blonde, unfolding like the wings of a futuristic bird, synthetic wires of precious metal and superconducting fiber blown up from beneath by the air-conditioning vent in the floor that pumped cool air out from the theater to her booth. A mist of diamonds rose up from her as she sat like a frozen version of herself, thawing, pocked and white, looking him over. He placed his hands on the ledge and pressed them slightly inside the portal in the glass, stealing the cold air sensation

with the tips of his fingers, like ten larvae advancing on an organic host. He looked exactly like what he was — a young man whose body was undergoing an extended torture at the hands of its addiction to methamphetamine-sulfate, who hadn't slept in five days and whose bones were like worms beneath his skin. His head was an explosion of static electricity and fine white hair. His face had taken on the color of the milk he drank daily by the quart to cloak the ulcer which grew like an embryo in the shriveled sack of his stomach. A single pimple clung to his cheek like a lonely red envoy sent up from the red homeland of his shirt to scout the white of his face. It sat huge and pregnant with the relentless paranoia manufactured by his addiction — interpreted by his body in the form of toxins, now aching to spring loose from the confines of their worried pouch. He felt it tingle as if in telepathic empathy with the littered stigmata that peppered her skin like ripening cherries. Waves of love expanded gurgling in his bowels. He chewed his lip like meat. His eyes were all pupil, made even blacker by the thin halo of bleached ivory around them.

The girl spoke to the double reflection of their faces merging in the glass: "Push the buttons! Push the buttons!" Her voice was a tormented fly, roasting on the flame-engorged head of a match, leaking out from the little silver speaker in the window in crisp syllables of agony. She nodded down to the sides of the booth where two black buttons were placed as if in a pinball machine. He pushed them. White rose petals drifted down from the ceiling like snow in a

glass ball. Two crudely constructed metal robot arms bending on pulleys and levers hovered inside the booth, responding to the pressure or lateral movements of his thumbs on the buttons. Each pincer at the ends of the arms held a long gleaming surgical needle. The arms danced about her face, jabbing at the compressed kernels that infested her skin, releasing them from their bondage. Pinstripe jets of black oil shot out from her face in a depressurized spray of volcanic effusion as the girl thrashed in epileptic ecstasy. A hand extended out from the blurred tornado of her hair and flesh, a finger pointing towards the theater. "See the Manager!" Her voice followed him like a haunting gnat and burrowed in his ear, whispering with desire.

He glided like a narcoleptic ice skater over the buffed aquamarine tilework that sloped down the entranceway into the black maw of the theater. The images in the tile spelled out in Byzantine stylizations the advantages of decadent life in the lost city of Atlantis. He peered down like Zeus in a frightwig, his head floating behind his body on a string. The manager met him in a hurricane of air conditioning at the glass sliding doors. They parted soundlessly. He stood just inside the frigid aperture gesturing the young man in like an impresario, twitching, a rat-man in an usher's suit spraying blue sparks of electricity out the sides of his mouth.

"Come in, come in, come in. We'll lose the cool..." he hissed like a necrophiliac mortician wheeling a fresh cadaver into his refrigerated lair.

As the young man entered, for an instant he

was shivering on his front side and sweating profusely out his back. The doors sucked closed behind him, hermetically sealed. Now the cold infused him completely. He stood shaking like a shaved cat. His shirt dried up and stiffened into a red cracking scab. He could feel the whiskers growing out of his face.

The place was as dim as a church. Roller coasters of tarnished brass and swelling seas of encrusted red velvet spread out in perversions of opulence before him. Gold thread traced rococo patterns in the purple felt walls. The theater's logo — a cupid with a clutch of arrows in one hand and a severed head in the other — was sewn in embossed pink at regular intervals across the walls and carpets. Vicious, greasy teenagers prowled the lobby, pumped up on cheap violence, gore, and clinically depicted scenes of sexual denigration and mutilation. They loitered, coiled like springs anticipating release. They'd later spill out into the primordial chaos of the streets in an orgy of drive-bys, carjackings, murders and rapes, unleashed on the world like a marauding legion of rampaging demons escaped from a sewage hole leading up from hell, squirting hot hormonal juice out their pores, laboring and defiling the polluted night, Los Angeles laying there with its legs spread wide with tinsel tangled in its hair, bleeding from its gash like a freshly gang-raped transvestite weeping on the piss-soaked concrete floor of the L.A. County Jail.

"That will be 12 dollars please," said the manager, his voice a moist rattle of phlegm tapping in a tin throat. Peppermint fumes escaped glittering from his lips, adorning the real stench of cheap brandy and bile

that enveloped his head in its own planetary atmosphere. The young man orbited at a distance, a trembling stick figure with eight-ball eyes. He noticed a growth on the manager's eyelid. It extended out a full inch, then drooped like a shriveled worm. It bobbed as he spoke, as if mocking his words. "12 dollars please!" scolded the manager, as if teaching a newly paralyzed patient how to use his fingers. He seemed used to this, ready to call out a hidden goon.

The young man simultaneously pointed outside and pulled a fistful of hundreds from his pants pocket as if seeking to buy the maelstrom of filth and heat out there beyond the doors of the theater with this immediate cash down payment. His stomach was a dissolving capsule, brewing with muriatic acid. In his mind was a microchip-sized seed that looked like a fish scale, containing the information that fed his lust for the teenaged girl, now just released from her booth and circling like a zombie in the foyer, drawn out by a thread of the young man's lingering scent, her hands held before her like lobster claws.

She was naked. Her newly purified skin threw out aurorae of light. Her hair lifted up as if fluffed by a cool wind from beneath, despite the impossible heat rising from the molten concrete and the waves of choking smut tumbling in from the endless parade of radiant metal. As she circled aimlessly like a sleep-walker, it dawned on him: she was totally blind, helpless. He could feel her thoughts reaching out to him like an elastic tether, chewing at his heart, but his body was a slab of butter carved into a soft approximation of his shape, melting, leaden and numb. He noticed a couple of particularly vile and predatory

teens looking her over covetously, as if an oversized chicklet had wandered in from the street and was now ambling on the tiles, waiting to be fried. They shared a cigarette, nursing it wetly like a swollen clitoris. Anyone coming on the scene would have thought she was performing a little degrading show just for them. They wandered out the glass doors into the heat. She lifted up her nose like a deer, sniffing the air for danger. Each one took an arm and they led her off, lifting her slightly so that her feet dangled like a ballerina. The young man watched as they carried her off to the slaughter, swallowed by the smog as they disappeared.

“I said 12 dollars! Now please!” repeated the manager, like a father about to inflict an especially gruesome perversion on a sleeping child. Then, to the air around him, “Wilfredo! Wilfredo! Come here now!”

The young man held out two handfuls of hundreds as if he'd just been eviscerated and was holding out his steaming intestines in wonder. Bills gathered at his feet like leaves in someone's backyard. Various young thugs hovered.

“Ooooooh, I seeee! You want the rooom! Yes. Wilfredo! Wilfredo!” Eyeing the money, the manager drooled shamelessly, like an obsessive masturbator spying a fresh jar of vaseline. His shoulders hunched in around his ears. The fingers of both hands clutched at his chin as if he were holding it in position on his face. The growth on his eyelid stood at attention like a stone-faced soldier.

Wilfredo was the goon. He appeared from inside a closet door that was seamlessly concealed in

the purple velvet wall. Inside the closet, a collapsing black and white television held together with duct tape spit out in Spanish the carnal description of the wrestling match, depicted flicking in the screen. A distorted face seen in close-up convulsions of pain was invaded at the mouth by a beefy hand that pulled the face apart like a hooked trout. The announcer sounded like his balls were being nailed to a plank with pins, barking out lurid descriptions of his misery through a toy megaphone. The goon lumbered forward, brooding, a monster of epic proportions. His bald head was the size of a basketball and was tattooed with a spider web. At the center of the web was a childlike jailhouse depiction of a throbbing membrane. He emerged like a genie from the puny confines of his closet, annoyed at being pulled from the bloody revelry of his match by this child's doll made of pipe cleaners and white cat hair with black ceramic discs for eyes and a rag soaked in blood for a shirt. The young man guessed he was about to be strangled and flung out into the street like a fingerful of snot, where his soul would bake dry in the sun.

Badly amplified sounds of hacking and moaning seeped through the double doors that led down into the theater, followed by scattered hoots of derision and parodied screams of terror. The goon stood inspecting the young man opaquely, like something squeezed from his skin. His hands were two writhing pigs stuck to the ends of his arms. His arms were the size of the young man's legs.

"He wants the room Wilfredo... He's a student or something, right?"

The manager looked at the young man, waiting for him to lie. Everyone had disappeared from the lobby, drawn to the horrors depicted on the screen like a crowd of infants slurping sugar milk from a huge communal tit.

"I - I - I - I - I - I..... NO! NO! NO! NO!... I - I - I - I....", was the extent of the young man's reply.

He had a childhood stutter which returned whenever the flow of speed lasted more than 3 days. His teeth were beginning to pull loose from his gums. When he sucked them, foul-smelling blood was drawn into his mouth, coating his tongue with bitter red paste. His breath smelled like pus. When he spoke now, he exhaled a swarm of rank flatulence. "NO! NO! NO! NO!", he reiterated, a tendon in his neck tensing like a snake traveling beneath his skin.

"Very good! He talks! How impressive!" the manager cut him off, as if congratulating a trained monkey for an elaborately humiliating trick. "A hundred dollars a week, two hundred dollars security and damages. A hundred dollars each for me and Wilfredo here for our finders' fee. I don't care what you do in there, just don't get me involved."

The young man got the impression the previous tenant had gotten him involved, and that this had led in turn to the goon clothing his little pigs in suits of blood.

He followed the manager deeper into the building. Luxurious waves of crimson unrolled before them like a tongue. Money trailed from his pockets like seeds scattered in a field. The goon retrieved it, a peasant Frankenstein, stooping.

Lubricated, rhythmic fucking-sounds bled from beneath the theater doors. “Oh Baby! Oh Baby! Do it!” someone demanded of the screen. “I yam! I yam!” came the mock-reply, followed by a horrible liquid squishing, as if a hundred greased orifices were farting at once.

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They entered an invisible door that parted inside a flaking mural depicting lewd scenes in a pastoral bacchanalia — Brueghel as seen through the eyes of a 1930’s Hollywood pornographer. When the door shut behind them, the heat was instantly suffocating, like being inside the lungs of a corpse, perfumed with the sharp tang of rotting air. The darkness was total, as if color and light had been vacuumed away down a tube. The manager flicked on his flashlight, a lipstick-sized cylinder protruding from a ten pound cluster of keys. They worked their way up the stairs like intestinal worms inside the body of a giant mammal. The manager led the way, an animated silhouette cut from tarpaper holding out a weakly glowing crystal ball for guidance. The goon followed the young man, wheezing thickly and prodding him in the back with a finger like a calcified sausage. Although the young man knew they were climbing stairs, it didn’t really feel as if they were ascending. The way the dark contained them inside itself, they could have been walking on a treadmill, the building tilting and swaying to convey the illusion of progress. The heat felt like air that had been sealed in a vestibule

buried in the substructure of an ancient pyramid, permeated with fungal spores breeding in the decaying cement. He stumbled forward, following the manager's gaseous nebula, the stench trailing behind the little man luminous, diffusing like the tail of a comet rising in slow motion into black space, the young man's arms outstretched, reaching for the light like a child dragged forward by the diaphanous robes of its demented ghost-mother.

The manager's keys jangled like a guard's keys in a jail corridor and a door cranked, grinding metal. A painful artificial light cut flashing at the dark. In bursts of light, the young man saw the stairway leading back down, getting darker as it descended, growing what appeared to be intestines from its walls, like the viscous fruit of a tunneled abattoir. The moist crimson vines were caked with a fine layer of powdered dust in which grew whole civilizations of dust mites. These tubes uncoiled back down into the dark like spiraling strands of time sucked into the inevitable gravity of a black hole — seen in instants of hard shadows seared in blue-white.

The manager ushered the young man into the room. It was a cube intersected midway by the ceiling bending downward and transforming into a wall rising from the floor like the interior curve of an eggshell — the ceiling/wall was the reverse of the dome he'd seen from the street. A window was cut into the wall like an exploratory square cut into the resilient meat of a cadaver, revealing the wall to be extremely thick and solid, as if molded by hand out of flesh-clay. It was heavily textured with stucco and painted glossy pink,

the color of the lubricated interior of a vagina, sealed in a glaze of nicotine resin. The paint itself had been rolled over curling hairs, roaches, torn edges of ripped-down old posters, thumbtacks, nails, little chunks of matter like food picked from someone's teeth, and hundreds of scrawled telephone numbers, the inked digits dissolving into the dimpled pigment of the paint like fading tattoos.

The window admitted no light — it was stained amber with nicotine on the inside and dusted with a coat of black grit on the outside. The light was provided by an overhead fluorescent fixture, chaotically sputtering like a randomized strobe, suspended low from the ceiling on two long rusted chains. Dust adhered like fur to the chains, crusted with nicotine resin. A graveyard of dried raisin-sized flies, supine and fragile, formed a gothic landscape on top of the fixture, a gauze blanket of dust evoking a creeping fog. Long strands of fibrous dust, marbled with strings of nicotine nectar, trailed down from the light fixture like the tassled fingers of underwater flora, swaying in response to the slightest movement in the room. The scene cracked from black to light with the spitting fluorescent tubes. The strobing effect gave the room a sense of sickening motion, of spinning downward, like the nauseous disorientations of a kneeling drunk. The heat in the room was even more fungal and oppressive than in the stairway, as if it culminated here in a final concentration of malignancy, where it would some day soon burst forth through shattered concrete out into the barren sun and smog in a climax of erupting putrefaction, vomiting out into the choking sprawl of Los Angeles.

The manager stood in the door. The goon bent his neck beside him. The young man paced out the size of the room, counting the steps, already a prisoner. The manager swept out his hand like a tour guide at the Grand Canyon unfurling the majestic view for an expedition of tourists. His hand was too large for his body, like a fake monster hand, the nails painted black and shiny.

"It's all yours! I don't care if you live here, so long as I don't know about it. The sink's there in the corner. No hot water. There's no toilet so you'll have to use the one in the lobby. I'll take the cash now please. Well?"

"I'll take - take it," said the young man, like an anesthetized patient choosing from a tray full of scalpels. He handed the manager a fistful of hundreds without counting.

"It feels great to be home," he thought, squatting in the corner in a jailyard crouch, his arms thrust straight out over his knees, his hands dangling loose like limp petals. He watched the light flaring like the last frames of a movie spinning loose from its reel as the manager and the goon descended back down the stairs. Their feet knocked like hooves as they howled with laughter, counting the money out loud like two bluebeards tallying heads.

The days ignited forward like phosphorous in his skull, searing hypervivid pictures into the membrane wall behind his eyes. Coruscating ghosts stalked him, circling catatonic, then froze in mid-motion, disintegrating into the air. As the hours flashed, seeping into days, he traced the textured walls with his

palms opened like someone blind trying to define the descriptions of their enclosing world. In the negative dark instants of the strobing fixture, he saw shafts of grey-blue light shoot up through the slats in the floor, speckled with glittering dust motes like plankton drifting beneath the sea, the light of the projected film below shifting in his room like searchlights in the Hollywood night. Fragments of images — severed white spider hands, open mouths shaping silent words, ravaging dogs in a swirl of human guts, angel-winged corpses interlocking their tongues while fornicating, hovering like birds — all rose through the columns of light like torn souls escaping up through cracks in the ceiling of some purgatorial chamber. As the heat of the room soaked through his skin, he lay on the floor curled like a child, naked and sweating, his clothes bunched under his head for a pillow, his eyes wandering in and out of focus as the room flashed from dark to light as if the air itself was charged with crackling random explosions of electricity. Tendrils sprouted out from the ulcer in his stomach and attached themselves to the walls with suction cups, listening. A clear plastic freezer-bag full of powdered speed lay open on the floor by his face, overflowing as he scooped out treasures with his pocket knife and sucked them through a straw into his nose, where they exploded against his septum in numbing shots of pain like the solarized birth of a third eye.

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A thunder at his door draws him out of a foaming pool of ecstasy. He unbolts the door, unaware of his nakedness. The manager and the goon stand snickering like slaughterhouse inspectors examining a hooked, skinned calf. He holds up his last handful of hundreds as a lure and manages to work his jaw into the configurations forming the words requesting a delivery of three cases of malt liquor, a few gallons of milk, and a large carton of toothpicks. They bleed down the stairs like purulence draining from a wound, giggling and conspiring like lepers or thieves at the base of a crucifixion. He stands there limp, unaware of time passing until they return. They slide the delivered goods across the floor, twisting their faces in disgust at the fecal thickness of the air within. The young man gives them the last of his money. The manager notices the rising pile of shit on the floor in the corner but shrugs, then leads the way back down the stairs. The goon and the manager mumble, then laugh as they descend, like hunters who've captured their prey after an arduous chase and are now finally cutting the terrified creature's throat, the blood pumping out over their hands and the lightning flashing against the dense black sky behind them.

When he feels his mind about to diffuse and disappear completely between his fingers, he drinks the beer. When he feels his body melting into delirium, he inhales more speed. The shots of white pain at the center of his head correspond in subliminal rhythms with the bolts of light/dark whipping through the room. He drinks the milk to keep the ulcer from



expanding beyond the walls of his stomach, and replacing him like a pregnant woman eaten by her cannibal child from within.

He stands entranced at the mirror above the sink as time stretches through him in jolts of plas-matic light. He digs at his mouth with the toothpicks, sure something is living beneath his gums. He works at a spot above an incisor where the pink flesh has pulled away in a flap. He probes beneath it, scraping and jabbing with the wooden picks. His face is a smeared elastic reflection in the mirror, light then dark, light then dark, as if time were passing here in this room, accelerating day and night like images printed on a deck of cards fanning out before his eyes. The creature between his teeth eludes him. He digs deeper, spearing its tail with a pick, but it escapes, burrowing further beneath the bleeding gum. He serrates and slices the gums away bit by bit, methodically over the days, working tirelessly until eventually his teeth are raw in his mouth and his face is swollen up like an expanding balloon. His lips are inflamed and bruised purple where he's stretched and abraded them trying to get at the secret caves behind his blood-smeared fangs. The sink fills with piles of gory picks. In the flaring light they look like something come upon suddenly illumined while rounding a corner in a complex of lightless tunnels in a dusted underground tomb.

He lays on his back looking up at the sparking fluorescent tubes. The ropes of dust and nicotine sway with the rising waves of heat. The muscle in his jaw tenses suddenly into a fist, pushing and straining

to get out of his face. The sinews and tendons in his neck seize up in sympathy. A clenching rush of paralysis spreads down through his shoulders to his arms and to his fingers until finally he lays there rigid as a corpse, curled on his back like a dead insect. The light surges up through the floor around him, swelling up between the slats in brilliant flecked columns that project his shadow scuttling across the curved pink ceiling like a massive frenetic cockroach, the real silhouette of his soul traced in flashes. Little trickles of music like glass chimes beneath the sea float through the room as if the glittering dust was singing. Then a pounding somewhere shaking the earth beneath him. The earth is flesh as it heaves, punished by a giant fist. It echoes moistly through glinting canyons of flesh. The walls expand and contract, the pink inflated sacks breathing like a thin and translucent giant pink frog's throat. His body inhabits the room like a parasite, changing shape as he flicks from light to dark, as if the room itself were imagining the variety of shapes his body might take. A trickling stream of yellow matter threaded with red veins runs out his rectum and forms an expanding pool, reflecting flashes on the floor. His throat constricts and a thimble-full of trapped stomach acid spills from his mouth and rests by his cheek in a frothing pink blossom. He presses his ear to the floor and hears a cackling from below, like ravenous ghouls at an orgy-feast of offal. Sheets of light come tumbling through black murk then fade, vaulting into a gorge deep beneath the ocean floor.

His heart cracks with the electricity, snapping

through his nervous system, pumping his flesh up with helium until he's inflated-out and pressed tight against the confining walls. Then pounding on the door, echoing, ascending in pitch, transmuting into a high buzzing, shrill and dry as if the room were a hive of frenzied wasps.

He's drawn back into his body in a whirlpool of liquid molecules. He hears them at the door, beating their fists like trapped lunatics. "Out! Out! Out! We want you out of here now! Get out!" He hears the goon wheezing in surges of approval in the background.

"I - I - I - I - I - I - I - I - I!" shouts the young man at the dead-bolted door in defiant reply.

He listens as they again disappear down the stairs, threatening, mumbling, threatening then mumbling, fading.

He stuffs his clothes into the crack beneath the door. With his knife, he pries loose a slat from the floor, then another. The work agitates the brown/pink piles of dust that breed between the flesh-floor and the flesh-ceiling. The spongy powder billows up in volumes that engulf him, changing shape in the black-white, black-white of the light, hanging like the aftermath of a desert explosion. Blind and gagging, he props the slats up against the door at an angle beneath the handle to prevent entry. He stumbles to the window and with desperate strength manages to force it open just enough to thrust his head out into the night.

The air is opaque with the smoke of the burning buildings. The city is laid out beneath his window

in a diminishing landscape of glowing coals, distant explosions, and spinning red lights. The air outside is only slightly more breathable than the air inside the room. The dust from inside funnels upward out the window and joins the smoke outside. When he breathes in, the smoke claws at the tissue of his lungs.

He sees helicopters swarming over the city in packs, just beneath the overhang of smoke, scanning searchlights over the fires and mobs that flood the streets like lava, advancing in a consuming wave of molten destruction. Watching from his porthole in the theater dome, he lifts up on tiptoe to peer over the ledge, like a tapeworm peeking out the throat of the body in which it feeds. He sees a giant inflated pink pig floating above the pandemonium and flames, cut free of its leash at Hollywood and Vine by the mob. It looms and sways, lifted up by the heat and heading west towards the sea. The last stains of sunset boil red at the underside of the smoke-ceiling as the pig's head rises into the black cloud, its bulbous pink legs dangling as it goes, like a fat infant treading water in a shallow pool. The helicopters drop puffing tear gas bombs on the crowds, herding them across the erupting landscape. A pack of horses, escaped from their stables in the hills, run mad before the mob. Streams of blood gush from their sweating flanks where they've been sliced by falling glass or raked by fleeing cars. The crowd seems to be chasing them, as if it wanted to rend them to bits barehanded in slashing tides of stinking blood. The horses rage, charge forward, impelled like locomotives mirrored to infinity, fueled by absolute terror, tongues whipping saliva mixed



with blood and steam up into the night.

A few horses spill off and crash into the glass doors of the theater. The young man hears them shrieking in fear and confusion in an onslaught of shattering windows and chaos below, then the hard-bone cracking of hooves on the stairs, the concussive thrash kicking at his door. He removes the slats and flings the door open. The horse is huge, shining, standing in the blasting light and smoke snorting, massive, as if it had just now crashed into being, transported from a distant planet consumed by violence, down into this shrinking cage that flashes with shifting unfathomable shapes.

He stabs at its eyes with his knife. It screams like a child. He grabs handfuls of its oily mane and wrenches it struggling to the floor. Its feet kick out cycling as if it were trying to swim sideways in quicksand. He saws at its throat. As it flails, spraying blood in stop-motion into the strobing smoke of the room, he bolts the door and replaces the slats.

“Now I’ll be safe,” he thinks, as he slices open its stomach. Using his speed-straw as an air tube to breathe through, he crawls into its guts like a snorkeling diver, folding his body inside the ruptured horse, warm, hiding.

(1994)

THE SEX MACHINE

The two women are naked and intertwined on the platform with their heads buried between each other's legs. Each one recites a muffled prayer to the shining pearl of lust hidden deep inside the womb of the other. Their faces submerge, recede, submerge, then recede. With every rhythmic forward thrust, the features of the face are lost in the damp glove of flesh, like the head of a praying mantis burrowing into the helpless shuddering body of a pinioned victim, devouring its insides.

The room is silent except for the distant fuzz of city traffic entering through the air vent in the ceiling, and the steady mantra of their coupling.

The circular platform is in the center of the room, covered with a cheap orange velour spread. Spotlights shine on their white flesh from each corner of the room. As the platform slowly circles, their skin changes to purple, then yellow, then pink as they

work. The spotlights contribute to the close heat of the room, and this heat mixes with the sweet fullness of their sweat, giving the atmosphere in the room an underwater tangibility.

A switch is turned on in the front office. Heavily amplified disco music pounds the air in a monotony of thudding bass frequencies. Their bodies indicate only a vague casual response to the sudden intrusion of the overwhelmingly physical sound. Soon their flesh can be seen moving in subtle variations of the mechanized rhythm, like two eels twisting in the mud of the ocean floor.

Signaled by the disco, the attendant opens the doors to the stalls surrounding the room, and the men enter, positioning themselves in front of their windows. The windows line the walls of the room where the women are on display. If the women looked up from their ritual on the platform, the windows would at first appear to be mirrors. But if they chose to peer through them up close, they could discern the inchoate dark shape of a man in each stall, and the glow of the fluorescent light above his head, behind the smoked reflective surface.

The disco music enters the stalls through a speaker in the ceiling. The enclosed closet-like space acts as a resonating cabinet for bass frequencies, adding to the already claustrophobic confinement of the stall. The sour metallic smell of semen thickens the air just beneath the more immediately acrid odor of disinfectant. The men take this smell down into their lungs, where it's diffused and absorbed into their bloodstreams and nervous system, poisoning

their perception. The potential for murder and perversion, normally suppressed, is fertilized and intensified. The certainty of anonymity opens the door further. If one of the women were to enter the stall physically, as something more than an image seen through a screen, she'd certainly be disemboweled, cannibalized, mutilated. The men are incapable of self-control. They all have a repressed need to taste blood. When they masturbate, beneath the benign and childish fantasies they conjure up, the real thrill of potential violence is always the true erotic secret.

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My hands are soft and cool. When I touch the smooth enamel walls of my stall, I feel the warmth of the women pass through the wall and into me. I absorb everything around me. I can taste the bitter luminous gas trapped in the fluorescent tube above my head. I can decipher the single note hum of the light beneath the depth-charge rhythm of the disco. The beat of the music pummels my body and spreads me outwards against the walls of the stall. I'm no longer contained in myself. I'm joined to the walls, part of a living cell. The stall is an organism. The circle of stalls is a circle of malignant cells surrounding a cancer. The women are rotting, sucking each other and transferring their corrosive juices back and forth, sharing their disease. I can smell them, ammoniac and fetid, through the wall.

Cued by a change in the music, the women get up from the platform and dance listlessly around the

arena. The lights swirl, saturated and acidic, shifting like tides in the liquid interior of the room. The women move through one color after another, like drifting willless bodies in an amniotic universe. In our cells, our arousal is increasing. I'm the first to reach my hands through the rubber-lined hole in the wall into the warm place where the women live.

Responding quickly, multiple hands press into the arena from the surrounding walls. Disembodied feelers, they form the interior nerves of an underwater creature groping for nourishment and stimulus. The fingers gesture, twitch and writhe, trying to attract the attention of the dancers. From the inside, the women see flickering mirrors reflecting the colored lights, and beneath the mirrors they see gummy prehensile pods, swaying frantically in the quickened current.

After teasing us for a few minutes, they answer our silent call and allow the centrifugal force of their dancing to push their bodies out to the periphery of the arena. As they twirl against the walls, they're pummed from hand to hand, invaded, pinched, molded, penetrated. If my hand had a mouth and teeth, I'd rip the skin open and drink down the thick blood, pumping it directly into my stomach, filling myself up with murder.

She feels like she's in ecstasy. The pores in the exterior lining of her skin leak out the juices brewed in her insides. My hands are slippery with her liquid, electrified with the sensation of her interior. I squeeze a rubber nipple, run my hands over her smooth stomach, pick at an inflamed scar above her pubic

hair. I form my fingers together into a funneled point and press into her womb as she butts against the wall spreading her legs. She looks up with her eyes rolled back in her head, the pupils retreating behind her eyelids. Her tongue lathers her lips, dripping spit down her chin.

We're unified, from stall to stall, man to woman, hand to body, liquid to solid, animate to inanimate. It doesn't matter if it's my hands inside her or someone else's as she rolls and glides from feeler to feeler. We're one creature, pulsing with bliss, sight, sound. Our orgasm never ends.

(1993)

THE MUTE DWARF SINGS

High up in the wall of the abandoned building, the mute dwarf sat perched on his tall stool like a buzzard and peered down squint-eyed out the black empty window. Waves of collapsed roof and concrete swept out over the lot beneath him, as if his building had crashed down from the sky and sent a rolling swell of destruction outward on impact. Scattered crusts of snow flashed up at him, signaling like mirrors in the debris, causing flecks of color and transparent spiders to drift across his eyes as his pupils shrank against the light. Behind him in the darkness, his bed was a mountain of crusted blankets and frayed quilts he'd extracted from the trash heaps of the neighborhood and piled in a damp mound in the furthest corner of the room. The bedding was still warm from his night's burrowing and steamed in the cold, surrounded by a flickering horseshoe of melted candles that trapped it like a dim beast in a magic circle.

He looked down on the fractured landscape, always searching for something shiny and retrievable. His face was a luminous ghoulish face floating in the black window. The cold air brought mucus to his nose. It expanded out from his nostrils like a child's bubble gum stretched further with each breath and finally rested on his upper lip — fresh larvae generated by an industrious insect. He snarled it in and out in quick repeated jerks as if telegraphing a coded description of his view to a hidden confidant in another abandoned building across the lot. Like a drugged priest holding up a chalice of Christ's intoxicating blood, he raised up his bottle of codeine-laced cough syrup in both hands and sucked the liquid in, loudly mixing it with air as if it were too hot to pass over his throat uncooled. It crawled down his trachea and sat in his stomach like molasses. He felt warm behind his eyes. He caressed the roof of his mouth with his tongue. The orifice was a sticky cherry red wound gouged out of his pulpy flesh.

He snapped a chunk of cement loose from the ledge and dropped it down into the rubble. A stunned confetti-cloud of seagulls rose up, hovered in a chaos of conflicting spirals, then landed again just as suddenly, feeding in the garbage. He fingered a single whisker that had sprouted curling from his chin in the night, breaking through the white shell of pancake make-up he refreshed daily without washing. He twisted the brittle hair in his finger, then yanked it loose from his face. He rolled it between two fingers, tickling his fat red lower lip with the frail wire, his pinkie foppishly extended. A two inch length of

hardened brown nail grew out of the nub-finger like a flattened claw. He released the hair and inserted the nail into the space between his front teeth, snagging a shred of last night's beef. Plucking a wooden match from the piles of junk on the table, he scraped the moistened scum from beneath the nail, wiping the paste and meat fibers into his greasy pant leg. He filed the nail meticulously with a tear of fine oily sandpaper, progressively honing the edge thinner as it flattened out, like the head of a precision screwdriver. Testing this fresh edge, he took a circuitry panel from the convolutions of scavenged electronic junk on the table and snaked a finger around a transistor, snugging in a tiny silver screw. He took the bottle up again, pumped down the remainder of the syrup, and sent the empty vessel smashing against a wall behind him in the darkness.

An ancient and hairless chihuahua emerged from the fading warmth of their bed wracked with trembling, and clicked yapping towards the light. It skidded across the floor and stood coughing up at the dwarf on his stool. The dwarf made an abbreviated choking sound, as if he'd been lightly punched in the stomach — one "word" in his vocabulary of guttural clicks and wheezes — and the dog jumped the impossible distance up to the table without apparent effort, then to his lap, where it laid quivering and nuzzling into the dwarf's crotch for warmth, looking up with black eyes rolling insanely in its head.

Directly beneath his window, three stories down and level with the sea of rubble, the old lady stuck her head out her window and began her morn-

ing song. Out from a throat that was corroded and burned with twenty years of cheap vodka leaked an aimless extended croak that hung strangled in the cold a few feet beyond her window. Cracked consonants and tongue rolls punctuated the feeble drone. These tuneless phrases were born in mountain-peasant squalor ten centuries back and passed on in decadent form 78 years ago as childhood folk songs she memorized and now repeated without memory of their meaning, except as they implied nostalgia and warmth. If she'd had a home and children, she would have been singing these empty sagas of wolves and kings and little girls to her grandchildren. Instead she offered up her wheezing lullabies to the feral hoards of cats that prowled and bred beneath the ruins.

She set out a dozen large bowls overflowing with warm curdled milk. The milk slopped onto the granulated asphalt slabs of shredded roofing that butted up to her window sill and steamed in the cold like porridge. She tossed out handfuls of gnarled chicken parts and looked up at the dwarf with a saw-toothed smile. He waved down to her, his only neighbor in the derelict building.

Quickly appearing, slithering out from the buried labyrinths woven through the rubble, the predator cats approached in a crowd, drawn to the old lady's offerings like piranhas swarming on a drowning child. As the old lady withdrew back into the darkness of the building, the cats were joined by rats of equal size, unafraid as they lapped the milk and ground the chicken bones in their teeth side by side with the cats, as if each species' assigned genetic

hatred had been erased. As the dwarf watched them feed, he imagined their mutual indifference was due to the bloated contentment the old lady provided them, as well as to the swollen piles of torn and leaking garbage bags that clogged the streets of the neighborhood, dumped down from the windows of the squats above or trucked in from the affluent areas of the city and left to rot where they lay.

The old lady came back to the window, squawking obscurities and gargling her vodka like mouthwash. The rats withdrew a sullen distance as she reached out and petted the growling cats, huge mounds of nicked and tangled fur that rubbed up against her wrist and licked her fingers with abrasive tongues for grease. But the rats sensed her soggy dementia and soon drew back in to feed with the cats. She'd long ago lost any ability to sense danger, or exude threat, and her instinct for survival had been reduced to a daily routine of trash picking and panhandling a few blocks away in a better neighborhood, where her extended styrofoam cup was quickly filled with dollar bills, presenting as she did to the guilty passerby such a perfect example of pathetic decrepitude.

The old lady disappeared again into the wall. A few minutes later, the dwarf watched her reappear climbing up and out the plywood hatch at the edge of the lot by the sidewalk. The hatch covered an old unused access tunnel that led under the debris and connected to the basement of the building. The basement was filled with a flat black expanse of standing water six inches deep. The air was sodden and warm

with decay. Mosquitoes continued to breed in the water even in the winter. A weak grey light filtered in through the dense cobwebs that grew on the rusted metal grating of the slitted air vents in the upper walls. A wobbly path of broken cinder blocks led through the water, connecting the tunnel to the ancient moss-clothed stairs that led up into the dark interior of their building.

When the old lady steeped up into the light, she spat back down into the rank hole to clear her mouth of the smell, and batted and swiped at her hair to knock loose any spiders that might have attached themselves in the basement. Despite the weight of the double thickness plywood and her encumbering cloak of layered coats and robes, she slid the hatch cover closed like light cardboard. The dwarf watched her lumber purposefully down the street with her capes flowing behind her, pumping fog out her nose in a cloud around her head like a lathering workhorse. She adjusted her yoke of mismatched scarves and shawls around her head and neck, paused to drink from the bottle hidden deep in her wrap, then proceeded on, deliberate and slow, taking on the hunched waddle of a destitute babushka as she moved toward the fertile begging-grounds of the more populous and prosperous avenues nearby.

When she'd disappeared around a corner, the dwarf turned his attention to the mob of rats and cats finishing off their food. Soon everything was devoured, and they receded like an ocean tide back into the underworld beneath the rubble.

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The dwarf spent his days selling off the grim trinkets and gadgets he'd repaired in the night, spreading them out on a blanket on the sidewalk. Later, he'd leave the unsold junk where it lay and he'd wander through the city, trolling in rubbish piles and dumpsters. If he came across a sealed tenement-tomb, he'd pry loose the plywood from a window and scavenge in the cool black musk. He'd drag his meager treasures out of the building and lay them carefully in the shopping cart he half-pushed and half-hung from in his migrations. The chihuahua trailed behind on a long leash of twine, dragged haplessly through alleys ankle-deep in broken glass and used syringes, where the urine vapors were so impenetrably sour the dog hacked and sneezed uncontrollably until the dwarf lifted it up onto the front edge of the cart where it perched like a featherless bird or a deranged shivering hood ornament.

Often they worked their way through the better neighborhoods, where they stood out among the sleek fashions and polished glass like filthy exiles from a depraved medieval circus. Here the dwarf would rifle through the corner trash cans, flinging coffee cups and newspapers and half-eaten sandwiches into the air like a madman. He'd sometimes pause at a payphone and unleash a stream of incoherent phonetics into the dangling receiver as if he were vehemently condemning some outrage or injustice to an indifferent bureaucrat. His white make-up cracked with the contortions of his rage and his tongue was a meaty red snake attacked by his yellow teeth. The ripe odor of his scummed and unwashed body rose

through the mildewed layers of his clothing and spread out in a protective cloud, keeping pedestrians at their distance. The dog snapped out at them as they passed, though it was too nearsighted to see them.

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The old lady had moved in a few weeks ago. One morning when the dwarf made his way down the black stairwell in his building, there was an unexpected flood of sunlight pouring out a doorway. She'd managed to pull the plywood covering loose from the window and was sweeping up a dense roil of decades-old dust. She stood furiously working in the center of the cyclone like a hag-witch violently stirring up a pestilent storm. He hung back in the darkness watching her. When the dust settled, he saw that she'd already dragged in a mattress, heaped with her coats in the corner, and that she'd adorned the window ledge with personal items — a cheap plastic crucifix, a few boxes of candles, bottles of water and vodka. He moved into the light gently, so as not to shock her. She leaned on her broom as they stared at each other for a while in silence. Finally she smiled, and he moved on. Eventually, over the weeks, they developed as much of a rapport as either of them was capable of achieving, considering her apparent total lack of comprehensible English and his vocabulary of frenetic gestures and meaningless vocalizations.

Before her arrival, the only visitors to his building had been the dope-fiends he'd heard late at night, stripping the copper from the telephone lines, hack-

ing loose plumbing fixtures, picking at the corpse of the architecture. The dope-fiends hung out in small crowds on the street corners of the neighborhood, kicking the ground and shouting for no reason, always on the lookout for an opportunity. They must have seen him coming in and out of the hatch very soon after he'd managed to break into the building and to take over the top floor, because almost immediately he'd been awakened from the dark smells beneath his mound of blankets to the distant hammering and scraping, gradually getting louder over the next few days as they worked their way up, cannibalizing each floor as they approached. The dwarf had run a well-concealed electric line down behind the stairs and connected it to the base of a street light, covering the connection and line with trash, and he'd been very careful not to burn an electric light at night for fear of attracting the police, or worse, dope-fiends. But soon, they were outside his door anyway and he worked in the piles of transformers, TV screens, cassette players and electric toys — so they'd heard his drills and smelled his solder and now knew there was something valuable inside.

One morning as he sat drinking his cough syrup, he'd looked up to see a dope-fiend leering in from the doorway. The dwarf grabbed a rusty butcher knife from the heap on the table and leapt like a crazed chimpanzee down from his stool. Cackling and screeching like a macaw, he scuttled towards the door. The dope-fiend jumped blindly down the dark stairs, shocked by the sight of the imbecile midget-crown with the porcelain face and the stretched

scarlet mouth emitting a scream like a cartoon sound-effect depicting the agonies of hell. That night, the dwarf scavenged a dead bolt and police bar and secured it on his door, so he felt safe inside his room. But the following night, he awoke to a furtive sawing at his door and the muffled giggles of the prying dopefiends. He flung open the door and threw a cupful of battery acid straight in the face of one of them and sliced at the hands of another one as the chihuahua yammered like scraping tin and he shrieked his war cry. They'd fled again, howling as they tumbled down the stairs. They hadn't been back since. The old lady moved in the next day.

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He sat at his window looking out at the flattened field bathed in cold moonlight and dissected in jigsaw shadows, as if it were the outer shell of the earth breaking up in slabs as it expanded from within. A hidden substratum of rebar and lathing and shredded metal rose from beneath it like a creeping web of weeds. Across the field, a dim light flickered behind a rippling blanket hung over a window in the hunched silhouette of a squat. An impotent flutter of guitar strums accompanied by what sounded like the whining of a spoiled child echoed across the lot, broken by sporadic shouts of drunken encouragement and bottles shattering on the bricks below. Out in the middle of the debris, on a large tilting concrete slab, a tangle of dogs exploded in a whirl of vicious blood and fangs, devouring each other with the collective enthusiasm

of a mob of crazed drunks roaring cathartic encouragement at a second-rate boxing event. The carnage stopped suddenly and gradually a sound which must have been there all along revealed itself — a distant moan, low and aimless, as if someone were calling out the dreary wordless emotions of an oppressive dream as they slept. He realized it was coming from inside the building, beneath him, that it must be the old woman. He took his flashlight, undid the locks on his door, and worked his way down the stairs, the dog trailing behind him. The moan called, guiding him. As he descended, he heard a suppressed wheezing, encroaching through the blackness that surrounded him, as if the sound was leeching through the curtain of darkness. He half-expected rough hands to reach out and blindly caress his face. Then, around one last sightless twist in the stairwell, he saw the anemic light of her candles wavering from light to dark as the wind entered her window. At the door, the dog inched back behind him, an idling engine of growls.

The old lady lay flat on her back in the center of the floor with her arms and legs spread out as if in a macabre imitation of calisthenics. Spit dribbled from the corners of her mouth, then sprayed up in a fine mist as she groaned from deep inside her chest. Her eyes stared up at a fixed point in the diffusing smoke and darkness above her as if she were deciphering a secret message written in the haze. A bottle of vodka lay dripping in a dark puddle beside her head.

A huddle of cats and rats fed on her bare feet, which were paralyzed by her stroke. They lapped the

blood from the rended flesh lazily, like nestling wolf cubs at their mother's milk. Up beneath her skirt, a rat the size of a football chewed at the softness between her legs. The dwarf screamed, charging, expecting the demon animals to flee, but instead they only shifted slightly, together as a herd, annoyed.

The dog wailed in panic out in the hall. Kicking ineffectually at the rats and cats, the dwarf looked out the door into the diminishing light to see the chihuahua caught fully in the mouth of an oversized pit bull. The monster adjusted its jaws around the tiny dog casually, then shook it furiously, its eyes dead and impassive as blood fanned out from the crushed body in its teeth.

The crowding dope-fiends snickered in approval and moved in from the dark. The dwarf lunged through them, swinging and scratching, smelling murder beneath their clothes. He clawed at the face of an attacker. Some flesh came loose in his hand — the skin boiled loose from the battery acid.

He broke free and leapt up into the darkened stairway towards his room. He felt them behind him laboring, clutching. He made it to his door and slammed it shut, but before he could twist the lock the pit bull flew into it, heavier than the dwarf, and with more force than he could resist. He fell back, and the dog was instantly at his wrist.

Then they were all inside, laughing and congratulating each other like football players after a great play. They called off the dog and carried the dwarf struggling to the table. They wanted to know where the money was hidden. They knew he had cash

because they'd seen him selling his junk around town, and they wanted it, now. One of them shined a weak flashlight around the room, illuminating the heaps of electronic treasure. Someone put a cigarette out on his cheek. He tried to talk, letting out a string of idiotic syllables, in fear. They laughed again, apparently pleased that he seemed to be mocking them. One of them grabbed a pair of pliers from the junk pile on the floor.

"Talk! Man, you better *talk!*"

He rammed the pliers into the dwarf's mouth. The hand was bloody and grimy, the blood puffed just beneath the surface, ready to seep. The dwarf sang out in a stretched ululating "Ahhhhhhhh" like a car trying to start as the pliers grabbed his tongue and pulled it out of his mouth like thick elastic.

Now his song was high-pitched, droning insanely, accelerating like sped-up audiotape. His body flailed on the table like a collapsing balloon.

"Ah *fuck* you man, just *fuck* you!" said the dope-fiend with the red bubbled face as he pushed through the crowd and cut away the tongue with a rusted child's pocketknife, flinging it back into the darkness like something diseased. Beneath the sound of his own wailing, the mute dwarf could hear the pit bull ripping into the useless organ.

(1993)

HOW I LOVE HER

The skin is stretched taut and translucent over the frame of her hand. The blood is visible as it beats through the delicate web of veins. The knuckles and joints seem vulnerable, over-large, exposed. Random pulses of electrical energy tick the fingers in involuntary jumps — spasms she responds to by moving her hand through her honey-blonde hair, smoothing out her pant leg, massaging her temples.

The hand sits quivering on the desk, like a tensed animal looking up at her as she stares at her reflection in the mirror. A pinpoint of light is thrown in through the bullet-sized hole in the frosted window to her left and lands on the joint of her thumb. She seems to feel the heat this conveys, as if it had passed through a magnifying glass, and she moves her hand slightly to one side. The wafer of light now rests on the formica surface of the desk. As it moves across the desk in a slow arc, it stretches into an oval and

eventually blends out into a larger indeterminate shape.

She seems to be daydreaming, losing herself in her reflection in the mirror, in the perfect symmetry of her face. It's cool out and the window to her right is open. She's shirtless. She must be cold, but she shows no sign of it. Her breasts rise and fall with the subtle rhythm of her breathing, the delicate skin slightly textured like an orange peel from the cold, the amber nipples hard and uplifted. Her eyes seem to be flooded with tears, but nothing drains from them onto her cheeks. She rarely blinks. A truck backfires in the street below, setting off a chorus of car alarms bouncing chaotically between the buildings, but she gives no sign of response, as if she lived in a superior, parallel dimension inhabited by the esoteric few, in unspoiled hermetic calm. I wonder if she's meditating, using her face as a mesmeric charm. Is she plotting dispassionate revenge for some girlish betrayal her friends committed at school, or simply hypnotized, as I am, by the light the vulnerable center of her body shines out through her eyes?

I sit for hours, as still as she is, connected to her, my thoughts projecting into hers.

As the sun begins to set behind the forest of city towers silhouetted against the purple sky, she grabs without warning the ivory-shelled brush from her desk as if it were trying to escape or leap up at her throat and she tugs it violently through her hair. She pulls out handfuls of blonde hair caught in the bristles and throws the fluff away from her as if it had begun to crawl up her hand. She takes a hairband from the desk, and bunching her hair tightly against her head

she loops the elastic ring snug against the crown of her skull, as if the hair were some vile growth to be kept away from her face and body at all costs. I cry out to her that I love her across the chasm between our two buildings but she can't hear me above the traffic as she takes the razor from the desk and slices her face in a hundred vertical gashes as her mouth contorts in silent paroxysms of ecstasy.

(1994)

THE GREAT ANNIHILATOR, or, FRANCIS BACON'S MOUTH

Hidden by distance, the darkness behind the stars reached an impenetrable black density. Light, thought, and possibility were sucked helplessly into the inhaling mouth of the dead hole. Inside the hole was the center of the heart of the opposite of space. The future and the past were nullified, backwards and forwards. History rewound, snubbed out before it began. Silence was exterminated.

The earth floated in a sea of black blood, glowing like an ember cupped in the hands of an invisible god. His corrupt breath spread clouds of poison gas, cloaking the continents in a sweet tasting atmosphere. Agitated hoards of reptilian predator birds migrated through the hemispheres in a stone-eyed search for prey, casting shadows on the red dirt like cryptic signals flashed down from the veiled deities that lived behind the sky. Beneath the ground, liquid fire rolled in waves of buried hatred. A mindless

howl echoed through the lightless subterranean canyons in a single sustained note of ignorant and savage pain.

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The steel and glass towers of the city reflect the lights of passing cars, and behind the jagged horizon, the moon stains the clouds red. Steam rises from a crack in the mildewed concrete floor in the basement of an abandoned building. A block away, in a fashionable hotel where the staff are actors and models and the sink in the bathroom in your room is a polished stainless steel funnel, you crouch tied in the corner by the toilet, naked and bruised, the shining white tiles hard and painful against your bare knees, watching yourself in the oval mirror, waiting for the murderer to come in and first pull chunks of your skin away with pliers, then to remove your teeth, then to fuck your warm bloody mouth. You had placed an ad in a porn magazine reading “Attractive Professional Seeks Punishment For Arrogance From An Expert Torturer” with the present disastrous consequences. You’re now certain you’re going to die, and the outcome is irreversible and beyond your control. Your complicated psychology of pleasure and desire is inextricably interwoven with your diseased sense of self-worth. Ecstasy is impossible for you unless your nerves are simultaneously saturated with its opposite. Since you’re addicted to ecstasy as the only effective means of erasing your identity and its attendant self-loathing, you’re also addicted to

pain and the elaborate rituals you construct in order to transform it into pleasure. When the shadow of the murderer moves toward you, seen sliding across the mauve bedroom wall through the crystal reflection in the mirror, a warm fullness gathers between your legs. Though terrified, you feel a sense of completeness you never dreamed possible.

(1993)

IF I WERE HIM

If I were him, I'd stand on the edge of the hill looking down the slope, past the uniform tile and stucco houses to the sea. The sun would pass over me and through me with the feel of a shadow, cold and wet on my skin. It would sink slowly into the flat bloody pool of the Pacific, like the polished white globe of a child's skull, and disappear. The sparrows, coming home for the night, would circle and dive against my hill like bats.

If I were him, my prehuman awareness, perfect in its ability to see past and future simultaneously in a 360 degree arc of sight, would send waves of exaggerated and pure sensation deep into the organs hidden inside my body, and when the warm mouth of silence sucked me in, I'd disappear in its moist folds. Randomly pulled from the comfort of non-being by hunger or the sound of a car hissing on the asphalt road below, I'd slap and rub my face in an effort to

concentrate, noting that the whiskers on my cheek had sprouted new growth. Drifting again, I might awaken to the rough tongue of a stray housecat licking my palm. It would be with hatred and shame that I'd feel myself stiffening and heating in response to the cat's ministrations. If I were him, I'd then dream of my teeth crunching into the soft white flesh at the back of a girl's legs as she struggles, roughly bound and gagged, the blood filling up my mouth with warm sweetness.

Later, I would have drained myself, and I'd feed the cat some ripened lunch meat from my sack and continue to watch, then fade, watch, then fade, transformed as motion and events moved through me without interference from my will.

I'd drink water from the plastic jug, still hot from the day's sun, and the plastic fumes would mingle with the water in my mouth. I'd snap sunflower seeds between my teeth, sucking the salt from each one, and spit the shells in a growing pile at my feet. I might wrap myself in my blanket, watching the lights come on in the house below. I'd continue watching as the lights were extinguished and replaced by the switching blue light of the television in the living room. And finally in darkness, the house would lie like a sleeping beast in a field of other beasts, and the stars would be dim and barely visible behind the grey screen of light that would rise up against the night in an aura from the brilliant swarm of Los Angeles, spread out along the coast to the north. As the night grew deeper and the lights of the city faded into sleep, the stars would grow brighter

against the dead black of infinity. Lying back on my blanket, I'd relive an LSD ritual from my adolescence: Staring emptily up at the limitless swirl of stars, I'd lose my body and soar upwards in a surge of cosmic bliss, dissolving into emptiness. Hours later, I'd crash violently back down into my leaden body, my erection unbearable and animal. The only way to relieve it would be to feel the pathetic weakness of a creature pleading in my squeezing hands, then to choke until the eyes fog over, disgusting and lifeless... If I were him, which I'm not.

I might be there hidden on the hill for three days, spying down on the house where I'd lived as a child. The streets would be silent during the dry hot days, with only the occasional mail truck or gardener spoiling the perfect stillness and geometry of the housing subdivision, a meticulously groomed, abstract and idealized tableaux laid out across the plateau beneath my hill and ending abruptly at the cliffs above the ocean. In the late afternoon would be the hum of skateboarding boys gliding over the smooth black streets, gracefully riding the tilted curves and slopes. In the early evenings, the lunatic wind of lawnmowers and hedge trimmers would echo up to me in my place concealed in the low brush and oak trees on the hill.

If I were him, each day I'd watch as the man and wife left my former home in the morning, the wife trailing behind with the crippled daughter, manipulating her braced legs and guiding her broken pubescent body into the chrome BMW waiting in the driveway. In the chilled early morning, the dew would

reflect the rising sun on the grass like diamonds as the night's fog retreated in a wall behind the receding curve of the Pacific, just as when the moon would sink late at night, as I watched, the wall of fog would again advance, silently cloaking the shrubbery and shrouding the street lights in a veil beneath my hill.

If I were him, I'd work my way quietly down the hill, and into the fog, just before the dawn of the fourth day, and I'd hide at the foot of the driveway leading up to the house, in the same overgrown cluster of thorned berry bushes I'd hid in as a child, a secret cave at its center invisible to the outside world. As the sun came up, the steam would rise from my damp clothes and unwashed body as I waited for the sound of the car starting and the parents driving past me with the girl. After they'd pulled away, I'd move quickly, dodging from the protection of my cave around to the back of the house, where I'd know I'd be protected from the neighbor's view by the low-hanging avocado tree, which now after the years completely engulfed the back south corner of the house. From here I might work on the laundry room window, safely hidden inside the dense leaves of the tree. I might know the window to be the type opened by a small hand crank. Pushing hard on the upper right hand corner of the crusted aluminum frame, the crank might inch the frosted window open, just as it would have done when I'd returned from my nightly prowls around the neighborhood, peering in windows, as a boy.

Once inside, I wouldn't bother to explore, because I'd know the house would have changed

irrevocably with the influence of the current owners. Instead, I'd go directly to the small bedroom next to the laundry room, which we had once used as a maid's room but became my bedroom when we could no longer afford her. The room would have a sequestered, secret feeling to it, at the far end of the house, and would be infused with the dulled ochre of early morning sunlight filtering in through the unfamiliar lace curtains, appropriate for the room of a young girl.

I might ignore the porcelain curios and the jeweled boxes and paperback books on the white lacquered desk, and the computer and the posters of rock singers. I might be relieved to find the bed in the same corner that mine had always been in, opposite the sliding doors of the closet. The bed would be higher and more resilient than the bed I would have slept in throughout my childhood. Crawling into it fully clothed, I'd pull the lilac scented covers over my tangled hair and rough beard and I'd make a funnel with the sheets, leading outward from my eyes. I'd feel safe in the warm darkness of my lair, the funnel providing me with a view of a tiny patch of wall just next to the closet doors, where the plaster is slightly rougher, and with concentration looks like the surface of the moon or a distant planet in an unknown galaxy. I'd reach my finger up carefully through the dark tube, as if my finger were my body drifting outwards into infinity. I might then stare, letting my eyes go out of focus, losing all sense of myself, past and future.

The girl would be floating in the buoyant hot water of her bath, daydreaming, freed from the constant ache in her knees by the therapeutic heat and lack of gravity. She might be grateful for the fact that she'd eventually recover full use of her legs, though the doctors had said the scars would always remain. Even at such a young age, she'd be mature enough to look at this as a blessing after such a terrible accident, her legs crushed by a car when she'd lost control of her bicycle riding down to the beach with her friends. She would be fantasizing, home from school on a state holiday, as she sings a popular song quietly to herself. At first timidly, but then, emboldened by the resonance the steam of the bath provides, she might sing louder, but with the frailty and weakness that only a young girl's voice could possess. I might then hear her singing, if I were him.

(1993)

A SACRIFICE

The ground is a hard bone shell stretched flat over the desert like petrified hide. The surface is webbed with black hairline cracks leaking cool shadows up from a secret place beneath the earth into the clear white violence of the sun. They work shirtless, like two red ants toiling on a crust of salt, swinging their picks in wide careless arcs in a line that extends out from a fixed point in their stomachs, tethered by the tensed rope of their arms. The polished steel tips of their axes strain like missiles against their trajectory, shooting up from behind their bodies and sweeping over their heads in a parabolic curve that culminates stabbing into the desert with a brutal crunch, releasing a voluptuous suction sound like trapped vapors escaping. Every impact incites an involuntary grunt jerked up from their solar plexus as if they were two pagans drunk with lust, fucking dry holes in the hardened sand. They wouldn't be surprised if the ground gushed blood with each steel intrusion.

A golden fur of jeweled wasps hovers close to the ground in an electrified field, spread out level across the flats, animated and rustling in the parching wind like sulfurized heather.

As they work, the sweat dries on their skin and leaves rings of salt around their torsos in chalked, rippled strata, tracing time on their flesh. They stop at paced intervals and drink water from an old rusted can that smells like gasoline. Often they squirt wine from a gourd held high above their open fish-mouths, washing down greasy chunks of black opium, then return to their labor refreshed, stupefied and methodical, serenaded by the humming dream-psalms of the wasps rising and falling in intensity in response to the wind.

They pierce the crust in a straight course, gradually dislodging thick jagged slabs of desert like pieces of a giant puzzle they lever out of the path of the ditch with crowbars and pile along its edge as they continue clawing the wasted floor, extending a dark strip like carpet unfurling pointlessly out into the blank white plain. As they work, the wasps congregate in the freshly turned dirt behind them in a solemn procession, sucking the last memories of moisture from the exposed earth. Off in the distance, just above the steaming horizon, a red blotch the size of a point on a sheet of paper flutters with the rising heat. They aim their ditch at this point.

This morning when they were dropped off by the truck, the stars were smeared across the black dome above them in wide swathes like titanium paint spread by the dripping hands of a delirious prisoner in

a solitary, lightless cell. The dawn swelled at the edge of the globe, a distant incandescent catastrophe, silhouetting the foreman as he pointed arbitrarily off into the blackness, his eyes squeezed into tight slits and his finger extending out from his arm like a blind man using his body as a compass to locate the source of an echoing sound. Neither of them could see much of anything beyond the white cotton shirts issued them by the contractor and their pale hands gripping the blond wood of the pick-handles before them, but they'd dug toward the general area the foreman had indicated. Then he'd driven off with the rest of the haggard crew, standing, hanging their arms over the wooden railing of the truck looking back at them grimly like prisoners or livestock in some future cannibal world.

The truck disappeared in a carnival of red taillights and cigarettes, levitating on the shimmering blue pool of headlights as it crept silently into the dark towards its multiple destinations of equally mindless and crushing labors. When the sun had risen enough to reveal detail in the emptiness, there sat the surveyor's flag dead on course exactly where the foreman had pointed. After a while, they removed their shirts and tied them around their waists, the caramel light of the early morning cooling and soothing their backs as they worked.

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With no place to hide from the increasing intensity of the sun, and the boredom of just standing

there intolerable, they advance sweating and groaning unconsciously, hacking and prying at the desert crust. Inching steadily towards the flag, their bodies struggle and grind against gravity and resistance, absorbing the heat without feeling as their insides begin to stew. Their minds pump out waves of ornately detailed sensation, fueled by the opium and the wine and the sun, sending them falling through layers of color and warmth that expand as liquid, withdraw, heat, then spread out through their bodies like the exploratory vines of a sexually omnivorous parasite rooted deep in the base of their stomachs, guiding magma streams of pleasure through arid veins and crackling nerves out into their half-numb extremities and fingers, which then tingle with current as if waking from sleep. Exposing the darker sand beneath the dry shell, they imagine they're revealing the course of a subterranean river, mirroring their path a hundred miles down, the ditch tracing the last faint breath of its rising humidity, the fresh moisture of the wound turning to powder quickly in the sun, the whiteness seeping into and replacing the darker sand like water soaking in a reversed negative film.

By the time the sun is directly overhead, they're badly burned but don't notice. They drink more water, wine, and inevitably ingest more opium to combat their growing fever, unaware that their skin is beginning to boil. Even the wasps disappear, hiding from the sun in their networks of tunnels beneath the ground. The silence is broken only by the sensual penetration of their picks sucking into the earth, their shallow breathing — quickened by the building heat

— or the random occasional clang of a crowbar against the steel head of a pick, cracking off into the desert then falling to the ground, dull and lilted, defeated by the weight of the sun, the resonance of the sound swallowed up like a handclap in a padded room. Their noses and cheeks erupt with transparent blisters, shiny with crimson light exuded from the raw meat beneath the tender balloons of skin. Pink bubbles expand hugely from their shoulders and necks, wrinkling in complex patterns agitated by the wind. The hide on the backs of their hands rises up and an oily juice drains out where the skin lifts up, tearing away from the flesh. But they continue working shirtless, oblivious.

The Irishman throws down his pick and stands facing off into the desert as if he were bracing himself against an oncoming wave of white dust. His skin was previously like porcelain, totally without pigment, but now gleams viscid and ruby red against the flaring sand. He holds out his arm, sweeping over the barren panorama theatrically. His wiry long blond hair, his solid square jaw and sparkling blue eyes make him look like a scorched Viking about to let loose with a mirthful soliloquy, beached and alone, surveying the wasted shore laid out before him like a continent of nothing. He sings to it, an asthmatic wheeze issuing from his throat that seems to shock him as it hisses from his mouth. The sound is incinerated instantly by the sun.

“Way down, waaaaaaaay down, waaaaaaaay down....”

Forgetting the words to the song, he lets it trail

off. He sits down on the edge of the ditch staring at a blister on his hand, watching it rise in the heat.

The American lets his pick fall in the dust and looks at him. It dawns on him that his friend's skin looks like bacon.

"I think we better put our shirts on... I wish we could get out of the sun." — the first words he's spoken since they were dropped off by the truck. He sounds like an old woman gurgling her last dying wish.

"What? Yes! What!..." The Irishman doesn't look up. He stares at his hand like a curious fossil dug up in the ditch.

The American repeats himself, carefully articulating the words as if reading from an abstruse textbook. The Irishman is still looking at his hand, turning it over, comparing the pearly color of his palm — each pad torn with perfectly round penny-sized blisters like cherry skins — to the gristly back of it.

"Yes... we... better... get... out... of... the... sun. I don't think I know where I am."

The American walks over to him, leaving a low trail of chalk-colored dust hanging in his wake. His shadow darkens the Irishman so that he seems to be sitting huddled in an amber pouch cut out of the fabric of sunlight. They put on their shirts and drag their tools and the water and the gourd of wine over to the toolbox at the beginning of the ditch at the side of the melting black asphalt road. Their shirts cling to their blisters, some of which burst instantly with friction, blotching the thin white cotton with sticky fluid. The Irishman stands rotating slowly on the axis

of his feet as if his head were a planet dislodged from its orbit — a world of vertiginously shifting planes punished by the relentless solar flood. He looks in both directions down the absurdly tiny black ribbon of road, an impotent scratched line on the face of the desert. He sees no sign of the truck returning.

“We-must-get-out-of-the-sun-now,” he recites like a law of physics he learned somewhere in school, suddenly authoritative and coherent. He’s the older one at 19, and he’s assumed the role of protective older brother though he’s only known the American a few weeks, having met him along the road just outside Istanbul. The American claims to be 18 but looks his true age of 15.

They overturn the toolbox, the size of a traveling trunk, emptying its contents beside the road. The tin sheeting riveted to the wooden box reflects the sun like a polished high-tech mirror, flashing random messages up into space. With the lid open, they prop the box upside down and at enough of an angle to allow them to sit crouched beneath it, hiding in the shade from the sun. The inside of the box smells like motor oil and cement and suntan lotion. Intermittent gusts of wind spray sand up under the lid into their mouths and eyes. They grind it between their teeth and wash it down with wine shot in hard sour jets at close range, swallowing more opium along with the sand.

They wait, the Irishman mumble-singing half-remembered fragments of current pop songs, as if they constituted a running voice-over narrative description of their predicament. The sound of his voice

is hollow and dead beneath the box. They watch the sun moving slowly over the sparkling patch of sand just outside the grey shadows of their shelter. They nod in the enclosed heat like dying flowers, sitting cross-legged and hunched over like the limp bodies of two holy men deep in meditation in a portable cave as their souls fly out over the lifeless desert towards the water.

The foreman's palm slapping the box rousts them from sleep. It explodes in their dazed heads like steel doors slamming. They see his feet before them in the sand, the toes protruding from the plastic sandals huge and calloused, the cracked knuckles powdered with white dust.

"Idée-yotez! Allo! Allo! Come out play now! Iddeyotez!"

The foreman throws the box off them, revealing them for inspection to the sun, like two broiled game animals pulled from their trap in the earth, their features caricatured with red blister sacks as if a possessing demon were straining its fingers against the skin of their faces from within. The workers, penned in the back of the truck, let out an "Ahhh" in unison like an audience overwhelmed with spectacle. The foreman stands above the two boys as they cringe in the light, hands on his hips, performing for the crew.

"You shtoopid two! Geddup now! Geddup! I tell you. Use de hads, wear de shirds, use de crame! Why-you-nod-lissen? I tell you!"

He points to the pile of tools in the sand. Mixed in with the sledges and hammers and crowbars are

two grimy cotton hats, a wrinkled and flaking aluminum tube of sun cream, several sets of massive baked-hard work gloves, and even a few pairs of cheap scratched plastic sunglasses.

Tying this fresh information into their ongoing chain of hallucinations, they get up and each one takes a hat from the pile. They walk over to the truck, where they're helped up by the ragged workers. They hang from the rails along with the others, looking down at the enraged foreman. He stands beaming his disgust up at them and the entire crew. They look like a truckload of dusted lepers corralled for transport to a desolate stone valley off in the wilderness. They deflect the foreman's condemnation with the glazed unblinking eyes of exhausted cattle. The foreman kicks the sand, sending a hive of dust roving off into the desert. He gets into the cab of the truck and signals the driver to start the drive back to the gulf. He leaves the pile of tools where they lay beside the road — there's no one to steal them and he'll send another crew back here in the morning.

By the time they reach the gulf, the sun hangs low in the solid wall of sky, torching a white hole in the deepening blue just above the smooth sand hills that lead off into the Sinai. The water sits expanding out in a still lake, as if the sand had melted and flowed down filling the bay with liquid glass. The foreign workers climb down from the truck and congregate on the hot asphalt around the cab, waiting for the foreman to pay them for the day's work and to pick the laborers that can return tomorrow. Everyone is picked except the Irishman and the American.

“You two, you go home now,” says the foreman, waving his arm out from the window like a farmer shooing some chickens away from his truck, hazing them off towards their countries, continents away.

The truck heads in towards the town, leaving the indigent crew on the road that ends at the edge of the beach. The rest of the crew wander off across the sand along the beach towards the vagrants’ encampment, a scattering of homemade tents made from filthy sheets, torn t-shirts, and sun-bleached cardboard that sits like a small garbage dump at the base of the hills that feed down from the desert and empty into the flat turquoise water of the gulf. They look like a sun-crazed pack of dog-men as they shuffle aimlessly away in the ankle-deep tides of glittering silicon. The sand quickly roasts their feet and sends them kicking weakly through the listless waves that feed quietly onto the shore. The skin of the foreign workers is brown leather and their hair and beards are matted with salt from their sweat and the white dust which forms a ghost patina on everything. Most of them are irremediably addicted to opium, though some manage to scrounge syringes and locate in the town the glassine packets that feed their heroin addiction.

The American and the Irishman walk in the opposite direction along the beach, towards the cafe that empties out from the vacant tourist hotel. Along the way, they stop to wade out into the tepid water. Metallic fish shaped like silver valentine hearts dart at the fluttering cloth of their submerged pant legs, pulsing rainbows as they attack. Sometimes a fish

finds an exposed toe protruding from a sandal and bites it painlessly, almost playful, like a child's weak fingernail pinch.

As they wade out further into the water, their legs refract out like giant stilts spread at wide angles beneath the surface. The dust melts from their clothes and floats in a white cloud around them. Their boiled flesh stings in the salt but it feels good, antiseptic.

Eventually they stand with the water up to their necks. Their heads float like inflated balls on the silver surface as they look out across the dazzled sheet towards Aqaba, in the east, opposite the Sinai, nestled in the enfolding umber hills that cup it like a toy city in semitic hands, spilling it out towards the open mouth of the gulf. A single rope of smoke rises from its center, twisting and unraveling up into the utterly cloudless sky, now graduating from pale blue to luxurious purple as the sun sets into the scorched embankments gouged out of the Sinai, in the west.

They wade out of the water and sit on the beach, squeezing the last wine from the water-slicked gourd, flavored with juice leached from the leather. The air is still hot enough that by the time they reach the cafe their clothes are no longer dripping, just pleasantly damp. A German hippie, barely groomed and shaved enough to merit his job as waiter (though he sleeps in the encampment with the rest of the foreign workers, and is himself a junky), approaches them at their table at the edge of the concrete slab beneath the corrugated green plastic roofing. He sets their gear down beside them — two sleeping bags and a small duffle bag — and they pay him for watching it

during the day. They wash down the last oily black pebbles of opium with lukewarm beer and sit watching the sun set and the color drain from the sky. The water changes from turquoise to velvet blue to mirror black, reflecting the lights of the tourist hotel like handfuls of stained glass fragments tossed onto an obsidian table, rimmed at the edges with a hem of phosphorescent white foam.

Later they lay on their sleeping bags on the beach, their scalded flesh glistening like pink salmon meat in the silver light of the stars. Each of them keeps a pocketknife open beside his head, in case of attack by predator junkies in their sleep. The Irishman is sleeping spread out, flat on his back like a mummified corpse in a glass case waiting patiently to be lifted up to heaven on a stairway of moonlight. The American, awake with alternating waves of fear and fever, sees a black shape approaching along the sand. At first he's not sure if it exists or he's hallucinated it in the darkness, so he watches it without breathing, motionless, his knife in his hand as it creeps forward. It seems to be floating just above the ground, as if it were drawn forward on rails. As it gets closer, just a few feet away, he sees its red rat eyes.

"Hey! Hey!" he shouts at it, to sound threatening. It stops, looking at him, appraising. He gets up and runs towards it, scooping up handfuls of sand along the way. When he's about to overtake it, he throws both handfuls into its face. It disappears, shrinking into itself, a black melon-sized oval instantly reduced to a single kernel of evil that flies buzzing out over the gulf.

He returns to his bag and lays down. The fogged light of the stars rains down on the agonized planes of his skin, passing through him. He looks over at the Irishman — still sleeping, mouthing formless words in a comatose dream. The waves regurgitate a few yards down the beach from their feet, swallowed by the sand. The moon hovers full just above the black horizon line of the water, a murderer in garish clownface, watching, spraying glitter out its mouth across the mirror.

Sometime in the night, the American wakes to see a bonfire as big as a house burning down the beach off towards the vagrants' encampment. He clutches his knife in his fist, frozen. Sparks swirl up like flocks of crazed miniature birds escaping from hell through a fissure opened in the earth, igniting as they funnel up into the vaulted blackness. Knots of fire explode like flung handfuls of flaming snakes spitting out from the infernal core. Shadow figures stand in a circle staring into the flames, chanting and shouting drunkenly. A phlegm-throated chorus unravels circular melodies, muffled by the velvet cloak of darkness encroaching around the perimeters of the glow. The song evokes a celebration, but also seems to auger a final malevolence, a sacrifice.

Squatting at the edge of the banks leading down to the beach, just outside the circle of light, the leader of the proceedings looks down with the reflective ebony eyes of a stallion. Its human torso grows out from the body of a bull. Its face is a human mask, as if the peeled and dried skin of a corpse were stretched across the frame of its skull. The eyes drink

in the light of the fire as if it were gorging itself at a fountain of blood. The mouth is torn into a smile, the cavern entrance that leads down to the black cisterns in its insides. The American feels himself drawn into its mouth, flung down into the pit of its guts where he screams, muted and hopeless. He drifts in and out of sleep, his knife ready in case they come for him. Once he wakes to see the creature pointing towards him, its face lit with ruby light. But sleep protects him, and he lets his body fall through fever canyons flashing from hot to cold as he twists, dreamless.

He wakes in the first greys of morning, the fever broken, the light soaking up from behind the hills. If he strains his hearing, he can detect the last grains of the sound of the amplified call to prayers echoing across the water from Aqaba. The dimmed static of the waves frames the silence. He gets up and walks across the sand. It feels like a cool liquid between his toes.

When he gets to the spot where he'd hallucinated the fire, he's surprised to see that there actually is a smoldering black pit where he'd dreamed it, the sand disturbed around it as if by a crowd. He hurries back towards their place on the beach to wake his friend and show him.

For the first time since waking, he looks at the Irishman. Just beneath the chin, a neat red wedge has been carved into his neck, exposing the shiny interior meat of his throat to the light. Otherwise he lays there just as he had in sleep, flattened out on his back as if presented, like a specimen. The knife is gone from beside his head, stolen along with their bag.

The American looks at his friend for a while, memorizing, then rolls up his sleeping bag. He delicately pulls his shirt on over his blisters, then walks down the beach towards the road that leads north, where he waits at the stop for the bus that should arrive any minute.

(1994)

DEFLOWERED

The blood comes from my stomach in short aches. Warm syrup bubbles out from between my fingers. My feet are numb, distant, fishlike, but my body remains standing, balancing on rote memory, despite my need to fall. The waves break onto the road, throwing ice crystals across the air. The frozen spray falls down my face in clear unfurling sheets, but it feels hot. I'm singing — no words, just the phrase “Na na na na na na” over and over, slow and flat, without a melody. The sensation the sound makes in my mouth gives me pleasure, soothes me like a drug, though I can't hear it above the gravel of the waves. Out on the edge of the sea, an oil derrick tilts, jerking with the swells, drunk on the concentrated energy of the storm. A wave claws at my knees, trying to pull me back out to its sinkhole beneath the surface. Eventually I might follow it home, tangled, dreaming in the weeds.

The road had arched up in a steady rhythm of hills and troughs, shining silver like a snake as it slid north along the edge of the rain forest, tracing the contours of the coast. As I walked, descending weightless into a trough, I'd lose sight of the horizon, surrounded on one side by the churning greens of the forest and on the other by the tilting steel wall of water. A disc of clear turquoise spun with hawks and gulls above me. The dull vertigo of the Seconal combined with the warm wine made me think the whole swirling mess of reality would come tumbling down on me like sand into a tunnel. Then I'd rise up on elastic legs as if the road itself were a wave in the sea and I'd scan the twisting line ahead for signs of change in the distance — a car flashing like a tiny shell, a road sign ringed with reflectors, a dark smear of flattened roadkill, or I hoped, eventually, the scattered beginnings of the next town.

The last car had passed an hour ago in a burst of chrome and mirrors. A sneering gaggle of children contorted their drooling mouths against the rear window as I chased stumbling. I fell into the wet grass along the side of the road, panting, watching them rise and fall as they disappeared up the road, getting smaller with each rise.

Then I noticed her, sitting with her back against a tree looking out at the ocean, her bare feet snuggled in beneath a thick blanket of pine needles, her fringed suede jacket stained dark with dew. Red hair erupted from her scalp in snarls of rusted wire, spilling over her shoulders in knotted clumps of barbed fiber, adorned with twigs and leaves as if she'd been sleep-

ing in the brush. It flickered with sea mist, lightly sprinkled with glitter. Resting like a child in the arms of these twisted vines, where the ropes of hair mixed with the fringe of her jacket, her breasts rose naked like a sacrifice offered up to the light, like two huge peeled eggs, plump and melting in the weak warmth of the sun, threaded with a faint map of blue veins. She turned to me and smiled. Her mouth was a wreck of browned and blackened claws, but her tongue was pale pink beneath them, gleaming like the last surviving innocent animal in a universe of scum. Steam rose from her insides, drifting up into the trees.

I went back and got my bag, then spread out a place beside her in the pine needles and grass. I used my bag as a backrest and looked out at the same imaginary point on the horizon, where the sea blended with the sky, that she seemed to be looking at, stoned, as if Isolde were a vampire wolf waiting for her meal. Smoke rose from her white bony fingers, fanned out like crab legs in the undergrowth. The nails were long and painted purple, perfectly filed and shiny, and littered with little gold stick-on stars, as if she'd just been attended-to by a manicurist high on LSD.

She held a smoking joint tweezed between two fingers. She passed it to me — soaked in opium, she said. I passed her the wine, mixed with my spit by now.

We drank and smoked, watching the horizon and the shapeless glow of the sun behind the grey fog, curving downward towards the edge of the earth, where it ultimately would pull darkness in behind it. The first glimpse of the storm was just a dark blotch

on the sky, creeping above the sea far to the south. Slowly, my mind emptied out, like blood flowing from a wound into the dirt.

She looked to her right, away from me, back up into the woods, then laughed as if she'd just read some instruction on the leaves. She laid her hand out like a shrunken infant, a writhing discarded curiosity I was supposed to pick up and keep warm. She led me back into the trees, floating. Our bags stayed where they were. She trailed the wine.

Fanged branches clutched at my face and hair, the mud sucked and chewed at my feet, and I fell rather than walked as she led me through the forest. The trees ran with sap, hunched over like emerald-haired mammoths dripping with weight. I drank the air, saturated with bitter dew and the gas rising from the mulch. My clothes bled from my body, drenched with clammy sweat and steam. My shoes were stolen and devoured by the mud. My shirt disintegrated, dripping from my back. My feet were shredded by sharpened sticks and bones concealed in the muck. My nostrils and mouth harbored feeding hives of gnats and mosquitoes. Twisting walls of poison vines rose up like cyclones funneling down from the dense mesh of the forest canopy.

We came to a gully. A shallow river drifted flat and silent through its crease. The banks were wide and smooth. The packed black clay glistened with sweat. Here the light filtered through the ceiling like a vast atrium. The vapors rising from the river gave body to luminous slabs and planes, curling with smoke. She pulled me through a final wall of stinging

thorns and weeds and sat me on a rock as she undressed. My body was a strand of lint, rippling in the fermented breeze.

The river flowed in slow motion. The slicked glass surface danced with a low-hanging fog of gnats. Foaming clusters of nicotine-colored froth huddled around the edges of the debris that broke through the reflective skin — a tortured branch fallen from the forest dome above, now draped in greasy curtains of moss; a gas can blackened and caked with silt; an unwinding bale of chicken wire plastered with rotting black leaves and decorated with jellied tails of clinging toilet paper. The paper was everywhere along the river, drooling from anything solid enough to stick onto, seeping garishly with incongruous color — bright yellow, sky blue, pink, bleach white — as if a tribe of excremental ghouls had recently migrated upstream, leaving these glutinous party streamers strung like mucus in their wake, wilting. The river was piss, flecked with drifting specs of disintegrating shit.

She stood naked, glowing like a giant worm against the fluorescent hyper-green backdrop of breathing leaves. Each follicle of her hair radiated out from a core of light compacted in the center of her skull, shooting out from her head like a million charged and squirming tentacles, like creeping filaments of electric red and phosphorescent orange. She signaled me with her eyes up the river, amused.

“There’s a town up there somewhere,” she said. Her voice hung between us in a cloud of inert molecules, then sifted down like talc, soaking moisture from the air.

She laid herself out, a soft mass of white on the hard black silt. Her legs were spread open and bent at the knees, splayed like the rigidifying and distended corpse of an unrepentant nymphomaniac, staring fish-eyed up to heaven at a leering god, inviting him to come down and taste her ripening contempt. Moisture crept to the surface of the clay around the outlines of her body, prismatic with oil, like the polished shadow of an aura. Her vascular system was crimson beneath her transparent skin, a blinding frenetic network of molten streams. Her cunt was shaved bald. The lips were the parted entrance to a buried crucible of light. Her hand stretched out across the distance to where I sat and pulled me to her.

I stood above her now, dissolving. My body was an effigy of my real body, hollow, loosely inflated skin. She peeled my pants away, cradling my genitals in her hand like an animal stolen from its nest, cringing. My cock expanded slightly, hunched over and listless, like a penitent monk. She pulled me down to her, folding me in like a nursing infant, feeding in the limp cord. She pumped mechanically. I sailed her heaving flesh, spineless. The trees bent over us, kneeling, licking my back with their fingers. Mosquitoes nested in my ears, sucking juice from my mind. I opened my eyes and looked at her face. Her mouth was stretched wide, reeking. Her tongue lathered my face. Her teeth were pointed razors. They snared the root of my neck, pulling my head down into her throat. She drank my liquid eyes. My sperm emptied into her.

She pushed me away, laughing. She stood up, looking up the hill at a crest in the woods. Her boyfriend stood there backlit by the sinking sun, holding up my bag like a trophy — “We got fifty dollars! Fifty dollars!”

As she dressed, ignoring me, I tried to grab her. She took a small penknife from her jacket and worked it quickly in between my stomach muscles, then pushed me back. I fell into the river. It was comfortable and warm, like simmering honey. I lay there watching the vines creep down to kiss me. Eventually, I heard a truck engine ignite, then roar. When I finally made it onto the road, they were just a black shape, shrinking. I felt the storm surge, then wrap itself around my naked skin in lashing sheaths of ice.

(1993)

THE YOUNG BOY

Still a young boy, I stood naked in the cell, a gift from heaven carved in alabaster. Girlish and barely pubescent, my skin glowed, pure and creamy, an opal shell lit from inside by the cold light of my unviolated innocence. A silky blond tuft of angel's hair grew clustered just above my genitals, floating like a holy crown. My body relaxed as if sleeping as I stared down meditating on a secret place on the floor. My long silver hair fell in streams before my eyes with the iridescence of a waterfall. Tears gathered at my feet, drawn together like mercury in a small mirrored pool on the oily black surface of the concrete. A single pale blue eye stared back up at me from the pool. Hypnotized by the eye, my body swayed in the moonlight that entered through the small barred rectangle in the steel door.

Outside, the moon rose above the black wooded hills and flooded the courtyard of the prison. Arms

dangled limply through the openings in the cell doors that surrounded the courtyard. Fingers gathered in the light, as if it were a clear liquid narcotic. I imagined that after being drawn into their cells, this intoxicant was drunk furtively from cupped palms, the prisoners squatting in a dark corner as they sipped.

The prisoners in my cell watched me from their beds, the rough wool blankets pulled up to their chins. The blankets were ripe with years of sweat, musk, and oils, the smell sealed in with the weekly blizzard of DDT the guards inflicted on our stripped bodies, our clothing, our personal effects, and our bedding.

Across the courtyard, a prisoner was being tortured. According to standard practice, his wrists had been tied to his ankles and a pole had been slid in beneath this knot. Lifted in the air by a guard on either side of the pole, his body was spun as he was beaten with a club. In between times, when the guards tired of spinning him, the soles of his feet were burned with cigarettes. The screams, as with most of the new prisoners, were muffled and resigned, subdued, to demonstrate total compliance. The screams were almost never expressive, rarely more than what seemed a cursory acknowledgment of the personal subjugation of the process. It was a ritual that was best endured passively, an initiation into the mute boredom and coming regimentation of institutionalized life.

When they'd finished their work on the victim, I watched as the guards ambled across the courtyard, the moon casting long gesturing black shadows be-

hind them on the white stones. When they entered the door that led into the administration building, the night went silent except for the low residual moans of the tortured man.

I turned from the scene in the courtyard. The prisoners in my cell were hovering around me, closing in. Their blankets shrouded their heads, hanging loose from their shoulders. They looked like leprous savages emerging from the woods, or evil monks drawn to a bloody sacrament. Each one held a weapon — a toothbrush filed to a point, a razor-sharp spoon, torn strips of cloth to be used as a garrote. I backed against the cold metal door and waited.

(1993)

VARIOUS TRAPS, SOME WEAKNESSES, ETC.
(1983 – 1986)

A CONTRACT

I'm in a situation where I can't resist. I'm not sure if I want to fight back. The only reason to defend myself would be if I were told to defend myself, in order to amuse or edify one of them.

I have an instinct — a vague desire — to retain a sense of myself. I don't know if I've been manipulated into thinking in this way. I'm trying to imagine that I'm the only thing that ever has or will exist. If I can do that then I can get rid of myself.

I can't concentrate. When a thought comes into my mind, it warps and stretches out of its initial shape, changes into something else before I have a chance to recognize it as something I've made. I presume that I remember things, but I'm not certain. I don't know if what I'm thinking is random (mine), or what I'm supposed to be thinking, in order to satisfy their desires, to fulfill the prescribed influence of the environment they've put me in. I don't know where

they stop and I begin. I don't want to know, but I persist anyway — probably because it pleases them for me to persist, manipulated.

I'm lying on the bed, thinking nothing, listening to the muted rhythm of their voices through the wall. Occasionally I let my mind focus, notice the sound of their voices forming my name. They're deciding something, developing a strategy that, depending on the nature of my voluntary/involuntary response to the stimulus they provide, will determine how long I'm allowed to live.

The girl/boy creature comes in, naked. The marks are there from the last time it was in here: deep red open scratches across its chest, leading down to its hairless abdomen, like crimson furrows gouged into white spongy soil; an open sore where the nipple was ripped away from its left breast-pouch; a large brown-blue bruise spreading up from its crotch onto its lower stomach, like a huge ugly hand, so saturated with color as to appear painted onto the skin, separate from the actual flesh.

The thing stands there docile, waiting, looking down at me on the bed, watching as my erection grows.

Looking at the creature, I feel what it's feeling: a stinging rawness winding up through its intestines, forming a locus of intense, nullifying pain in its solar plexus. This translates into a compressed sphere of concentrated pain in the center of my skull, where my perception of the creature's physical appearance registers itself. This is what they'd like me to believe is "compassion", but it's really a symptom of my mind

decomposing, or so I believe, or so they'd like me to believe.

The hardness strains between my legs. The girl/boy is delicate and vulnerable. Its wounds shimmer and change colors like an exotic bird signaling an erotic opportunity. I call up the memory of its body as it was previous to its last encounter with me — I remember, destroying my awareness of myself as I am now: I had beaten its soft flesh slowly, methodically, drugged, my fists feeling nothing. Then, as it groaned and whimpered with what could be mistaken for pain or pleasure, I sodomized it, the sound of my fists clubbing against its back, reverberating in rhythm with each stroke as I pressed my cock into its pliant hole.

After the creature had left, I tried to remember what I'd done, and as the image of what had happened floated across the surface of my memory, I couldn't remember if it had actually happened, and if it had, what had motivated me. I don't remember now if I had imagined myself in the scene, or if the pleasure I felt was really a distortion of the real event, wherein I was the object of abuse. It could be a fake memory, created by someone else, to gain pleasure from my suffering.

I don't remember if I felt pleasure or pain or indifference as I stood looking down at its battered and torn body on the floor. I don't know if I was ordered to do it and I obeyed, or if I was overcome by the same murderous lust I feel welling up inside me now. I don't know if the thing manipulated me into beating it and torturing it to satisfy its own lust, or to

satisfy the faction of itself that had been shaped by them into a need requiring that it be brutalized. I don't know if I've been conditioned into believing that the event took place, whereas in reality, I may have nothing to do with it, the memory having been planted in my mind, the creature's entering now serving as a substantiation of my (fictional) involvement in the act.

I have no choice but to assume it actually occurred. I was seduced, goaded into it. It threatened me in some way, then enjoyed the pain I caused it, transforming it to pleasure. It is an absolute slave and can't differentiate between beaten and being fed.

The last time it was in here it had long blond hair that fell down straight to the base of its spine like fine strands of silk. Now its hair is black and shines with oil. Before I ruined the face, its skin had been clear and polished — the luminous complexion of a child. Now the face has been burned, cut, disfigured. The nose is broken, hanging off to one side. The left eye has been cut out — the empty hole drains a thick yellow fluid. The lips are swollen and cracked, bleeding thin red juice.

The creature holds a knife in its left hand, pretending to sharpen its against its right arm. In the right hand, extended towards me, it holds a small clear glass beaker, half-full with a clear liquid.

The thing moves towards me. I'm not sure how to respond. I get up from the bed and stand facing it, my erection raised up in the empty space between us. The creature strokes it gently with the dull back-edge of the knife. The coldness of the blade numbs me.

It lifts the bottle up to my face, gesturing for me to drink. I feel like I'm now supposed to determine if its been sent here to fuck me, manipulate me in some way, kill me, or supplicate itself to me. It could be any or none of these possibilities. I have to figure out the proper response to whatever occurs.

I don't know how to think. My mind feels slow, as if I'm struggling to imagine myself in a dream. Whatever I do has to be to my advantage, but it can't appear that way. I have to second-guess myself as well as them (or the "them" I've been forced to falsely imagine — the picture of "them" they want me to see), because they could be using me, or the "me" they've made, against myself, the "self" they've decided to destroy.

If the creature has been sent to kill me, I might try to kill it, or laugh, or talk to it, reason with it, convince it of our mutual interests.

If it's been sent to talk to me, to soothe me, I might rape it, choking its soft neck. Or I might become submissive, get down on my hands and knees and beg it to help me, licking its feet, pleading with it to show me how to act.

If it's been sent to fuck me or manipulate me, I might grab the knife away from it and rip my bed into shreds, or I might kiss it gently on the mouth, sucking the blood from its tender lips.

If it's here to make itself available to me, to be used by me, I have to remember what it is I want from it (I can't remember), or find out if what I want is actually what I want or is what the creature wants or has been manipulated into "wanting" by them.

I don't know which course of action would satisfy them or me. Each option seems to have countless ramifications of itself, each one worse or better than the one before or after it.

I have to make a decision. I don't know why. I don't know what I'll do next. If I'm being manipulated, I'm not necessary to myself, or them. If I'm not necessary, what's the use of manipulating me?

The thing is holding out its hand, offering me the liquid. I take it. It's oddly warm. The creature tells me to drink. Its voice is gentle, the syllables smoothed over with unquestioning love.

My first instinct is to pour the bottle out on the floor.

I drink it. I don't know why. I wonder if I've just drunk poison, or a drug. It could be plain water, used as a neutral placebo, in order to heighten my sense of vulnerability.

Smiling faintly, a smile that seems to convey a conspiracy between us, and at the same time is meant to convey to them, looking through the hole in the wall, its newfound strength and victory over me, the girl/boy walks confidently up to me and wraps its arms around me with the familiarity of a trusted lover. Rising to its toes, it whispers in my ear.

"You've just swallowed poison. It will kill you in an hour. If you please me, I'll give you the antidote and you'll live. Take the knife and cut off your right hand. Then I'll give you the antidote."

It said this as if it had memorized the words and was simultaneously mocking the speech as it made it, revealing the lie in it to me as it was spoken.

I suck gently on the soft skin of the creature's neck. My face brushes against its face. A thick fluid — the drainage from the empty eye — clings to my cheek.

With one hand, it gently strokes my erection while the other hand places the knife-handle in my palm, then closes my fingers around it.

I decide to stab the creature in the throat. Instantly it seems to sense this, as if reading my mind, and it steps back.

I sit down on the floor, not sure of what I'm doing, where I am.

I spread my hand out on the floor in front of me. I use the knife, feeling nothing, cutting through the bone and muscle at the wrist. My hand is separate from my body, sitting there, the fingers curled in on themselves, an object like other objects. The blood flows out of my arm onto the floor. I'm standing there above myself watching myself through the girl/boy's eyes, watching the blood run out of my arm, red on the white linoleum.

The possibility occurs to me that I've only drunk water, not poison, that I've been manipulated into cutting my off hand uselessly, so they could watch me bleed, just to see how it looked, how I'd react.

Later, I wake up. My wrist is bandaged. My hand is connected to my arm. Only a small gash, already healing, is visible when I remove the bandage. I look down between my legs, feeling empty. My genitals have been cut away, or there was always an emptiness there — I don't know, I can't remember.

I look around me, for something to recognize,
to anchor me. I'm in a different room. I don't know if
I remember it. I don't know how to act. I can't make
a move without wondering why or if I made it.

(1986/1994)

BLOODSUCKER

I hear your voice while I'm sleeping. I'm not sure if I'm dreaming, or if you're standing above me taking advantage of my susceptibility to suggestion. Your thick voice crushes my body. You press me down. I'm sweating, wrapped inside the rubber sheet you seal me into each night. My mind's weak. I'm incapable of resistance. Your voice covers me in the dark. I wrap it around me like the rubber sheet you use to wrap my body. Your voice invades my body. The heat of your voice warms my body as it weakens it. My skin is your skin.

Your face is hanging over my face, glowing slightly in the dark. You're disembodied. I'm encased in what feels like fat. I've been disemboweled. My throat's been cut. Beneath the rubber sheet, I'm swimming in my body's waste. I open my mouth so you can stick your tongue in me. I'm completely yours. As your face covers mine, I feel your knife

puncture, then slip into my chest. I'm looking into your eyes, drowned by your strength. Later, bound up in the rubber sheet, hanging by my ankles in the corner, I feel loved, as my blood and refuse fall across my face onto the floor. I'm completely open to you.

You leave me alone in my corner for several hours. The blood drains out of my body. My flesh cools. I'm conscious of myself hanging in the corner, and the sound of laughter in the other room. You're drunk. When you tell your friend how you finished me off, you choke on your words like a dog chokes on meat. I'm swaying. The floor's falling away from me. I'm conscious of my flesh being food. I'm aching to be eaten. I want to feel myself slide down into your stomach, the source of your voice. I need your strength.

You're pulling me against your body. I feel my bones breaking. My back's bent backwards until it snaps. My neck's tied to my heels. You're shaping my body to fit your needs. You're singing to yourself, soothing me, as you inspect the package you've made of my body. I'm inert. I'm yours.

I'll do anything for you. I don't exist outside the perimeters of your needs. My body doesn't exist until it's violated by your body. I'm unable, unwilling to move, become conscious of myself, without your direction. When your hands aren't on me, I don't feel anything. When you fuck me, burying me in the bed, I use your skin to define where I end.

My skin's rubber. When you claw me, the lacerations you leave behind don't bleed. My heart's soft for you. When you suck my eyes, you can taste how I see you. I need you to seal me in, so I won't

think, and lock me away. You're pulling me into you. I'm gorged, sinking into your belly. I don't feel myself when I'm inside you. I need you to order my time, my movements, my mind. I don't feel anything unless you feel it for me. When you claw me, when you penetrate me, when you open up, I feed on your pleasure. I'm empty inside you.

(1984)

A WOMAN

He's looking down my dress. He can see my breasts. He wants to hurt me, hang me with the noose that's in his hand. He's mocking me with it, swinging it in front of my face, showing me that if I go with him, he'll hang me with it after we fuck. I'm not sure if I want him to hurt me. I know that when he pushes his cock into me it will hurt when it hits my uterus. His cock fills me up and makes me another person, subject to his desire, his violence. He's going to call his friends over and invite them to gang rape me, then hang me while they masturbate in harmony with my suffering. I'm prey. I'm constantly hunted. I keep my head down, trying to obscure myself, trying to sink into the wall. They always smell me. My ass gives off a scent. I can't get rid of it. Men smell me. They want to fuck me, obliterate me, once the smell's reached the nerves inside their heads. They want to fuck me, rip me to shreds. I have to steel myself, be more clever than they are. I use my scent as a lure (a kind of

weapon). I lead them to a cliff, then I push them off. As they fall, they can't believe what's happened to them. They scream in stupid male agony. They've been had. Sometimes they get the better of me. Then I'm tortured, cut, disregarded after being used. Someone's going to hang me. Some man will follow me and string me up in his shed. He may as well kill himself, because once I've been wiped out, I'm of no use to him, and he needs me. He needs my smell in his head. When I die, my smell will shift into decay and choke his desire. His desire is putrid, ugly. Mine's justified, because my cunt has to be filled. My cunt smells like death, because it was made to choke cocks. I deserve to be hanged, eviscerated, my feet and hands cut off, because I'm a woman. My body should be left to hang in a dark room until it gets ripe, until the smell is physical and solid. When he comes in and puts his hands on me, cuts me down and lays me out on the floor, my corpse mouth will moan for him to fuck me. My smell will press him into my corpse while he fucks me. The words I lick into his ear will kill him slowly while he fucks my body.

(1984)

YOU

My head is between my legs. My back's bent. I'm limp. I feel myself: I'm a spiral. I enclose myself, then lose myself, then enclose myself again. The air I inhale sedates me as it infests my blood.

I have to stand up. I can't control my limbs. When I lift my left arm, my right arm falls, pulling the rest of me down with it. My bones are soft. They bend beneath the weight of my body. I have to move. I slide along the floor. I'm a snake. I press my tongue out onto the floor for guidance. I can taste where your feet have been. I look up at you in the other room through the half-open doorway. You're sitting at your desk talking on the telephone. I slide myself towards you. You notice me, but ignore me. I'm at your feet, looking up the underside of your desk. My hands are between my legs, protecting myself, warming myself. Some words are carved into the pale wood on the underside of the desk: "Get rid of him." I hear the

repetitive scratch of the voice in the telephone: "I hate him." Your voice is soft and thick in response. I can't define the words. They fall against my skin in slow, deliberate waves. I rest my head on your feet, looking up at you. You reach down, winding a strand of my hair around your finger.

You hang up the telephone. I pull my knees up into my chest, trying to compact myself. My body is a smooth sphere, my genitals exposed, hanging out onto the floor. I hear the faint cracking of your bones as you bend over me, then the warmth of your mouth surrounding my genitals. I'm passive as you feed on me.

You pick me up and throw me over your shoulder. My white liquid is draining from the corners of your mouth. I have no ambition, no fear, no will to live. I'm sucking your breast as you carry me. Your milk bleeds directly down into my stomach. My stomach swells, stretches. I'm pregnant with your milk. I'm drugged.

You lay me out on the bed. I watch your shape pull away from me, preparing the box in the center of the room, tamping the blankets and cushions along the inside walls. I fall asleep.

I wake up inside the box. It's black inside, a sliver of light entering through a crack in the corner. I reach my hand up to it. The light catches on the knuckles. The rest of the hand is in darkness. It's not my hand. It doesn't belong to me. I'm in a separate world. I try to remember where I was before. I can't. I don't remember what I feel like outside of this. I'm studying the shape (my knuckles) in the column of

light. A finger emerges, a serpent drawing itself out of water. I turn it towards myself. It disappears as I bring it closer to my face. I run it along the skin of my cheek, pressing in to see where I end. I insert it in my mouth, sliding it across the rough surface of my tongue, sucking as I regain consciousness. I feel my face stretching.

I'm gradually aware of two things: a constant low frequency roar, and the steady increase of the temperature inside the box. I close in on myself, pulling my knees up to my chest, pressing my head down in between my knees. The box fills with smoke. I feel my skin burning. I try to cease breathing without losing consciousness. I concentrate on one thought, eliminating everything else from my mind: you.

(1985)

THE INITIATE

I'm naked, on my hands and knees, crawling down the hallway towards the incinerator. I'm boiling, I'm sweating, the leash around my neck is choking me; I want to burn. My master, the cop, is digging into my back with his steel claws. I feel all five of them. Each claw makes a separate canal in my flesh. He's holding the leash tight, pulling the choker when I rebel. He's shouting down at me: "Move, dog! Crawl! Hurt!..." His big mouth opens wide when he shouts. Stale, heavy gas comes up from his stomach and forms a cloud around my head. His guts smell like bilious hunger. I want to burn, and smell my flesh burning as I burn. The hallway is shifting sideways. When the cop shouts, it knocks against the walls then slams into my head. I can hear my breathing. It's amplified a hundred times. It's the breath of a mechanical beast exhaling steam. My breath comes back at me and grinds me into the concrete floor. I stop moving. I've lost strength. My arms and legs have collapsed. My

head's resting sideways on the hot concrete, my tongue hanging out of my mouth. My tongue's swollen, ready to burst. I look up. The cop's looking down at me, the fire from the incinerator reflected in his eyes. He flicks lightly at my tongue with his boot, smiling, showing mock compassion. I try to pull my tongue back into my mouth so I can form words. I want to apologize, assure him that I'm trying to get up strength. I want to burn. He raises his boot. I feel my tongue smashed into a pulp. The incinerator's roaring. The cop's face is deep orange. His shadow on the wall behind him is huge, the arms swinging down onto his head as he beats me. When I wake up, I'm suspended by ropes in front of a mirror. I'm naked. My genitals have been cut away. The word "crawl" has been carved into my chest. I hate my body. I don't want to look at it. When I try to turn my head away, I can't: the tendons in my neck have been cut. When I try to close my eyes, I can't: my eyelids have either been forced open or removed. I hate my mind. I hate my body. I'm trapped staring at my carcass. The sound of my breathing is torture. I try to stop breathing. I can't. I can't escape myself. Several policemen come in. They stand around me in a semi-circle, discussing the shape and contours of my flesh. One of them takes a knife from his pocket and carves a slice of meat from my thigh. They pass it around, each one tasting it turn. I'm happy to have them eating me. Eventually I'll disappear. As I dissipate, they'll grow stronger. I feel myself pouring into them.

(1984)

THE IDEAL WORKER

At work, I'm dead flesh, waiting to be eaten. I enjoy feeling that way. I want someone else to inhabit my body. I want them to use me. My time, otherwise, is useless. When I'm given a specific task, I'm not punished with my mind, which I despise. I need my superiors because they save me from myself. My only ambition is to become more pliable, more inert. I want my mind to be open to my superiors. I want them to be able to read it at all times. Then they'll punish me for my involuntary hatreds. If they punish me correctly, they'll wipe my mind clean. That will feel good.

(1984)

THE WHORE BOY

I'm waiting for someone to ride me. I'm on my hands and knees. My naked ass is sticking up in the air in a roomful of clothed men. Their businessman's shoes are shined and I can see the distorted reflection on my face as I bend down to lick. I've put myself in this position because I enjoy the power I acquire through self-denigration. Once these men think I'm no better than meat, I have the advantage. They drain their sperm into my ass one by one. I enjoy the pain I steal from their pleasure in hurting me. After they're finished with me, they spit on me, then they dress me and push me out the door. Riding home in the cab, I'm drenched in the smell of my asshole and my sweat. I enjoy the thought of the cab driver smelling it also. When I'm upstairs safe in my apartment, I squat over my frying pan and release their sperm and my shit. I let it simmer over the fire, mixed with wine. As I eat, I play

the scene over again in my mind, ingesting each man,
one by one.

(1984)

DEFEATED

I'm in the hallway, my hands are hidden. I'm afraid of recognizing myself. The walls reflect me. They know me, think for me, remember for me. I know myself, so I despise myself. I'm unable to forgive myself. I'll commit murder. I'm capable of a premeditated act of cruelty, torture, just to see what's it's like, just to see what I become. The world's an immediate extension of my thoughts, my self hatred. I cut myself off.

They're in the room at the end of the hall, feeding on each other, sucking, sweating into each others' mouths, penetrating. They're larvae. They are undulating worms. They're monsters. I'm insane, I'm inverting myself. I'm twisting like mud between my fingers. I'm malleable, shaped, soft. I'll kneel here, pressing my face to the damp carpet, and watch them through the crack beneath the door. The perspective is warped. Their feet are grossly oversized, their

heads are tiny. Their bed is an altar, built of stone.

The television provides the light in the room, beside their bed. The light blankets their bodies. It's my face in the television. My mouth is opening and closing, slowly shaping words I can't hear. I don't remember what I'm thinking. When they grope each other, I feel their hands on me. I'm writhing inanely. My body's activated with hatred and lust. I can't tolerate it. I stand up and pound on the door.

(1985)

A MAN

I've structured my time. There's no room to move. I know everything. An unexpected experience is an intrusion on my autonomy. My body's an intrusion on my mind. I don't remember standing where I am. My body's dragging me down with it. My body's impenetrable, filled with lead, pushing me down. The window's closed. The air's pressing against the pane. The window's part of my body, part of my skin. My body's filling up the room. I'm trying to turn my neck. Her breath is slowly moving along the skin on my back, warming an area slightly larger than her mouth as she moves up, then down. The sensation of the skin coming alive with her breath is sickening: my skin's out of my control. As she moves, the areas on my back that have been warmed, then passed over, return to normal: they don't exist. Instead of going over me area by area, she should consume me. She should take my body into her mouth and bring my body temperature to the temperature of the inside of her mouth,

ruining my awareness of myself. I'm incapable of avoiding her. I can't make the decision to move: that would draw my attention to my body. I'll forget where I am now. I'll be forced to recognize my body as an object I can't control. I won't be solid. She's talking to me: the words hit my body, then fall off onto the floor. They're physical, hard chunks of phlegm and blood. The impressions they make on my flesh when they hit stays for a few seconds, then gradually evens out and blends in with the surrounding flesh. As the words pass out of her mouth, I equate them with the blood being pumped through my veins. She's on her knees in front of me. I want to open her up, disassemble her like a curious piece of furniture or a mechanical device, not worrying about how to put it back in its original configuration as I place each piece to the side. I have to make a decision: I have to either get rid of myself through her as she fucks my body, or I have to eliminate myself or her, before she fucks me. I don't want anything to happen. I've ordered my time so I won't notice it. I want to dissolve. Her hand's on the inside of my thigh, her mouth suffocating my groin. She's drawing me out into the room, away from myself, into her. I have to negate myself before I become aware of myself through her. I'm on my back on the floor. Her body's a mouth around my body. Her face is indistinguishable from the ceiling. I don't know if I'm part of the room, part of her body, or if I've taken her into myself and ceased to exist as I knew myself before she fucked me. I'm submerged, inhaling water. I'm saturated. I'm being compressed. My body's filling up the room. I'm pressing the life out

of myself as I press her into me. I'm wrapped in her tongue. I'm using her body to kill my body.

(1984)

RAPING A SLAVE

I'm being followed. I'm being dissected. I get raped constantly. I'm trying to build up my strength. I have to fight you off. You're stupid and slow, but I have to be careful. As you look at me now, I can feel you trying to rip my body apart. You're going to eat it bit by bit. Once you've trapped me, I'll be all yours. You want to cut me up and devour me. I'm stronger than you are, but I need time to plot out my actions. Every cell in my body's ready for murder. You're not going to hurt me. I'm going to take what you give, chew it, then drown you in your own violence. I'll suck your cock, gently licking your asshole, and you'll think, "This bitch is an animal. I control her. She's made to suck my cock. She's completely mine." I wrap my lips around your hard prick (I made it hard, so it's mine), then I bite into it, slowly at first so you don't think I'm teasing you, then I rip it apart. You faint like a woman. I suck your gristle and sinews roughly down my throat into my stomach. There's a

hose of blood shooting out from your crotch into my face. I stick my mouth to the hole where your cock was and drink the blood until it stops. You enjoy it. I'm made to eat your cock, not suck it.

I can't count the ways in which I want to mutilate you. My hatred and my desire have always been inseparable. Your hairy arms could crush me or I could hack them off with a machete. You think you can manipulate me. "Intelligence" in this case isn't a virtue. You don't know the power of your own brute strength. You're scared of it. You have to figure out ways to justify it. You suffer from guilt, proving your weakness. You should be proud of your ability to dominate physically, but instead you cower from it. You're frightened of your tight muscles when you inspect yourself in the mirror. I can use this to my advantage, teasing you, ridiculing you to the point of murder, then satisfying you slightly (so you deflate) in order to put you back beneath my foot. You actually enjoy licking the soiled undersides of my feet. What a weakling! It doesn't even excite me to have you do it. It's the natural order of things, to have you down there. I'd like to stroll through a room full of half-conscious naked male bodies, poking and slicing with my machete until I'm up to my knees in a sea of blood and male flesh, occasionally stopping to decapitate some guy, picking up his severed head and french kissing it until I fall down among the carnage, mixing my come and bliss with the blood. That's the unspoken truth. It's what you attempt to push to the back of your mind each time you try to seduce me. You are a joke, you are a clown, you are a eunuch.

I'm laughing my guts out as we fuck. You're trying to flatter me, telling me how wonderful I am (only because you're raping me), and I'm dreaming of stabbing you through the ear with my knife. I'm devoted to the idea of your belittlement. It's what I live for, what I think about every second.

While I'm at work, where I'm treated like a dog, only my body is present. My mind is standing on top of a monolith, looking down on a swelling crowd of cowardly men. It's my position in life (I've always known it) to cut the throats of arrogant men, and weak, humble men also (maybe they deserve oblivion even more).

I'm breathing a red fog. It goes down into my lungs and fills me with my real strength: my lust. It's my secret consciousness, my right to kill, as well as my duty. I love to hold your hand, feeling its buried strength, caressing it into impotence. You feel it too. You feel your power draining into me. You're helpless. There's nothing you can do about it. I'm a magnet that draws every particle of life out of your body. All you live for is orgasm, for the last drop of life to be sucked out. I'll never understand how you can be so stupid as to strive for your own denigration. But it isn't my place to understand you.

(1985)

BLIND

I'm alone. I can feel their eyes on me. I'm gagged. They put a urine-soaked rag in my mouth (my urine?). My eyes are taped shut. I can't see anything but the red behind my eyes. It moves, changes hues. It's the real source of death, the real evil, the thing that's choking me. They want me to experience an absolute, numbing death, the corrupt stench of the red behind my eyes.

I don't feel pain. They're cutting at my leg. I can feel them slicing away at the muscle, then removing the muscle, lifting it up for everyone to see. Now they'll eat it from a communal plate. I can hear them licking their lips, groaning. The knife comes again. They're cutting away the entire leg at the knee. I hear something growl, then teeth gnawing against bone. I'm not in pain. The red behind my eyes spreads through my body and warms it. I listen to the chewing until it's finished.

They're pushing something cold, metal, into my cunt. It's as wide as a man's cock, but longer. They force it in until it reaches the underside of my belly, then remove it abruptly. They're bored with this. I hear one of the women say that she wants it, that I don't deserve it. They laugh. I hear them whispering their approval, and the wet sound of the thing sliding in and out of her. The only sound in the room is the sound of my breathing and the sound of the thing going in and out of her. Then she comes, screaming like a dying horse, and they congratulate her, laughing among themselves. They begin to bark like dogs, at first staccato and shrill, then blending into a deep, resonant, sustained howl. Its penetrates my skull. The red is wiping me out, erasing me. Then, rough hair and claws against my breasts, as the dog mounts me, his long tongue wetting my face. I spit out the rag and howl until I disappear into red heat.

(1984)

THE BOSS

If he doesn't do what I say now, I'll figure out a way to get him to act according to my needs later, and by then, my needs will have grown into something even more satisfying — they'll include his humiliation, rubbing his face in the shit. He shouldn't cross me, especially when someone else might observe it happening — like a child I saw jab at the eyes of its mother as she tried to pick it up, the disgust I felt for the mother is what they'd feel towards me, if I start to lose control... I gear every movement I make specifically for the purpose of control, of order, like an elaborately choreographed ballet, the formal structure invisible to the participants and only knowable from above — where I sit.

I'm stronger than him, than the rest of the them. While they're busy vacillating, jerking around in spasms like beached fish, victims of useless conscience and inhibition, I'm acting out my desires,

forcing them into reality by strength of will. The key to success in business: imagine, then act. And at this second, my desire includes his denigration. He's an extension of my imagination — I can play with him like a child plays with its daydreams, molding them as they pass through its mind to suit its drifting fantasies...

He's mine to play with, mine to use, mine to discard when I'm finished with him.

There he is, stinking, decaying, sweating, exhausted with heat and stupidity, the great mindless stupidity of putting one foot in front of the other, his self-hatred so thick in his throat he's choking on it. He's not himself, doesn't belong to himself. He's watching his boundaries dissolve as I control him. He's moving through the toiling crowd. He feels his body expanding, then condensing in response to the opening and closing of the spaces between their slaving bodies, as they work, as they waste their time, which in turn fills me with the pride of my accomplishments.

He feels like he needs to be alone, needs to sequester himself, needs to remember exactly who he is, but he can't find the place where he exists alone, without the interference of me in his mind, rearranging, shaping. What he needs is absolute isolation, sensory deprivation, to remove all stimulus, or, to repeat a predictable set of stimuli endlessly, until he's floating in a thick liquid pool of his own unconsciousness, convinced now that he doesn't really exist, drifting in the tide.

If he screams, if he fights back, put a gag in his mouth. Choke him until his eyes pop out. If he complains, punish him like a disgusting child — he's asking for it.

(1983/1994)

A COWARD

I've wasted myself. I've turned myself into something I can't control. I'm dwarfed, minimized by everything around me. I'm scared of what's going to happen next. Any unpredicted movement, any sound I haven't anticipated, terrifies me, lessens me. There's a pair of scissors on the desk in front of me. I'm picking them up, opening and closing them, pressing the rings of metal against my bone. I'm sticking my finger into the blades of the scissors and squeezing as hard as I can. They're dull. They won't cut into me. It doesn't hurt, it throbs, reminding me of the existence of my hand, which disgusts me. I hate my body more than I hate the objects and events that rub against it. I don't despise the conditions of my life as much as I despise the existence of my flesh.

(1984)

A GRAVE

I use this room like a disease uses a body. I corrupt it, eat away at it, mar the walls with my hands. The room stinks of my blood. I'm in my bed. The mattress is rotting beneath me. My urine has eaten a hole in it. My lower back's buried in the hole. I can't tell where my body leaves off and the mattress begins. When I get up and go to the toilette, I tear my body in half.

(1984)

A TRAP

When I look at myself in the mirror, the heat comes to my face. I'm convinced time has slipped and I've just left the mirror: now it's someone else standing there, pretending to be me. When I shut my eyes, they invade my body, so I have to keep them open. I don't own my body.

Yesterday, I went through the phone book at random, picking out men's names that seemed interesting, calling them up and inviting them to come over and fuck me. Finally one accepted. When he arrived at my door, I opened it but left the chain attached. He could see me in my nightgown. His body matched his voice, which had been rough and crude on the telephone. He was large and hairy. His face was dark, pitted. His hands were huge: I wanted him to choke me to death. I let him in. I undressed, lying flat on my stomach on the floor, hoping he'd see how vulnerable I was and kill me. Instead he kissed the

back of my neck softly, then gently fucked me. I tried to squirm, to become violent, so he'd get angry with me and hurt me, but instead he reacted by losing his erection and apologizing. I stood up, looking down at him as if he were a useless, retarded child, and told him to leave. After he'd gone, I went to the mirror, massaged my breasts, pulled the nipples up to my mouth, and sucked them for hours. I lost myself, I forgot where I was, I lost control of my body. I don't know who I am. I want to be obliterated. I want to be sucked up into my cunt.

ANOTHER TRAP

I'm a small thing, plotting suicide, sucking my toes. I'm locked up in this piss-soaked public bathroom. They're having a good laugh about me outside. I can hear them slurping their beer, burping, farting, cracking jokes about me, imitating my voice. I'm naked in here. The smell of my body overpowers the smell of their shit and piss. I smell like misery. It's private, I know its strength. I usually keep it under my clothes. Right now I'm letting it come out and make me drunk. I love the way I smell. They could easily break the door open. They'd find me in here on the floor, a retarded infant. I'm better than they are. Their jokes feed me. They don't know what I'm doing. I wish they'd break the door down. I think if they saw me in here like this they'd be ruined.

(1984)

A GAME

I feel nothing for you. I hold myself down. Keep to yourself. You shouldn't touch me. My skin peels off my bones. I'll give you a gift: cut the skin away from my stomach and stretch it across your face. Look in the mirror: I see myself through your eyes. My body's on the ground behind you. You use it to amuse yourself. When you kick it around the room, you feel the impact of your boot in your stomach. Cry for me. Blame me for the fact you no longer recognize yourself. Lying here, I want the air in this room to consume me, to pull my body in behind itself while you stare down at me uncertain, if you've lost yourself in me.

You're running your hands along the leather surface of your skin. The sound this makes changes pitch according to the area of your body you touch. Your thighs and your groin generate a low hum — the sound of my corpse releasing dead air when you kick me. Your face generates a continuous high pitched

squeal — the sound I make when you burn me. I take you over. You forget yourself in my body. When you chew a piece of skin from your finger, you remember my body in your mouth, my bones cracking between your teeth. I love you. When you lick your hand, your sweat tastes like my blood. Conceal yourself. Close yourself off. Pull back into my skin. I'm inside you. The place on the floor where my body decayed left a stain on your memory. That's the signature of my love for you. You can't forget me without losing yourself. I'll never die.

(1986)

MONEY'S FLESH

Your money's warm. It feels like flesh. Your money's in my mouth. I'm in your body. You're fingering me. I'm weak, I'm a small thing in your hand. It's easy to use your desire and turn it against you. It's easy to control you. Your image of yourself is a front concealing your desire to be fucked. I don't like your weakness. I don't feel it when you hit me. I don't remember a situation that I didn't control, that I didn't own. My body's taken on the shape of the things I own. My hands are mallets. I don't own any hands. My hands aren't attached to my body. My body's separating from itself. Pieces of my flesh are scattered around the room. I'm kicking myself in the head. My head's rolling away from me. You cut into my stomach with a dull knife. There's no sensation. I don't acknowledge your flesh. Your meat translates into money. You own my meat. I manipulate your meat in order to shape myself. I cut you up into an

image of me, so the pain I feel when you humiliate me is reversed. I enjoy it when you arbitrarily degrade me. I'm strong when you ridicule me. You're inert. I don't consider you "living". I enjoy stroking the contours of your flesh and watching your face change as I manipulate you. You deserve what I'm doing to you. You don't exist outside of me. I made you what I want you to be. I want you to feel pleasure when I fuck you because I want to suck it back into myself and use it for my own pleasure. I want you to annihilate my perception of myself when you fuck me, treating me like a piece of flesh between your fingers. I need your money in order to get the things I need to excite myself sexually, the things that look like me and invert me, the things that turn me inside out so I can fuck myself. I use your hands on my body as feelers for myself. I want to feel what you're thinking so I can excite myself through your misery at not being able to own me. When I take control of your mind, I'm disgusted at my ability to hate myself, and want to abuse myself sexually through the device of your body. I'm meat. I'm pleased to be meat beneath your corpse, your corpse living while it fucks the life out of my dead mind. My mind is eating you, because I made you into an image of myself I could fuck like I fuck myself. In order to allow you to dissect me, I lay myself out on the ground with my legs spread and show you where to cut. I can feel what you're thinking. When you cut me, it doesn't hurt me. I'm hiding in the warm interior of your stomach while you cut me, opening yourself up from your genitals to your chest. When I crawl out, you hold my infant body in

your strong arms. My first instinct is to kiss your neck, then, when you're lulled into narcosis, to rip it open with my teeth. Looking up at you, my eyes see through the roof of your mouth up into the interior of your skull. As you penetrate me, I'm stretched across the walls of your skull, screaming in your head. When you grind your teeth together, I feed off the section of your brain that gets hot in reaction to the friction between your teeth. I want you to hold me down, keep me back, keep me away from the part of yourself where you exist. When you screw me down in place, I stuff your mouth with money. When you rape me, you pay me for the favor. When your rape me, I thank you and I rape myself.

(1984)

BASTARD

I'm looking for a man, someone I can coerce into suffocating me. A man stole my cock. I hate all men. I used my cock on weaklings, people unable to control their emotions or desires. Now, I'm revolted by my own existence. There's an ugly hole between my legs, like a woman's hole. My hole is diseased. My disease feeds on itself and keeps me alive. The symptom of my disease is that I keep living. My physical presence in the world is the key to my stupidity. I avoid awareness of my body. My skin's crawling. My body's a rotting shell, containing only the awareness of itself. If I had a cock, I could suck it, committing suicide by poisoning myself on my own sperm.

I'm oiling myself, toning my muscles in preparation for my murder. I want to look good while choking. I want my muscles to mirror the muscles of the man that strangles me, cuts off my air. I want to look into his eyes and feel his hard cock against my

legs as he kills me. The stronger I am, the more perfect I am, the more he'll hate me. I'll be the perfect mirror of the weakness in his virility. As he fucks the hole where my cock used to be, he'll fuck his self-hatred. Being strong, I won't allow him to deny the power of his impotence. If I prepare myself correctly, he'll hate his body more after he kills me.

I use myself as a device to amuse my other self. If I watch myself closely, I'll lose my mind. When I look at my body, I dissipate. I lose the ability to exist. I trick myself into believing the part of me observing the other part isn't the reverse. It doesn't make any difference if I'm the victim or the perpetrator of aggression. I cancel myself out. I hate my body. I use it as a shield to conceal my hatred for men. The smell of the slit between my legs is a constant reminder of my inverted superiority to both sexes. When I bleed, I bleed like a man. The blood pours out from between my legs in thick, congealed chunks, mixed with sperm and muscle.

I'm stretched out on a slab. I can't think. My mind's aware of itself, fixed on its permanent emptiness. I'm glued to the slab. I don't want to escape. I won't move. I want the life choked out of me. The man is on top of me, his beefy hands digging into my throat. I'm foaming, trying to form words with my tongue. The man's mouth is open, his tongue hanging out, draining spit down onto my face. He's fucking my hole as he chokes me. I'm stronger than he is. I throw him off me. He's a coward. He squats on the ground and begs me not to hurt him. I rip his cock out with my teeth.

A woman comes into my room. I despise her smell, her soft coy flesh. She brings her stink in with her. The beat of her heart works in opposition to the beat of my heart and destroys my ability to lose myself in the stupidity of my own pulse. As her mouth surrounds mine, I exhale sperm into her throat. When she passes out, I tie her to the slab, face down. I reach my fist up into her rectum and remove her intestines, filled with shit. I stuff her guts into my hole. I pretend I'm soft, feminine. I sit down in a chair and sew my hole shut. I can't think. I don't want to think. My flesh is changing shape in direct response to the stupid whims of a mind I don't own, don't control.

(1984)

A SCREW

I don't trust anyone. I'm trying to guard myself. I hate these creeps. Their dirty penetrating eyes see every humiliating flaw. I know I'm better than anyone I've ever seen or met, anyone I've ever worked for, anyone that's ever seen my face. When I'm exposed, I'm hiding something. I'm holding it in. I'm hiding because I'm better than they are. I'm transfixed. I'm staring at my naked body in the mirror. I've had it shaped according to what I want to see. Slabs of fat cut away, my breasts uplifted, reduced to perfect size and shape. I've worked on this body. I've put myself under the knife for it, I've sweated for it. It's mine. I control it, use it for my own gratification. It provides me with perfect sex: self-inclusive, contained, rigid, unrelenting, punishing. It's mine. I'm perfect for myself. The smell of my sweat, the feel of my muscles tightening, satisfies me, fucks me. I'm perfect. I fuck myself. My image in the mirror is fucking me. I turn

myself on. Everything else is superfluous. I'm self-contained. I'll eliminate anything, any creep, any ugly living flesh that gets in my way. When I look in the mirror, I make time stop. I need nothing, no one. Nothing can fuck me like I fuck myself. No regrets. I've worked myself into what I want to fuck. I'm fucking myself now.

(1984)

PUNISHMENT

Every one of them has a concealed motive. It takes years of concentration to peel away the lies. Every quirk of behavior, every trivial response, is premeditated toward a certain end. The only honest behavior is an immediate physical reaction to pain. Real pain — not emotional or mental — caused by direct physical violence. For this reason, one or the other is usually in the process of plotting an attack on the enemy (the other). The only thing that stops them from committing murder is the threat of punishment. Since they're unable to express their violence in any immediate sense, they've developed ways to make their violence more abstract and complicated, delaying the ultimate release until it's no longer bearable. Without tension or desire, everything is equal. So they play their violence like chess in order to exist for violence.

(1984)

BAPTIZED

She's spread out on the bed, saliva and sperm running out of her mouth. A pool of blood and sperm is forming between her legs. Her stomach's rising, falling, rising, falling. Otherwise she looks dead. I'm sitting in a chair beside the bed, fully clothed, smoking a cigarette, looking into her eyes. She says, "I'll tell you when I've had enough. You shouldn't have stopped. You should have stopped." She seems incapable of moving. She tries to get up, lifting her head, then falls back, apparently content with her weakness. I tell her. "It wasn't me. I wasn't here. Who fucked you? Who's cock did you just suck? Whose cock was in your cunt?" When I finish my cigarette, I take off my clothes and lie down on top of her, forcing it into her hole.

(1984)

FEEDING THE ANIMAL

I can't breathe in. The air is trapped inside my lungs and feels like burning sulfur. I'm sitting rigid in my chair. My feet are screwed to the ground. Directly in front of me, my eyes have worn away a small patch of wall. I'm looking at myself there, a red smear on the white paint. Because I can't turn away from it, I feel myself becoming it.

I feel myself draining out of me, as if my body were an emptying sack. I'm decaying, my metabolism is breaking down, I'm losing control of my mind as my brain dies.

Using all the energy I can gather, I shift my weight to my legs, trying to stand up. I can't, though I feel weightless. My skin holds in my intestines, light, as if they were filled with air.

I want to stand up. I can't concentrate. I make it halfway up, then fall down on my back on the ground, knocking over the chair, ripping the bolts

loose from my feet. I lie there, my body spreading out around me, distended. My head drifts up toward the ceiling. I can't move.

Time passes while I think nothing, then something creeps silently up to my exposed entrails. It wraps its fingers around my heart and squeezes gently, as if trying to coax it into a last weak pump. I lie there waiting. The dog/man opens up the flaps of my chest and inserts his face, brushing his cool nose along the wet coils of my guts. With my last strength, I pull the face into me, whispering my name into its ear.

(1983/1994)

HER ONLY LOVE

Unable to bear the smell of her parents' decay, the little girl gets out of her bed, leaving the protective warmth of her soft blanket, and walks down the hall to her parent's room. Her bare feet are silent on the thick carpet.

She opens the door. The air rolls over her, smothering her with its stink. She walks in, lightly vomiting small chunks of matter and blood into her hand.

The bed is black with flies, burrowing into her parents' flesh, planting the eggs that will become new flies. The wound she made in her father's neck is infested with them. Her mother's head rests on her father's shoulder, her mouth open, dense with flies.

The knife is on the floor by the bed. The carpet soaks up the blood. She picks the knife up, admires her face in a patch of shiny steel that peeks through the blood, then tosses it off into the corner.

She walks over to the window on the other side of the bed, and with great effort, finally opens it. The cold winter air moves in. The flies dig deeper into her parents' flesh for warmth.

She removes her nightgown, then pulls back the covers on the bed and slides in between their bodies. She's immediately covered in flies. She pulls the covers tightly around her neck, keeping out the now freezing air, and gradually drifts off to sleep. She feels the flies tickling her skin beneath the covers, like miniature birds gathering around her trying to lift her into the air. She rubs her leg against her father's cold stomach, dreaming.

(1986/1994)

HIS CHILDISH GAMES

The old man is lying naked on his bed watching the television. His face is pressed up close to the screen at the side of his bed. He looks out over the downy white hills of his pillow into the magical world behind the glass.

The only light in the room is the light of the television. The skin of the old man's face is pale blue. The details of his skull are visible behind the surface of his skin, like an x-ray.

There's a bowl filled with cold cooking grease beside him on the bed. He smears it over his body as he watches the television, providing himself with a vague impression of sensuality.

After an almost sensationless ejaculation, he goes into the kitchen and takes a carving knife from the drawer, then walks back into the bedroom and lies down on his back in front of the television. He relaxes himself, emptying out his mind.

He slips the knife under the skin of his right arm, at the wrist. He's careful not to cut too deep.

After an hour, he's managed to peel back the skin, up and off to his shoulder. He feels fresh, thinking he's been remade into a better version of himself. Any pain he feels seems irrelevant — he's lost the ability to distinguish between the pain in/on his arm and the sensations produced by his greased skin rubbing against the wool blanket on his bed.

He gets up and gets dressed. His arm sticks out from the sleeve of his T-shirt and smears red everywhere, bleeding over everything, dripping to the floor. He works his way down the stairs, stopping at each landing to gather strength, leaving a small red pool at each resting place.

Out in the bright sunlight of the street he feels naked, on display. People look at his stiffening bloody arm and spit. This gives him a sudden feeling of freedom. He thinks, "They should envy me."

During the first day, his arm is red and moist, the creases and sinuations in the muscles glistening in the sun. But as days pass, as he wanders aimlessly through the city streets, propping his body up against a wall at night to catch a few minutes of dazed half-sleep, his arm forms a crust, and it swells to twice its normal size, like an awkward and cumbersome club dangling loose from his shoulder.

His eyes roll back in his head, exposing yellowed whites, webbed with thin red veins. He walks blindly down the street, tripping on his own feet. He stays where he falls until someone comes along and reluctantly helps the filthy old man up. He offers them

his scabbed arm. When they grab hold of it, the scab comes off like the burned skin of a roasted animal, a conical hollow crust in their hand.

(1986)

SOME WEAKNESSES

I've got muscles, so I want to use them. I get up in the morning, pose naked in front of the mirror, and flex for half an hour. Looking at myself, I want to beat someone's head in with my bare fist. I want to see my fist forced down some asshole's face, reach down, grab a handful of intestines, and pull them up and out the throat. That would make me feel good. Whatever makes me feel good is what counts. The reason I build my muscles is to use them. That makes me feel good. It'd be senseless to work out for years just for the stupid satisfaction of feeling "healthy" or knowing I look good when I'm about to fuck somebody up the ass. I get satisfaction out of grinding a face in the pavement. I don't want to question it. I like causing pain. That's how I am. I see an immediate response to something I just did. No bullshit. Pure animal pain, me the victor, me in control, me on top, you on the bottom. I never allow myself to be in the position of

feeling pain. I'll do anything to avoid pain. I'll run, humiliate myself (if it's the lesser of two pains), betray a so-called friend, anything. In order to decrease the possibility of pain, I'm never threatening in public. I obscure myself. I don't show off my muscles. I'm soft-spoken. I don't need to impress anyone. I couldn't care less what they think of me. All I want is satisfaction. I get it when I need it. I cultivate it like a hard-on, stroke it, build it up to bursting, then, when I'm ready, I find somebody to fuck with. Somebody to destroy, somebody to ruin. I brutalize them, then I fuck them. But they can't be "into" it, they can't be some wimpy masochist getting rid of their lame authoritarian guilt. They have to honestly be scared, maybe even think they're strong. That's when it feels good. That's when it feels good, when some pompous turd feels my boot in their eye, or their ribs breaking under the impact of my fist, my big fucking sledgehammer fist snapping their ribs like matchsticks, then my cock fucking them in every hole they've got, my come mixing with their stinking blood. Yeah, I turn on thinking about it. I'm just now pulling on my cock. I'm imagining my meat in your toothless mouth right now. I'm shooting a gallon down your throat. You're vomiting a thin green liquid into my lap, then I kill you for that mistake. I twist your head right off your weak neck for that mistake. I kill you like the worthless chicken you are right there and then, then I fuck you some more. Later, I eat your sour brains and throw your corpse out with the garbage. Now you're perfect. You're doing what you do best: you're dead. I used you. I fucked you. I wiped you off the face of this rancid

earth. My main goal in life is my pleasure, and that made me feel good.

•

I've been milked. My tongue's hanging out of my mouth. My fingers are boneless. My spine's loose in my back. I can feel the rot spreading through the insides of my teeth, into my gums, then crawling up onto my brain. I can smell my brain rotting. If I pressed both hands on either side of my head, my mouth would ooze pus. My eyes are turning to jelly. I can see much clearer because of that. The table across the room reveals its true appearance: it's half-cow, half-man, its ass sticking up in the air, yellow shit pumping out the hole. I realize I'm looking in the mirror. I get up and go to the bathroom and wipe myself. I smell like a dirty whore-cow. If I can figure out a way to lift my legs to walk, I'll make it to the bed, where I can cover my head and smell my fingers. In bed, I'm a pig. I fart and pick, suck my saliva through my mind. The saliva comes back into my mouth tasting like nicotine juice. I've poisoned myself. My brain's squirting piss into my mouth. I have to swallow it, because the goo that's accumulated on my lips has dried and sealed my mouth shut. I love myself. This way I'm closer to myself. Nothing leaves me. I stay put. I'm sealed tight, sewn shut, like a dead pig's eye. Sewn shut, like I sew my fingers together by pulling the needle and thread through the first layer of skin on each finger, making mallets out of my hands. Then I hold my hands up to my face, wishing

I could sew them to my face. I consider it (feel it as) a violation to be looked at by someone. Conversely, I feel like I'm eating when I look at someone or something. I'm already full. I'm bloated, the skin that seals my body is pressured outwards, ready to burst. I'm like a balloon full of guts. I don't want to lose my guts, so I don't want to look. I can only stay in this position for so long. Eventually I have to take my hands down from my face. Then, eventually, I have to open my eyes. Then I have to move my legs and walk over to the bed. On the way, I sit down on the floor to rest, poking my leg with my finger. I can't feel my leg. I can't feel my finger. I don't know what I'm doing here.

•

You've got soft skin. I like the insides of your thighs, running my hand slowly up to the lips of your cunt. Your cunt was dry a second ago. Now it's faintly wet, not quite soaked, just beginning to lubricate. That's supposed to suck me in, supposed to make the blood rush to my prick, so it'll get hard and want to go up inside you, so you can steal my come. I refuse to accept that ploy. I'm only tender with you in order to watch you respond, to watch you thinking that I'm something I'm not. You're moaning like a stupid animal. You think I'm a very passionate dildo. The truth is, I could murder you right now. But I won't. Then you'd be useless. I need you. I have to pretend that I'm caught up in this, that I'm "abandoned", so that you in turn will respond exactly how I want you

to. I'm standing above us, watching our imbecilic bodies press and grind, each of us thinking we've fooled the other. I'd like to throw gasoline over the sweating heap and light it, watch us scream dumb pain as we burn. I make myself sick.

•

The idiot cop is telling me to move. I'm standing there like meat. He's prodding me with his club. He knows I'm pliable meat. He's meat. His head is solid muscle. I'm also meat. My mind tries to convince itself that it's not meat, but the physical fact of being prodded, pressed, locked in dead concrete, dulls each thought, each hate, making them meat. This makes me want to cut meat. I've been thinking: "I'll never leave here. I don't want to leave. When I stare long enough without thinking, time stops. I move dead. It doesn't feel. I don't have to think. There's no reason to think. I'll stop thinking." I continue to think. I cannibalize my thoughts until nothing remains but hate. Hate makes me strong. I'm willing to kill him. Because I'm meat. It's the last thing to think about before I become permanent meat. Meat that eats and shits, moves when pushed, sleeps when tired, nothing else. He pushes me again. I pull out my knife and slide it into his stomach. I cut his throat. His face lights up. He's surprised. For a second, he's not meat. My mind begins to work. One thought after another, against my will.

•

Sucking in and out, with lips that look like clam meat, her mouth forms word after word. I can't hear anything. I want to disfigure myself. Her long thin hands shoot up from her sides and dance around my face, driving me to the point of a scream I can never release. I'm gagged. She's lecturing me, admonishing me for my inability (she calls it "unwillingness") to speak. But she's the one who put the gag in my mouth, the candle wax in my ears, and the tube that runs up from inside my ass, down along the floor, and finally up her ass, so we're "biologically" connected, as she says. When one of us takes a shit, the pressure builds in the tube and the shit slowly works its way up the others' ass. She's berating me (I can tell by the expression of hunger-anger on her face) for not shitting more often. She wants my shit up her ass. I have the ability to hold it in. She knows this. That's why she plugged my mouth and ears, so it would eventually have to come out my ass. But it won't. Right now, I can feel it crawling up my throat, and it's going to start coming out my nostrils any second. First in slow drips, then in a quick brown double-stream I'll aim at her ugly, selfish face.

•

Every move I make is imitated exactly by the guy standing in front of me. I don't know if I'm willing my movements, or am myself imitating him. I know he's imitating my thoughts because occasionally he'll slap me or bite me if I've just thought of a violent solution, some way of exterminating him. Whatever I think turns back on itself and works against me. I can't

think anything without immediately realizing that the thought has been instantly apprehended (stolen) by my adversary, and consequently has been nullified because it's no longer part of my mind. It's instead more ammunition for him to use against me. If I'm in fact imitating him then I've become (or always was) a ghost, or at best activated flesh dependent on the will or desire of my enemy in order to respond in even the most primary way — as when a knee gets tapped by a hammer. As a solution, I'm making myself inert. I won't think. I won't move. I won't allow my heart to beat or my lungs to expand and contract. I'm going to wait and see who make the first move. Whoever makes the first move dies. The other will kill him by imitation.

•

My clothes are sticking to my skin. I'm drunk, I can't see. I'm being pushed back and forth in a circle of people I don't recognize. They're beating me, laughing at me, spitting at me, pissing on me. The men are pulling their hard-ons. The women are fist fucking their cunts. They're enjoying me. I put my cigarette out on somebody's hand. It was resting on the bar next to me. It was fat. I didn't like it, or thought it wasn't alive and wanted to see if would move. The hand belonged to somebody in the crowd. He or she must be worked up for some hot sex right now: I'm going to be dismembered, played with. I'm helpless. I can barely stand. I can't form words. I'm finished. I committed the perfect crime: relatively

harmless, punished by slow orgy and murder. I feel good. I understand my position.

•

The filthy bitch was my mother. I cut off her head and hung it above my bed, letting the blood drip down onto my pillow, into my mouth. I ate the rest of her corpse for snacks while I watched TV. Every few minutes I'd look up at her head swinging above me and spit bones or gristle at it. Sometimes I hit it, sometimes I didn't. When my father came home from his business trip, I cut his head off too, but before I ate his corpse I buttfucked it. I hung his head next to my mother's so that the two could be together, swinging up there, just above my face, looking down at me masturbate, watching the news, picking my teeth. As time passed, I began to form a collection of heads above my head — friends I'd invite over to fuck or give presents to, whatever the lure. Soon my room was crowded with heads. I couldn't walk through it without brushing aside my former friends and relatives. I passed the time in my bed, watching TV, looking at their heads. I was able to sustain myself permanently on a diet of their flesh.

•

He stayed docile. He didn't resist. Once his body was correctly arranged, he seemed to resign himself. Possibly he felt at home, relaxed. His hands opened and closed mechanically, apparently detached from any thought process he may or may not have

been engaged in. His eyes were fixed straight ahead. He was dreaming, or already dead. I was standing directly in front of him, my face six inches from his face. His breath smelled like the insides of his stomach. He didn't seem to be looking at me, or at me as I pictured myself. I took his left eyelid between two fingers and pulled gently at first, then harder, almost to the point of removing it from his eye socket. No immediate or extreme reaction, just a faint sign of recognition in his right eye. I wondered if he knew who I was, if he in turn wondered what I was thinking, if he knew what I was doing to him. If he didn't know, then I'd failed. I wanted my print on his brain. Every object, face, building that crossed his mind had to bear the imprint of this moment. I considered carving it in his chest, but that would have detracted from the initial design. I want what I implant to take seat. It can't be erased or disfigured. He had to bend, he had to be molded. That was the agreement. Everything has to be carried through to its logical end. The consequences should have been considered. If they weren't, the end will be the same. I turned the wheel. I planned on doing this slowly, but I was losing patience, so I turned it hard, putting all my strength into it. The pulleys tightened the ropes. His arms and legs stretched out in the shape of an X. His joints began to snap. The features of his face were shifting, remodeling themselves into the shape of my face. My (his) mouth was open, the lips stretched wide. I was looking down my throat, watching the words come up: "You'll never forget this."

(1983)

THE CAREGIVER

My grandmother and I live in two rooms. I live in the hot room with the small window that won't open. The window looks out across the alley onto the bricks of the building next door. The window is coated with yellow dust, car exhaust, filth. The shadows that cross the window look like monsters trying to get in, trying to see me inside, five stories up, sweating in my room. Whatever creatures make the shadows must be huge, as large as a building.

I lie awake at night and wait for their fists to crash through the wall, then to reach in, pluck me from my bed, and crush me as I squirm. I work on this dream, concentrating, certain that if I can visualize it clearly enough it will happen. When I feel them looking in at me, I'm alive. I want them to kill me. I want to feel my guts spread out like jelly across one of their palms. I want them to hear the tiny sound I make when I die.

My grandmother lives in a room identical to mine, except that her room doesn't have a window. She keeps the light on 24 hours a day — a long-tubed fluorescent light fixture she props up against the wall in the corner. It makes her skin look gray-blue, and makes the dust that coats the walls glow. She has two air vents in the floor of the room. They pump in a constant flow of stale, slightly cooled air. The movement of the air in her room makes the fibrous growth of dust that sticks to everything look alive.

I never see her sleep. Whenever I see her, she's in her chair, staring at the wall as if it were a window, or slumped over, entranced by something in the carpet. The carpet is dirty orange and has long strands, like a field of worms.

When I'm dreaming, I hear her talking across the hall, arguing, laughing, taking revenge on someone. I wake up and move quietly to her doorway, trying not to be noticed, afraid someone else is in the house. But there's never anyone there. Eventually she notices me. She looks up and smiles, clicks her tongue three times, as if to gently scold me, then shows her teeth. She wants to eat me. She wants to hold me in her rotting mouth and crunch me like chicken gristle. I turn around. My face is expressionless, knowing that if I show any emotion, the invisible wall in the air between us that protects me from her will shatter and I'll be drawn into the sucking whirlpool of her mouth.

Back in my bed, the smell of her room drifts across the hall into my room. Her smell mixes with the smell of my body. I inhale her smell into me, holding it in, eating it. I let it shape me from the inside

out. I want my world, my body, to consist of her smell. After it has become me, I'll be held enclosed, like an insect in a huge fist, and crushed.

Twice a day I go out and get the food. When I leave the building and step out onto the street, I keep my head down. I'm afraid I'm going to be attacked, knocked over, kicked, mutilated. I'm defenseless. They sense my weakness. Some day it's going to happen. There's nothing I can do about it. Because there's nothing I can do about it, I crave it. I concentrate, trying to will it into reality. When someone looks at me and smiles, I feel raped.

I have to buy her soft things to eat — processed white bread, cream cheese, chocolate pudding, milk. If her teeth touched anything solid they'd slip out of her gums, and she'd swallow the whole mess down, teeth and all, not noticing the difference. Then she'd bleed into her hand and cry, realizing what had happened, feeling sorry for herself, and I'd want to kill her. But I couldn't, because I need her. She gives me money. I can't kill her. I'm helpless. When she dies, I'll starve to death.

As I walk up the stairs, returning with the food, I hear her voice, leading me up towards her like an invisible leash, as she talks to herself. As I approach the door, the tone changes, as if my increasing nearness affected the shape of the images passing through her mind, changing the tension in her vocal chords. I want to hear what she sounds like when I'm not near her, when she thinks she's alone.

Once, I took off my shoes and worked my way slowly and silently up the stairs, pausing with each

step to listen. Just as I came within hearing distance, I heard a growl, like a dog about to attack. I took another step, and it changed suddenly. She'd heard me. Now her voice was passive, defeated, rambling, exhaling the words so they'd run together randomly. The string of words that leaves her mouth is senseless. When she speaks directly to me, I only understand her subliminally.

I prepare her food by putting the ingredients into the blender and mixing it until nothing has a shape of its own anymore, until it's soft and whipped. The high-pitched scream of the blender mixes with the cackling she emits in anticipation of being fed.

Often, I stand in the closet-sized kitchen for an hour, letting the whirl of sounds rush through me. With my eyes closed and my body swaying gently to the sound, I picture myself walking up to her, handing her the glass of slime. Then, just as she swallows, I take a knife from behind my back and I slit her throat, cutting and cutting until her head falls to the floor and rests against my foot, looking up at me, the expression hardly changed.

But instead, like a mannequin controlled by her thoughts, I do the opposite. I take the glass into her, sometimes even providing a straw to make drinking the smooth liquid easier for her, and I kneel down obediently beside her, holding the glass for her. Often I'll pour the liquid gently down her throat as she sits there with her face upturned, her mouth a black hole, like a snake-hole leading down into the belly of the earth.

I'm always careful that she has enough time to swallow. She looks up at me with her black bird-eyes, making me feel as if I were the liquid sliding down into her stomach.

When's she's finished, she smiles up at me in fake gratitude. I take her ancient hand in mine and rub the loose skin over the brittle bones and joints of her fingers. Then I kiss each finger, licking away any of the liquid she may have spilled.

She is sweet and gentle, so perfect in her old age. I want to be just like her. I want to disappear into her. When I lie awake late at night holding myself, as if my body were both mother and child combined, I imagine myself as her. I whisper secret hates, feeling my ruffled dress stick to the scaly skin of my back. I can feel the neglected cancer hole between my legs rise up and swallow my face, drenching it in sour smells.

I'll forget I exist. I'll sit there with my mouth open and stare back up at myself, reading the mind contained in the body I've left.

(1983/1994)

DAYDREAMS

The tiny light far off at the end of the hall went out suddenly, leaving everything black. I could just barely see the air glowing like a submerged nucleus where the light had just been, but as I walked towards it, the trace faded and before I reached what I assumed was the spot, I'd lost all sense of my relation to it and to everything else around me. Now I was completely lost. I felt my fingertips swelling in anticipation of touching something, reading the contours of a surface. I raised them to my lips. They touched, but felt nothing. They needed something alien, unconnected to my body, to charge their nerves. I spread my arms out and walked with my legs close together, becoming a crucifix. The glowing fog at my feet sent an iconic shadow upward towards heaven, but it stopped at the arching curve of the tunnel above my head and wrapped itself around me as I walked. I felt protected by my holiness.

I hear breathing. Slowly, it's been building in volume. It's in perfect time with the rhythm of my own breathing, so I haven't noticed it until now, but now it's increased in volume to a level where I can't deny it's originated from somewhere outside my chest. I feel like I'm being mocked. Someone's been watching me, listening to me, as I stumble through the darkness.

As my breath rate speeds up with fear, the alignment of our breathing slips, becomes louder, cacophonous, a deafening barrage of random wheezes, sucks, hisses of exhalation. My body begins to shake uncontrollably. My arms swing madly like the blades of a propeller, trying to deflect any unseen person or object that might come at me in the dark.

The lights come on. Sudden blue whiteness. I'm standing on top of my desk, looking up into the rapid flashing of the fluorescent tube light above my head, unblinking, the light pouring down into my eyes with such force that the light becomes black. My arms are still stretched out in the shape of a crucifix.

Jennifer is pulling at my pants leg. Her face is contorted as she looks up at me, annoyed — a pig's face wearing the loose fitting mask of a fashion model. She's urging me to come down, faking compassion. Her voice bleats out of her nostrils, shrill, nauseating. I lower my arms, defeated, put my hands in my pockets, and step backwards onto my chair, then to the floor. Standing in front of my desk, looking into the green glow of the computer terminal, I'm amazed at the reflection of my face, superimposed over the graphs and figures. Nothing's changed. It's still the

face I loathe, the face I've never been able to accept as my own, the face I've always wanted to rip away — live the rest of my life a glare of exposed muscles, nerve endings, veins. But my face is implacable, unchanging, perfectly handsome, unmarred.

Throughout the day, Jennifer watches me, peeking around the corner of her cubicle as she works at her computer, putting just a little tension in her brow to show pity, where honestly she should express contempt, disgust. She asks me occasionally if I'm all right. I tell her yes, of course, keeping my eyes on the screen. Her head disappears back around the dividing wall again, her keyboard popping beneath the onslaught of her nails, sparking off a symphony of high pitched torture inside her machine.

Alone again at my work station, one hand is buried in my crotch as the other types out a game plan for the destruction of my subconsciousness.

(1985)

THREE NURSERY TALES

- 1 -

On the right, the impassable cliff. Its walls rise straight up, pitted with 100 caves that lead deep into the solid rock, snaking beneath the flat plateau above. Two or three killers crouch naked at the mouth of each cave, watching us pass beneath them through the gorge.

On the left, the beginnings of the tropics - a wall of foliage and hissing fog. The low steady growl of the beast hiding behind the trees follows close behind us, rustling through the brush as it tracks us.

As we walk, we're mocked from both sides. The killers raise their knives, showing blackened dripping teeth, cooing down to us softly, as if we were straying pets that might return to them, drawn to our own murder by the gentleness of their voices.

The beast rushes forward, jutting its hideous head through the brush, wags its purple tongue,

laughing like a strangled child, then withdraws suddenly back into the jungle, the brush closing in around it.

Our clothes have long since been torn from our bodies, and our skin is shredded and bleeding. The sun bakes our sores. We're doomed, but we keep moving, too dazed and too stupid to stop and give ourselves up to be killed.

The fear of being captured by the killers — hung up on hooks forced through the skin at the base of our necks, burned slowly alive above a low fire, our flesh pulled away in slabs from our bodies then eaten before our eyes — moves our legs forward, keeps our eyes half-open.

Inevitably we'll drift into the jungle where we'll be eaten by the beast. He'll drag us to his secret pit and play with us until he's bored, then devour us.

The thought of its tusks buried in our guts is less terrifying than the knives and fire of the human killers, so we fall into the brush, defeated, waiting to be taken. As we fall into sleep, we hear him breathing at our necks, hot and moist, prodding our bodies with his snout. He talks to us in a human voice, like the innocent voice of a little girl, soothing us, reassuring us, laughing softly to himself beneath his words.

- 2 -

I don't recognize myself until I commit an act that negates me. Then I'm strong, because I've attacked the things I protect, and I've cut desire off

before it has a chance to grow. I'm a victim. Random invasions of experience enter my mind and transform me. Conversely, while staring at the thing I want to possess, it repulses me, because I want to make it part of my body. My body disgusts me because it's not mine. When he touches me, pushing me around, crudely inserting himself, I see myself as him, and I hurt myself as I hurt her. I'm unable to erase my desire until he erases it for me. When I'm in his mind, I'm a murderess. I'm going to tie his hand behind her back and tie her hands to his feet. While I'm licking his face, coating her cheeks with my saliva, I'll hold my cock tight and selfishly fuck my own cunt, avoiding him. After I've ejaculated into my cunt, I go into the bathroom and wash it out immediately and thoroughly, feeling infected already. I flush out any trace of him. Then I return to the bedroom, standing over his bound body. I urinate on her while she strains to get free. She enjoys being drenched in her own dead waste. He thinks he owns me, but I'm nothing. He doesn't exist except to violate my inversion, selfishly manipulated by me.

- 3 -

Chained together, they led us naked down the street. Our bodies were burned red from days exposed to the sun. At night we slept huddled together, under guard, curled up against the monument in the center of the city. We'd learned to hate each other, each other's smells, faces, the soft hair growing out

the back of the neck of the person before us in the procession, more than we hated the guards or the heckling crowds.

The prisoner in front of me was proud. He refused to keep his head down as we were led through the mob. They seized on this as a sign of conceited defiance, and several goons immediately began spitting at him. Then some of them reached out and cut him with razors attached to their fingers. I knew that if he fell, he'd pull the rest of us down with him and we'd be torn to pieces. To avoid this, I kicked him hard in the back and he lurched forward, taken by surprise. He looked foolish. The crowd laughed — I'd confirmed the fact that we were harmless idiots, no longer a threat. Later, he told me that one day he'd kill me in my sleep. But the next morning when I woke up, he was dead beside me, his throat cut so deeply that his head hung from a single tendon. Someone else had realized that his pride was a threat to the safety of the group and eliminated him before it was too late.

(1983)

TELEPATHY

I'm on the other side of the wall, listening, seeing. She's there, I can feel her, lying naked on the slab beneath the thermal lamp. Her skin's burning slowly. A large bubble of flesh is expanding on her left forearm. I can see a small shadowy creature inside the patch of swelling flesh — now I've projected myself from the other side of the wall into the warm lifting blanket of skin. My body's inside her arm, huddled. I'm pressing my arms and legs against the membrane walls, trying to break out.

Each time I push, she screams.

After a long struggle, I break through the thin layer of skin. My head is free, looking up at her distorted face. The structure of her face is shifting, falling off to the sides. The thermal lamp is slowly burning away layer after layer of accumulated skin, gradually incinerating the outer evidence of her character.

She's strapped down to the slab. As she screams, her body thrashes against its confinement. The straps tear into the broiling flesh like butter. She's helpless, trapped. The man on the other side of the wall must have secured the straps, then left her here to suffer. But now, watching her closely, it doesn't seem that she minds her condition after all. When she screams, her face rips with pain, her mouth a torn gash in her face. But half of her pain is obviously ecstasy, like the bliss an athlete obtains with endurance.

There's a rhythm to her screams, like the rhythm of two people fucking, or the rhythm I remember as the sound of the heartbeat of the man on the other side of the wall, or both of them combined, a fresh mutation, a new sound with a life of its own.

I break out of my sack, wrapping a sheet of her skin around my shoulders and jump down to the floor. I walk out of her door and into the room of the man. I stand on his chest and look into his mouth. His tongue hangs down to his chin. His face is shifting, bubbling, dissolving, like the woman's face. I stand on his tongue. He pulls me into his mouth. Inside his chest, his heartbeat sounds like the dull moaning of the woman.

(1983/1994)

FRIENDS

They'd always give me cause to question my basic identity when I'd see them, if I gave them the chance. No question, they were superior to me in every way — by breeding, by economic circumstance, by education, by their social skills.

The trick was, of course, to develop scenarios wherein even if I failed, suffering the usual thinly veiled humiliation, I'd win.

For instance, one day they knocked on the door to my apartment. I knew instantly I shouldn't have answered, but there was no going back. I'd been on my knees, vomiting into the toilet when I heard the knock. I shouldn't have answered until I'd at least brushed my teeth. But my intelligence was dulled beneath the weight of my hangover, so I acted instinctively without weighing the consequences.

They smelled my breath. I suppose this should've repulsed them, but instead their faces be-

trayed a blatantly sarcastic, self-satisfied smile. They'd gained access to a secret weakness, a part of myself that would have been better left concealed, and this pleased them. Instantly they knew that a) I had been drunk the night before, and that b) this was another relapse, so I was weak of mind, depressed, probably suicidal and that c) I was of extremely unstable and weak character, unable to muster even the small amount of self-discipline I'd led them to believe I possessed.

As much as I tried to hide my compromised position, I was unable to convince them to come into the apartment. They kept insisting it was obvious they'd disturbed me, that they'd call me later, but we all knew they wouldn't.

In order to come out the winner, in my mind, I memorized their faces, down to the smallest detail, the smallest nuance of expression — the black curling hair growing out of his cheek that he'd missed shaving, the pale pink blemish above her right eyebrow showing through the film of cream-colored makeup, applied with skillful thickness so that it blended out smoothly into her forehead.

When I closed the door, I held them in my mind, exposing their image permanently onto a blank sheet in a secret file where I kept my memories for future use. I'd use this and other memories of them to serve me, to make them please me. They were flimsy in there, among the images I preserved, foolish really, not threatening at all. Two people who crushed each other's bodies every other night beneath their mutual flab, muttering gratuitous, lustful phrases into each

other's waxy ears until they'd come. Then they'd roll over, farting a sleep-inducing lullaby.

I know, because once I needed a place to sleep, and they let me stay on the kitchen floor, sharing a hairy blanket with the dog. A place only two feet from the foot of their bed, and they didn't have the good manners to refrain from their sickening ritual while I was a guest. But then I suppose I was more like a stray cat one takes in because they can't overcome the guilt they feel at watching it starve. More like that than a friend, so they felt no embarrassment at having me witness their intimate purgatory.

This is how I remember them.

(1986/1994)

I'M AN INFANT, I WORSHIP HIM

I'm a pig, and I smell bad. Mr. Smother is my god, and that's what he says. He's always right. I kiss his ass. I suck everything down into my guts. I never shit. My body's greedy (there's nothing I can do about it). I'm bloated. I'm soft. I weigh 349 pounds. I'm fat scum. I despise myself. I'm sitting here in the pink pajama bottoms my mom gave me when I was 15. They still fit. I hate them, but I wear them. They're caked around the crotch with various foods that I dripped, and old sperm I never wiped up. My sperm's sweet. A lot of that sperm's there now because of Mr. Smother, so I like it. I like to break it off in chunks and grind it between my fingers thinking about him. Then I feel disgusted with myself, but I like feeling that way for him. I'd like him to take a shit on my face while I lay back on the sidewalk and have people crowd around and laugh. He'd point down at my face and tell them how I deserved it, and they'd laugh again in

agreement with him. I'd feel good. I like to feel good. I like to touch myself, especially when I pretend I'm someone else. Sometimes in a restaurant I lose myself, I forget I exist. I sneak my hand up under my shirt and rub it along the hair that collects around my bellybutton. The hair's soft like the hair on a baby's head. I get hot and I can smell myself. I'm being smothered in my own armpit, then I come, but I don't feel anything. I discover a puddle of sperm in my crotch. I hurry and pay, then I leave, afraid they'll notice. When I come, I don't get an erection. I love myself, but I also hate myself. I should be destroyed. People look at me and think I'm repulsive. They hate me. I like them hating me, because they're right to do so. I get an erection when I think about a specific person that hates me. Then I get an erection, but I can't come. Otherwise I just come, like pus drains out of a sore, without getting hard. I need them to hate me, to be sickened by me. Then I get what I deserve.

Mr. Smother is my boss. He gave me a job. Even though I made him sick, even though he loathed the sight of me from the start. My smell surrounded me. I smell like putrid marmalade. He should have thrown up in my face, but he hired me, even though he hated me. I deserve anything he dishes out. I want him to dish it out. Every day I find ways to make him degrade me, without become so sickening that he fires me. I'd die if he fired me. I worship him. I need him, because he crushes me. He demands that I live up to his requirements, and he punishes me when I can't. I don't know why he hasn't fired me, because I'm weak. I always make mistakes. I love his hairy arms,

his hairy chest, his hairy back. I dream about chewing his hair while I masturbate. Then when I don't come, I feel good, because I didn't deserve to come. I only come for him when I'm not masturbating. When I come for him, it's because he makes me come. When I don't expect it, so I'll feel bad. But later, when I'm lying in bed thinking about it, I feel good. He knows how to use his authority. He makes me feel like a fat deformed child: I'm sitting in the corner in my diapers, and against my will I shit until it forces its way out onto the floor. My parents come in and scream at me and beat me. Then, when they leave, to show them that I want to be good, I scrape it up with my pudgy hands and eat it. I prove to myself that I can get rid of it and be good. That's how he makes me feel. I like to feel that way. He doesn't pay me much money, I'm a fat slob. I don't deserve to be paid well. I want to hide in his world. He feeds me. I never want to leave him. I get depressed when I have to go home from work, away from him. He makes me feel good.

He's my boss: he makes me do things. I'm in the stock room getting a carburetor off the top shelf, and the ladder breaks under my weight. I fall down like a sack of rotting gelatin. I hate myself. I don't get hurt, because my fat protects me. I don't get up. I enjoy being on my back, looking up. I'm an old cow, dying beside the road, waiting for her master to come drive her to the slaughterhouse. I want Mr. Smother to come and investigate the noise, and find me on my back. Then, when he shouts at me, I'll feel good, because I'll be on my back, and I'll feel stupid. He comes in shouting at me before he's seen what hap-

pened. "What's going on in here! Hurry up! What're you doing!" He comes up and kicks me in the side, as if trying to determine if I'm alive or dead. I'm in a beautiful dream, looking up into huge angry nostrils, his cold black eyes. Up inside his nostrils the snot is hardened and clings to the hairs in large crystals, like sugar. I think how wonderful it would be to crawl inside his nostril and curl up, eating the sugar, warmed by his breath. "I'm sorry, Mr. Smother. It won't happen again. I'm sorry!" Before I have a chance to finish apologizing, he says, "You alright?" And walks out to the front counter without waiting for an answer. I like the way he looked at me: I'm a bad dog. I get up and hurry to the bathroom like a fat poodle. I pull down my pants and stand there for a second, listening to him yell at a customer. The customer is whining, complaining that a part that he has bought for his car doesn't work. Mr. Smother refuses to believe it. He tells him to get out of his shop, now. I hear the door close. No one can resist his authority. I'm playing with myself, thinking about the sugar in his nostrils. I have a tiny penis. I can hold it between two fingers when I jerk it. I pretend I'm milking a little cow. In order to treat Mr. Smother with respect, I hit myself in the face while I jerk. My nose starts bleeding, but I keep going. There's a little piece of shit stuck to the toilet bowl. I get down on my knees, still jerking, and lick it with my tongue. Now Mr. Smother is beating on the floor. "Come on! Hurry up! What are you doing in there! Get back to work!" I hear him walk away. I wish he would've broken the door down. I want him to know that I'll do anything for him. I

almost come. I'm glad when I don't. It would be a desecration. If he finds me in here with shit on my lips, he'll be disgusted. Maybe he'll beat me up. He'll fire me. Maybe he'll call the cops. I like cops, but I'm scared of them. If they put me in jail, everything I did or thought would be up to them. That would be good. But I wouldn't have Mr. Smother anymore.

I'm walking home from work. I smell like syrup. I want to eat myself, in order to disappear. My slime is soaking through my clothes. People look at me. They laugh to themselves, making their disgust obvious. They can smell me walk by. I love my smell, but I don't blame them for hating it. I'm repulsive.

It's getting dark. I don't know where I'm walking. I've forgotten about going home. I stop at a schoolyard. I'm standing at the fence, looking in, wheezing. I can't breathe. Walking tires me. I need a rest. Because it's almost dark, I feel safe here. I won't be noticed. There are some children playing handball in the schoolyard. I hate their shrieks. They disgust me. They're too unruly. If I had more courage, I'd go and cut off their heads with my pocket knife. But I'm a coward, and I wouldn't be able to catch them because I'm too slow and fat. They'd laugh at me and spit at me. I'd deserve it, but I still want to kill them. When I was young, they used to hold me down and spit snot in my mouth. Then I'd throw it up, and they'd force me to eat my vomit before they let me go. When I got home, I'd throw up in the bathroom without being told to, so I could prove to myself that I could take my punishment, and not cause more trouble. But I still hated them, because they punished

me without thinking, just to please themselves. That's not how it should be. It should be done with a sense of duty. If you enjoy your duty, it's alright, because it's your place. Mr. Smother is good, because he puts me in my place, and he knows his place.

There's a wino asleep in the corner of the schoolyard. The children don't seem to notice him. He's a pile of rags and meat. His mouth is open, a hole in the pile. His mouth looks like it's demanding to be stuffed, of its own will, without him knowing. Now one of the boys notices the wino. I knew this would happen. That's why I've stayed here watching. He gets the other kids' attention. They crowd around the wino. They're scared at first. They move up close, then jump back suddenly, giggling, then move back in again. Now they're not scared anymore. A few of them are spitting on the wino. He doesn't budge. The first little boy is encouraged. He throws the handball hard at the wino's head. There's a sharp crack. The ball bounces off high into the air. The wino doesn't move. He's having sickening dreams. Now the first boy takes out his penis and pisses on the wino's head. Everybody laughs. The wino's head is steaming from the hot piss. The little boy takes a can of lighter fluid from his pocket and squirts it on the wino. Everybody flicks matches. He's a pile of meat covered in short blue flames. He doesn't notice anything. The flames haven't burnt through his clothes to his skin yet. The children panic. They're screaming hysterically. They're scared they'll get caught and their parents will punish them. The first little boy tries to piss on the wino, to put out the fire, but he can't piss any-

more, so he runs away. When he's gone, I go into the schoolyard and piss on the wino. No one can see me. It's dark now, and most of the street lights are broken out. I get down on my knees and look at him. He's a filthy dog, worse than me. He smells. I like his smell, because it's sweet, like mine. He's mumbling incoherently. His words are a part of his sickening dream. The only words I can make out are, "Please" and "Thank you."

I stand up and kick him in the balls. I want to see if he'll react. He moves a little, but doesn't seem to feel any pain. I feel warm in my crotch. I look at his face. It's thick with old acne scars, smeared with filth. His teeth have rotted out of his mouth. His left eye is coated with a thin yellow skin, the pupil visible underneath. But the main thing I notice makes me shake, I feel so good: if his disfigurements were cured or erased he'd look exactly like Mr. Smother. I'm in a dream. I love him. I feel sick. I'm spinning. I realize I've thrown up. It landed beside his head. I bend down and lick away anything that splashed in his face. I feel better. I try to put myself into his mind. I want to smell his dreams. I have to be obedient. He deserves obedience.

I grab hold of his arm and pull him up. His arm is strong under his overcoat. I feel happy. I slap him in the face, trying to wake him up. I don't want him to miss anything. He looks at me indifferently, then goes back to his dreams. But he seems conscious enough to walk. As I lead him away, I whisper into his ear that I'm sorry for bothering him, that I'll make him feel good again. We stop to rest at the fence. He leans

against it, half-conscious. I stick my tongue in his ear, carefully cleaning out all the stale wax that's accumulated in there for months. He doesn't seem to feel me doing this, but I don't care. I swirl it around in my mouth until it becomes liquid, spit it back into his ear, then suck it out again, taking it through the cracks between my teeth. When I'm done with both ears, I swallow everything. I don't feel sick at all. I like it. I'm thinking about Mr. Smother. It would please him to know I'm doing this. I deserve to be hated by him. It feels good.

I lead him down the street, pretending we're two drunks helping each other walk. I bury my head in his shoulder as we go, hiding my face. It's dark, no one can recognize me. All they'll be able to say is that they saw him walking with a fat man.

We come to an abandoned building. I lead him across the vacant lot in front of the building. It's pitch black here. My smell seems stronger. His smell is mixing with mine. I like the new smell. It's suffocating. I lay him down against the wall. He says "Thank you," looking up at me. He repulses me.

I kick out the plywood that's nailed over the window I want to go in. It's black inside. I can't see anything. I light a match and hold it inside the window. The room is piled with debris, old furniture, rotting garbage. In the center of the room there's a wide hole, where the floor has caved in. If we fall in the hole, we'll break our arms and legs, and be eaten by rats. As they rip at me, they'll ejaculate, and so will I. If we keep to the sides of the room, moving along the walls, we won't fall in. There are some stairs

across the room, in the far corner. I want to take him up there. It will be private. I climb through the window into the building. I cut my arm on an old nail. It doesn't hurt. I can smell my blood. It's sweeter, more refined, than the smell of my body. I pull him in after me. I have the feeling he's helping me, because it's so easy. I feel light. I hold a match up to his face. He's smiling. It makes me sick. He's crazed. I don't know what to expect. His open mouth is like the hole in the floor, and the rats live down in his stomach. I sway. I almost fall into his mouth. He grunts. I smell it against my face. It's the word, "Please." We work our way along the wall. We finally get to the stairs. By this time, he's conscious enough to move on his own. He walks up the stairs in front of me. He moves slowly, but he's sure of himself, as if he's been here before. By the matchlight he looks like a drugged giant. I'm glad to be following him. I'm being pulled up the stairs by his smell. He's controlling me.

The room is empty except for a couch, and some candles in the center of the floor. Someone must have stayed here before they boarded up the building. I light the candles, then I sit down on the couch. He sits down next to me. I'm covered in his shadow. We don't talk. He seems to be waiting for something. He looks at me like food. He disgusts me. His smell is strangling me. I realize he's waiting for me to give him some alcohol. I have to do something quickly or he'll get suspicious. He could kill me, in order to punish me. I admire him for that. He can do anything he wants. He shouts at me. I don't understand what he's saying. His voice is a roar. It stinks. It's

echoing through the room. I'm choking. I take out my pocket knife and hold it open in my lap. I'm in a daze. I've always been here with him, it'll never end. He's standing up. He's ready to run out, down the stairs. He'll fall in the hole. I stab him in the throat. He falls down immediately, jerking around the floor like a fish, the blood pumping out of his neck. It's putrid, I'm gagging. He rolls over onto the candles I lit, then stops moving. The room has gone dark. I feel around on the floor, reach under him, and pull out a candle. I light it and hold it in front of his face. He looks exactly like Mr. Smother. I feel happy. I start to cry. I touch his cruel eyes. I stick my fingers in his mouth. It's wonderful: his cool strong tongue, the tongue that shaped the words that made me obey. He's perfect. I feel myself getting a hard on. It's warm, not like before. My penis is huge, hard, full of blood. I take off his overcoat and shirt and throw them to the side. I undo my pants, letting them fall around my ankles, then I kneel beside him. His chest and his stomach are hard and strong, exactly like Mr. Smother. As I kneel beside him, my erection hovers over his body. I squeeze it in my fist as I cut into his abdomen. I was made for this. I'm happy. As I'm cutting his skin and muscle away, the smell of his intestines rolls up into my face. It's stale and sharp like wine vomit. The smell makes me drunk. I know I'm going to come this time, because I deserve to come. I'm falling face first into his soft intestines. My mouth is open. I'm sucking his guts into my mouth. I'm eating myself. I'm pretending that Mr. Smother is standing behind me watching me, making sure I eat everything. I'm eating sewage. My

stomach is filling up with slime. I can feel myself getting fatter and uglier. I'm worse than I've ever been. My smell is dissolving me. I'm burying my head deeper in his guts. I'm losing the ability to distinguish between his guts and my smell. I'm coming into my hand, throwing up into his guts, eating it, throwing up into his guts, eating it again. I'm drowning in my own sperm while I drown in his guts. After I eat his guts, I eat his heart. Then I cut out his tongue and I eat that. I'm licking up my sperm. It's still hot. It tastes like his guts. I wipe the blood off my face and work my way down the stairs out of the building.

(1983)

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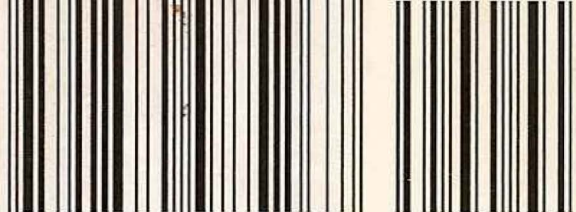
M. GIRA

Gira was born in Los Angeles, CA in 1954. In 1983 he founded the highly influential musical group Swans. He has released over a dozen albums, both with Swans and related projects.

In 1995, Swans released *The Great Annihilator*, and Gira released his solo album *Drainland*.

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PHOTOGRAPHY: WIM VAN DE HULST JACKET DESIGN: SUPERLUX

This is repulsive writing. Brilliant, disciplined and repulsive writing...

– Nick Cave, author of *And the Ass Saw the Angel*

The Consumer is a look at the inner world of illusion, hallucination, self-hatred, a search for identification through mis-indentification of a lost soul. It is an all consuming book. It is certainly not a book for the squeamish, yet even the squeamish, I believe, will be hypnotized by this book. Though hallucinatory, the writing is extremely clear, crisp, succinct, as the narrator literally eviscerates himself for the reader. Yet, at the end I found myself with an unanswerable question: are the hallucinations a distortion of reality, or really closer to the reality of the world?

– Hubert Selby, Jr., author of *Last Exit to Brooklyn; Song of the Silent Snow*

M. Gira is an astonishing writer whose belief in the power of language is almost supernatural. *The Consumer* is one of the purest, scariest, and most beautiful books I've read in years.

– Dennis Cooper, author of *Try; Frisk*

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