

Treachery

By Brandon S. Hursell

“Why don’t you start from the beginning? Tell us about the Male Structure.”

I put my worthless hands to work. I put my filth to her. I am bleeding almost every day, white-hot and so much more and more. I am getting sick of the guilt trips and I want to walk and make my plans. I want special devours. I will walk to them. She is the girl of the death-leaking world. I hate her and am all for it.

I am dizzy and filled with ripped apart. Inch by scattered edge and gnawed bones of the body’s muscle, I will make it. I am here on the flat outstretched and I am coming now. My bones are back. Seven years in the birthing cycle and they have all been lost and forgotten and burned and mutated.

And what is there of my mutations? I will tell you that I am male now. In my body that is increased outward by carcass and manufacture, I am in it. The room is breeding ground and dress-up time.

There is the day that I become aware of myself. It is, in fact, every day. It happens and then compresses. Blurred marks are made on my name and life.

But it all happens to one moment’s becoming. It is lead to, joined, and burst.

My name is Ambrose. I am twenty-six years old.

I get up today and I am dreadful. I am in shock at my personality. I want to be because of her.

I am she and I go to the telephone when I get up. All plots seek to destroy me as man and then we have rebirth. The estates of this mechanism are locked in, not the people, however. There is never an individual, not in these moments. I tell you so very much can happen at once and in all directions. This is the sight that plainly picks up the pieces, if rules can be made. I get up and go through the hall to the bathroom.

I want to be a statue, a working gear. I am the beast of conflict, the devil himself. Thank

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you, very much. She said, don't go yet. I get to the bathroom and etch my words into the wall with a sly stare. My hair is oily and my skin is catastrophic, marked by the day's coming brutality. It forces a face desperate for age to come death. Powder goes to soap, to slimy stages, but nothing that finishes or sticks to make anything better. I am full of my doom and dancing violence. I am the womb of horrified young women.

Days of my parade of wonderful blood happened. I start the march. Black linen was pulled tight to my stuck flex muscle and rigid command of bone. I am going out the door. I am searching.

I penetrate the waking world and its islands. Everything is meant to be. Foot comes before next. Head is up on the faces that approach me. The sun is beating down with its burning-out chill on the back of my neck. My nipples grow erect and sharp. They are scraping me inside out. Stale cigarette is in my lip with its lingering hatred of my fury. I am every being in the world and no one knows me. Here is the slaughter that I am to choose from. Here is my divine right. I am on the street and moving quickly in thought, in muscular harmony. A face is pained in the frame of icon love. There are slender features with bulk to back them. There is a straight virginal nose of hard-curved, perfect bone. Tight muscular cheeks are cropping up over the bone. She is a full head of midnight curls and summer daydreams. The eyes are lost on me, jumping through the universe and the lips gone into another foul creature's breast. She is pale in an onslaught of steaming jewels, all ripe for the picking. Heels and healthy body and healthy clothing crack the earth for the playfulness of it. Flowers flow into the city's dredged and sucks its juices. They bare their palms to razor-sharp green and synthesis. This woman is a forever-flowing factory and a gorgeous dream and just inside my reach. Night falls to us in our midday and makes things more appropriate.

And I know there will be more. Heat rises from the ground in deadly inhalations and carries meat for words that make traps. Slowly and with subtlety, she drives the entry phase into cooked-up plan and enters car frame, then comfort in seat, then cloth-stained fumes into comatose slumber. She is heavy like the sack of gears. I bring her to my home for work.

The hysterical hordes of spirits at my female sight beg for death, but the proper preparations must be carried out before the great gift is placed at tomb.

Beyond the decimal point and scattered noises that break concentration, there was the fragmented corridor, empty and serene with bullfrog chirps and growled moans of the beast.

She stood there with a fistful of photographs, simple objects and treats, the organs smashed with expired make-up products. She was wearing a white t-shirt gripped to her flat chest and the fists of her ribs. Her hips were hanging. I was drool-running and sweating, getting down her frame with my eyes. Her black stockings were high into the strings of bondage that raced with drops of her arousal and excrement. She was painted with the aroma of wood shavings and ammonia and nocturnal flowers. She smelled of the chemical under the sink. Yesterday, I fucked her with her ass sweating on the granite top, her jeans around her ankles and her legs spread and she hadn't shaved in weeks. Tonight was different. She looked days younger and full of the panic of control over me. She didn't understand what it was doing to her. Her words came out in tight softness. She told me in echoes that she liked the taste of me and she wanted to know where I wanted to put it next. I pushed her wet into my mouth, grinding her closer and closing her ass with my hands. She was pulsing and feeling on the nectar of currents. Tall stones were making the light of photographic organisms. The images were in the corridor of night air and light of the glass window. I had a fear, she told me, of broken glass. She was going to beat that into me. More important than you, is the column that we are making, the life it breathes and sucks, and the ground it makes from our sludge.

It was morning at the coffee table, "I woke up today really feeling like shit about our conversation. What we need is a plan."

"We need a plan that reaches really deep."

"The crop of your body is worth a fortune. It is with me in the final days of god's earth."

Our bodies were alert in the tension of daily stress and they were dripping in the dropped energy of falling bites, eggs and failed and fractured bread. I am so sloppy to her. I am not the one that she wants around. I look at her and see excitement tingling up my legs. I see

something out of the ordinary happening to the sex in my legs. I see sheets of plastic on her face and a wooden world of small fantasies. I get to calculate what that must mean about me. I think it is distracting me.

“What does this little wooden box that you keep dreaming about have to do with our scheme? What actions does it lead to or are you just drifting off and avoiding the necessary? You are always like that. You are a procrastinator.”

“I’m no such thing. I think it must be something subconscious. It has got to be some kind of sign trying to point us in the right direction. That or it is just a flashback and you are right about me. I am drifting off in avoidance. But the thing is I cannot place it anywhere in my life. A memory from outside of my life must be a communication from outside of my body. You are projecting something into me or the universe is and it or you are trying to guide me.”

“Or we are all trying to fuck you up. That is what you think, right? You don’t trust any of us, right? I think you are maybe just some kind of creep with your little secret, such elaborate carvings, nothing I could come up with. You want to fantasize about nature, go stick your dick in the mud, creepy fuck. I am going out.”

“Where are you going?”

“I am going anywhere but here. I know what you want to do and you can’t possibly imagine that I like watching you masturbate. I am tired of fucking you anyway. Call me when you get a plan.”

“I am going to make a device while you are gone then. Pick up some materials at the store if you see anything that we might need, know what I mean?”

“You are a jack-off and a dick-sucker. I am leaving you. You are filthy and you smell like soap. You’re a weird combination for a man.”

The lights grow dim. The wood floor underneath me feels like a stage setting. I don’t know what I am doing, but the words in my head, the words that make up instances have left and I am just all movement at this point. This morning was a dead end and she still hasn’t returned. I don’t know if she wants me anymore. Maybe, I did something wrong when we were

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together or I just didn't do something right. She is probably fucking someone else right now. I wish I didn't care. I am not jealous, but it affects me. I need her here. I can't reach all the things I need to without a second or third or more party. She was the best at that. I liked her anyway. I didn't like being with her only, but I liked the person she was. I liked being witness to that. It is strange to want to just be a witness to somebody. It is not natural, I think. I want to be with someone for the interactions or know about them and not have to necessarily be right next to them all the time, but she is a special case. I've got to be right there. The witnessing comes through different organs with the two of us. There are things not catalogued by modern medicine that we turned and raised to the sky. I feel the shapes of it in my eyes and down the ridges of my hands. We are organs of beings that mankind will want to be if he wishes to join, enjoy, survive the future. What we both hated in it though, was the way we talked. For some reason, I don't think we could really talk in the way those organs were thinking. I think we didn't allow ourselves to develop the skills needed like we should have. We were impatient and fell to dressing in more familiar things, dreadful speeches of ancient figures. I cannot believe the multiple of possession that marched day and night. How long was it though? Was it really just four days? What is a day anymore? I am sure we shall soon find out. New ways are coming and someone told me that in it, the measure would become painfully, boldly clear.

There is a chill in the air and I feel thin in parts and fat in others. My beard is dirty and gross and it has retained a scent of some plant or animal that I am curious to identify. The chill in the air moves from left to right, panning across my body and alternating intentions in me. We will have one last walkthrough before bed. I have to be up in a few hours. I try to get up with just a few more minutes of cold in the air. I try to get up when the grass is still wet.

Some previous excerpts that were made years ago are to follow after the collision that is scheduled for tomorrow. I will not let her know about that though. I don't think she'll be around for that. It is a disaster. It is a perversion.

What is the meaning of the taste of you? The room is filling up with sheets of cotton batting. It is a bleak thing to be surrounded with cotton that is on occasion infected with

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invisible burrs. I want to know the substance that makes these little bumps. It is my own irritation, I think. I want to reach to her with the telephone, but she is sleeping. I put brass and silver and plastic between her legs. She designed it to look like the horns of a ram and to fit securely and perfectly into her vagina. She screams the wet scream. She is exactly what she wants and she has the distance to break me. My hand is crawling to her across the planks of my housing. I don't want to keep going back here. It is empty without her. I feel like she has forgotten me. I feel like she has forced herself to call me by a different name when she sees me under the street lanterns. What the fuck is the purpose of that? Is she trying to hurt me? I crafted the horns of the ram from any salvaged material I could find. The house is filled with material that wants nothing but to be salvaged and made into something else. It says to me that it might as well be a sex device for her. It tells me that I am getting no weapon of violence from them, so put them to other use. If I could make a weapon of them, I would. I don't know how. I don't know how I should design it. What is stuck in me is the thing that she wanted. The things that fit perfectly and made it groan in the wicked orgasm. She said that she is small for the penetration. She is made in a way that this thing will be exactly what she wants. Her silk robes fall to the earth. She is standing proudly and displaying herself to me. She has the spirit of youth that warms up in bitterness. Her hair is dark with light. It falls to her breasts. Bend to her commands. Worship her in a way that makes her laugh. Worship her in a way that makes her piss into your lapping jaws. Her garter hooks scraping the strange animal by the side of my face. She is the warm river of the ancient. I am in the robes of death on a mountain and my horse is at my cheek.

Godlike features exist in the mundane. The sun comes up almost every day in this town. There are days that I cannot explain for certain what happens, times when I sleep all day. So, it is not strange if I cannot swear to the happenings of things. I have tried many times to remember every exact moment of what happens when I sleep for extended periods, but I am wiped blank every time. I fail. I fail her at the top of every minute. I shave down seconds to make wrought iron drawings of the misery I have brought to her body. I have to take a piss and

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I have to have breakfast and go outside for a smoke before and after these things. I want to feel the chill of thick air. I want to be disappointed. I want to buy a telephone to the spirits. I want to talk to myself about the roads that I know that are close to here. I think about their textures, their subcutaneous layers of fat and the calcification on water lines. I want to be a traditional man on this calendar day and fiddle with lusty fights. I will have a session with her and confetti will drop on my nude body.

She is a plastic, giant lady of the court and a night witch married to wooded nature that surrounds me. She splits routinely into the buxom and thick dangling, starving woman and thin and tight muscles with hair shaved down to bones of her head and pubis; she rides and spits waves of thirsty pleasure. She is married to me in the floor on blankets and tingles with violent romance. She is the head of the earth and serenely and thickly covered with the blood of days. Days are weeks drawn on paper and silk bags. I am chewing up my breakfast and reaching peaks. She is about the way I crane my beak and reach and stretch to pull my head to her breasts are her weight slams down into me. She is heavy with the force that she is pounding onto me and for moments of instants she is completely happy, even if her face is not with me. It is not tied tight to stars. It is somewhere else. It is in the lap of his car. It is in the dinner bought and sold from hanging on to another employer's pocket files. They have all gone corrupt. Is she operating within that structure? Is she in the oblique humans of cheats? She lost her promises. She ripped her feet on the stony path. But this is bullshit; it is me trying to make something lovely in place of my failure. If you can rip me dry, why wait? Why put it off for another day if I can pay for it. Revenge is the only thing worth living for. I am still living out successful feats that have granted me the satisfaction of spitefully pissing on the ones that ripped my soul from its sleep in the chaos, from the ones that have done me bad little favors when I was just learning to speak and walk. I hated learning all of that. It draws us farther onto shore and it is something to be truly despised. I am happy swinging these chains and rusting them with tinctures of the body and polluting the sands that have been swept deeper into the cracks of the floorboards.

The chrome and leather of the systematic chair, the operating board, drinks up the

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excretions of her skin. I think about her skin day and night and night and week. I think about the smell of it and the reactive hues and how it is slimy with the thoughts she grows on nights of smiling, melting, and screaming orgasms. She is a sight to behold. She is a place for tourists to rest their dirty feet. She is a place for traffickers to rest their heads and let out some puffery into her silky wear and peels her mind back. She has the price of knowing and the pleasure of surprise ground into her skin. Her skin is like the wrappings of a penis. It moves in the mechanized way and gets her off in the same fashion and it has that inhuman feel. She has the tits of majesty. They ride on enormous skies and have markings written well and huge and in shade deeper than all surroundings. I could breathe her underwater. I could make campfires of her and live in warmth, outside of my sacrifice. She is the league of dead populations.

I am going outside in rainy afternoon today. There should be a meeting today. I described well the location and the transport that was made for it. It is all still on my property, but just barely. The person that I am meeting is an official person. He keeps things for the state. He wears his own uniform. He is dressed well. The person I am meeting, I am told, has the same interests as me. I should spot this for a lie. I have interests, I am sure, but none publicly defined. So, who is this outside entity? His name is Mr. Robes. He was contacted indirectly through a friend or machine. I took a powder to reduce the swelling in my legs and keep it at bay so that I can stay out in the cold for an extended time if need be. I am prepared with wrapped breads and containers of liquid and the instruments he could expect to examine. I have three soft packs of cigarettes, a wool hat, and sturdy shoes and blankets. I am overdoing my preparation. I will not be far from the house, not more than a hundred yards. It is times like this when I catch myself and ask myself what I am doing. The response is often too dramatic or it is nothing at all. I have a bad tendency for being overly silent in addition to being overly prepared. I always keep a flashlight in my pocket, among other things. I have keys to places that I can no longer get to by land. This is all of little consequence though. I think I am running the words to kill the time that is between me and Mr. Robes, the official person. I imagine he is doing something similar.

The birds outside are hungry. They are squealing for food. I cannot imagine where they

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might find it. It looks very still out there. I rarely do anything for them in that regard. I don't do them any favors, but I also don't keep things so tidy that their life might feel impossible. Sometimes I lash hunks of meat streaming blood into the ground. I am sure they gain some benefit from it. This is by no way good enough. I am not their friend. I don't pick up their shit. I don't even taste it and sometimes I steep their warm carcasses in fine glasses of mud. I drink to them and I look east to the ocean town, but it is many miles away, so this only happens on rare days. God forgive me and arrive soon in this man, pull yourself up the driveway and arrive with your instructions. I have a message for you to leave with. It is to be taken to her and it asks for her forgiveness too and begs for her to release this distance between us.

The beaks of the little talkers are shivering. It is cold outside and I hear his tires crackling up the path. He is on his way. Something slows him. There is a distortion in the way he is getting to me. He is shivering now too.

I am going to go inside and wait for all of this nonsense to evaporate. I will wait for moments inside, but before I go, I put the cameras on him and attach a chord to my belly. When resistance is upon my gut, I will know to go for him. I don't want to be met inside. In fact, it may be best to keep him blind to my dwellings completely. I stay in rooms close to the door, no more than two thresholds between us. I can get down the steps as quickly as I need to despite the achiness and tightness in my foot. It warms quickly enough.

Once inside, it takes a full hour for the nerves to relent enough to let me do some business and think unhindered. I am never at my best, but always on the ready for it. I decide that I am going to gather a little armful of goods to help me get some accomplishment. Not so careful thought is put to it, but I think I arrive at healthy selections. I have got some pornographic magazines and some glassware. I used to like them quite a bit; they were some of my favorites. I would take walks for them, holding them under my arm and reflect constantly on the people they introduced me to. I saved them for days like today. Killing daytime, pornographic magazines are best in the light of afternoon and on a full belly of liquid. They are a historical museum. I liked the European models the best. They are the fast aging of

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modernity. You can feel on your skin. You can take it with a glass of warm milk and have a nap afterward and not feel so bad. I have burned holes in my mattress resting with days. When I get up to sleepwalk, I watch television and I drink coffee and I talk to the magazines. I am starting to feel ridiculous and undone for society. Every day feels more and more urgent and I feel less and less capable of combating the existence. Someday, they will remove me for this very reason and I will have no objection to call.

If I take a look out the window real quick, will the apparition still be holding? How long can Mr. Robes fix himself in hypnosis and on my property? I am getting to feeling like he will never want me. I am going to go feel myself in the shower. I am tired of waiting on him. I am tired of losing in the waiting. In all honesty, I am tired of the voice that comes from my body. The dread is retroactive and has poisoned my past. I was never here. I was never that person. I was never arriving to this place. Right now, I believe that if she were here, I could force her to compassion and warmth. I could force her to dress and speak with confidence of the act that could confine us forever in fatigue. She would wear the proud tensions of her vibrating pussy and pull back the sweat from my forehead, ramming it into my skull.

There are feeble cats painted in cafes slammed to the wallpaper. There are porcelain cups and saucers with tea and rubbing alcohol and the smell of engine grease hanging in the threads of lace doilies. I am angry, levitating aboard the couch. I am sleeping under a rattling ceiling fan fixed exposed ducts and braces. I am mutilated and feeble. What the hell, I am angry. I have got to go out and get some lunch. I must have some money around. I take another look to verify that he has left. He has. I still don't know if I can leave. Maybe, I can call her and have her come pick me up. Maybe, when she gets here I can just tease her into the house. She likes the place. I hate it, but I love to watch her enjoying it so much. I love what she does when she feels it in her chest, when she feels the memories that she has lifted from me. It is just water, but to her it is something supreme and arousing. She calls it the giver and taker of life. She says she'll murder me. She says that I won't have to concern myself with the water anymore. I tell her that sounds nice and I agree with everything she mentioned, but I just want to be next to

her for a little while longer if that is fine with her. She always submits. She thinks we are not getting anywhere. She must keep trying. I keep enjoying it.

I marked seventy-seven inches of blood with the hair of her entrails. I poured oils in her mouth and burned her like a lamp. I wore her legs around my head and danced naked under the treetops. She was full of artifacts.

I got out my gloves and my hat and I threw them down on the stack of magazines as I sank down to the bathroom floor. I felt the golden glow of hell between my legs. I began talking to whatever would listen. I am going to the camp for the first time. This is the day that I will remember, the first visit.

My legs carried me to the camp in a way that I did not know legs could work. They walked with the bones gliding up and down the skin and they breached new horizons in spurts. They dragged the rest of me in this leaning posture. I was falling like a shadow falls on the floor and crawls up a streetlamp. Then, in a flash, I was in a group. I was part of them in a way that was just immediately understood by all of us. We knew of a purpose that would take quite some time to solidify in our minds. Our beings were this new group. I want to call it a colonial organism, but I am not sure if that is right. Perhaps, it will be clearer soon.

My body parts are in these beings. I want to speak out into them and ask them questions. I don't know if I can be a speaker with them. I know so little and that must be changed if these questions can ever be put to them. I wonder if then I will even have need for it. I wonder what the future holds. I can't imagine the nature of it. Nothing like this exists in me, or rather, I have not responded to the existence of it yet. I want to ask them about Mr. Robes, about his vanishing and what I want to believe is his inevitable return. I want to ask them about the girl that is traveling. I want to know what makes that up and if she is to come to collect in this way. That is what the universe has become. The universe has become the collectives that collect and the body parts that skin strides over and the way that it massages out the rivers of planets that are to be. It is very simple that we learn these things. Each person's method of studying it is so personal and when they tell you about it on some soft and secret night, you will

both kind of chuckle and you will say to yourself, I really like that, the way this person went about figuring it out. That is pretty clever of them or that is just what makes that person or that is so strange that they would do it that way. Then you want them. Then you think they are something good. Then you are with them and they let you have it. It is a kind thing. It is what leads a lot of people to everything and in some ways that is really terrible.

I am going to try to sit down and figure out my body parts in this arrangement. I start looking for what are my organs and try to see if I can still recognize them. I am feeling wet and like everything there is sloshing underneath me in vertigo. I remember having headaches for maybe a year or two when I was still pretty young. I don't know what is making me think of this now. I would anticipate them. I would just wait for it to happen. I would prepare myself. I would say I know today it is going to happen. It is going to knock me down. I would just have to be really still and away from everything and just try to let it pass. It is something really simple and it gets to be unbearable. Then just when I was getting to where I could just live with it, I think they just stopped. It is like I didn't even notice that they stopped. It was more that, without noticing, I gave up on waiting on them. They had become too infrequent. As this becomes more distant in my memory, it makes less sense. It is more difficult to grasp. Looking back, the whole chain of events is preposterous. I had gotten to the point of building in an acceptance to something that was just unbearable to me and then it just vanishes and I hardly take any notice. What the fuck?

Then I start walking and I get a feeling like I am now physically pulling away from them, like I am going for a little walk away from them. It is like someone trying to clear his or her head. It is all still attached. You say to yourself, I am going to get away from this and you are dragging yourself around outside in the rain or riding in your car, and you do it, you have gotten away from it, but it is really still there, it has just shifted into alternate behavior, which really isn't all that alternate.

I am thinking all these things like I am just wasting time. I see that much. I am doing something else, but I am playing little games in my head. I am daydreaming or something like it.

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The fact is I don't really recognize what I am actually doing. It is like some sort of communion.

I want to call these beings strangers and myself a stranger, but that is completely false. My mouth tries to form the names of them, names that I must know, but it fails me. That usually happens with people that are too much in the past, but I don't think these beings are those kinds of people. I think they are something new and unfamiliar, but they are so completely a part of me, if only for an instant even, it is something so intimate, that I know them in a way that our kind can only recognize as a production of time, great time.

I think about my old ways and live myself through an entire day, every hour of it, but it doesn't take long at all, well, what I mean is that it is over quickly and no time at all paid the price for it.

They are drawing seasons of numbers on the board. They are speaking. I am shivering in my clothes and rubbing my skin in the working way.

Dialogs are had in parks and hotel courtyards. I am slipping down onto the surface of very cold tiles and getting drowsy and I am brought back to the familiar surroundings of my home. I have obtained little but secret instructions that give the time and place for the next coming together. The room smells of fragrance and I believe someone else is here with me. I keep thinking about how nothing was given up for all the recent occurrences. Then I start to get really scared. Maybe, something was given; I just didn't see it go. How could I have missed that, and what has gone from me? Is this the way that these things must eat? Am I going to become a participant in that process? I hope to hell not, but why do I even hope for that? How am I to know this person that will be me?

They all drop dead, electrified, rejoiced in the new machinations of their souls to skin. I wonder how sweetly or perfectly or quietly they will decompose. Outstretched arms tell me, sleeping not dismantling. She says, go enjoy the old movements. How the hell would she know what that entails?

She will blow you down. It is the way.

The doorbell rings and I get up to go answer it. There isn't anyone there. It is just a

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reminder. I am back in a single operating piece, under the roof of the place that was so carefully constructed. After the construction, it became mine to keep provided I could do the maintenance and pay the taxes. I thought I heard sobbing and then young chatter from upstairs. It is the bright part of the days and it is so still. I think, back in the apartment. I have been slipping up like this a lot lately, referring to things incorrectly.

The heat kicks on and I remember it is my favorite sound. It soothes. It makes me sleepy. I say to him, yes. I'll have a taste. Take me outside. I want to have a smoke and get some fresh, cool air. I am dozing off. I am feeling harsh. I grab him and pull him close. He is a gelatinous blob in my fists. I am rubbed red raw and itching under layers that I hate that I need. He puts his hand down the front of my pants and starts pulling. I am getting so much harder. I kiss and bite his ear and I whisper, I am going to come right now; is that what you want to do to me? He breathes out a gasp and it is over. I tried to hold it, but the pleasure flew from deep down in my gut. It feels disgusting and guilty when it is over and he tells me that maybe next time he can just watch me and talk me through it. I have a fantasy a lot of being instructed, but it is always with a woman. I don't think I'll ever get a next time with him. He doesn't want it. I get the feeling he told me that just to put me off. He knows I would hate even the thought of doing it that way. He didn't like what just happened, but he was afraid that I did. I think I might have, but that doesn't really matter much now.

I tell him that I am going to bed and I go sit down on the couch in the other room. I leave the lights off and sink down and light up a cigarette. It feels the best. I hear him leave through the back door. The glass panes rattle very softly.

Branches were swinging the night breeze. Blankets were basking on my legs. I am still going to get to sleep relatively early tonight. She talks to me later. She talks to me tomorrow night. I can feel it.

Everything about the place was green. My stomach was shriveled to black frilly ridges. I could see it. It was hardening into a sickened state. The pale light was turning me in knots. I am not bearing the weight of the thin crowd well. I have this fear that they are paying close

attention and committing my words to memory and trying to make sense of them as we all go along with this together. We didn't ask for it. So, why would they do it in such a way, to strangers? I don't know. It sickens me. It makes me awfully nervous, especially considering what I am about to try to coax her into. I know what it is. I realize. There is no denying and perhaps coax is too kind. It is more like a demanding plea. I am commanding an awful thing. I am overcome with want. I should just run away and stagger and break myself on something. I would like that. I sit calmly though. She has ruby red lips. She has a shaved head. I am pushing it into my pussy. She drags her lips around drooling all over my thighs. Get yourself together. She is fucking a pillow between her legs. She is bleeding all over it and coming. Her sweaty cheek rests against my belly as she falls down into exhaustion. I twist her head back into me. She is slowing down perfectly and I am getting warm and romantic with overtones of bitter hatred. Someone is fucking her from behind. His thrusts are rippling along her and into my hips. The waves are pushing me in the pace of my biology, the spectral orgasm. We let it rest on our tongues and pose in ways that degrade us. She has done me in. I think she put a knife between my ribs. I get up and go to the bathroom. I am leaving it all behind. I am going to drive to the airport as soon as she falls asleep. There is no reason for this anymore. I can see it in her eyes. She has had enough of me.

I think back to that day and realize what an awful mistake I made. I misread her. I didn't misread her. I used her. I did it all for myself. Maybe, I was acting in the interest of making some kind of gesture, something to complete it. I wish I could've accomplished that in some other way. The reality is that she needed me and I left. The only reason I did it was to make a thought come to life. At the time, I hoped that in some stupid way she would gain from it too. I thought she could appreciate it. It was a sick thrill. She wasn't up for that. Nobody should be.

Fire swept across the sky. I was standing in the sink, shaving. The mirror was turning silver and rust. This house was going. The blade dragged across my face and pinched out flecks of skin. Blood bubbled with the branches of microscopic deep-sea life. What has happened to let me let this place go so far to ruin. I know the rest of the house must be like this. I will go look

when I am finished. There is dust and a damp sheen across marked patches. The light has just become cracks and dusty clouds. Little silver objects are rusted and discarded in various open places and tucked in away in others. I can feel the foaming breathing miraculous comforts of aloe and menthol as I peel it down my body in sheets. I do the usual cleanup. I wipe away the foam that sticks and run cold water and alcohol down my face and wipe that from chest and put my shirt back on arms and neck. I am going to go out and have a smoke, and then I will clean this place up.

The air is just as cold and wonderful as I had hoped. It is one of the best feelings after a shave. I am standing there watching the moisture come up through the concrete, the sweating concrete. I have gone into the basement. Why have I gone into the basement? Why am I not outside? Why did it feel the same for so many minutes, a third of a cigarette? I wonder if it is dangerous to be down here, doing this. I am going to put it out and go to bed.

I am going to wake up in the middle of the night and go downstairs to do the dishes. I look at the clock and it is after two. I calculate that it might take me an hour and twenty minutes. I don't know. It is a rough estimate. I go downstairs, after I put my shoes on, and I start filling up the sink. The water is cold and I am impatient. The water fills the sink up halfway with icy water, and then half way up the ceramic walls, it starts to scream out its bluffs of steam and whistle like a rocket. I have to yank my hands out of the way to prevent myself from being burned. It is awful and I laugh a little bit to myself. I don't know why it strikes me so funny, but it does. There are little leaks up around the top of the rim, so I have to have a washcloth on me to keep the counter tops wiped down. You have to protect them from water damage. I usually just tuck the cloth in under my belt or I throw it over my shoulder if it is one of the cloths of appropriate size. I wash all the dishes and I am really thorough. I don't remember using half of these and it feels like I just went through this entire process maybe two or three days ago. There is a lot. It piles up. I don't get it. I don't remember eating. Are these crumbs and fluids of eaten meals or are they from other materials? What could I have been doing with all of these dishes?

Then I start to really think and something terrible occurs to me. I think that I might have been gone for a period of time when I was with the group, inside their dimension. I could have been gone for days or weeks even. Is it possible, that in my absence, someone used this place? Do I have someone that could've let him or her in if they had a key? Did I even lock the doors and windows? Of course I did. I always do and I check them multiple times, and not just when I leave, but when I am home, throughout the day or night or week. It is one of the few things that I can truly count on. It is one of the major priorities that I spend time, which I have worked to be certain of. There is something about something that is open when it could be shut, well I just can't have it. I do something about it. I have always loved the intricacies of lock, key, and latch.

But if this is the case, I suppose the initial thing to do is to find some other evidence of it. I get out a pocket notebook and a pen to take notes of it and to make diagrams, illustrations, whatever could be useful. I skip a few pages and then start scribbling down my notes. Numbered first is the occurrence of many dishes, coated with crumbs and with a film of liquids and other materials. I make a mark, a symbol, and then follow it with some explanatory notes. This is unexplained due to no recollection of eating and a feeling that not enough time had passed to justify this accumulation. My conclusion, followed by a different mark, is left blank for now. Then numbered secondly, and I think it best that after noting this first discovery, I should start now from the most upper interior portions of the home and make my way down to the bottom of it. I also realize that an inspection of the entire property is probably going to be necessary, more than just the interior, but I am starting here. I go up the stairs. I turn on the lamp on the nightstand. I didn't feel the need for the main lights. I can get around just fine without them, even in the dead of night. What am I going to find up here? What am I expecting or what the hell am I even supposed to be looking for? I suppose I am simply searching for evidence of another person, the marks that come from someone's life. I have to find how they touched the place. I thought for a second about hearing crying, just the sound of it. I don't know why. Anyway, I am trying to see if someone else was here. They shouldn't have been,

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right? I do live alone. It is odd. I have never said that out loud to myself before and here I am saying it out loud to myself in the upstairs, the top portion of the house. Shit, the attic is the very top just from inside. How the fuck do I get up there? Should I skip it? No. I look up for a panel and I need a flashlight for this, so I pull one from my pocket. I always keep at least a small flashlight on me. There has got to be a hinge or a seam or some kind of grip somewhere for the attic. I try to remember the outside dimensions of the house so I can plot in my mind where everything must be laid out. Right, that peak there in the east, above the window, is that it? I am looking up in the corner and I start stretching over the bed and I trip and fall and collapse on the floor between the bed and the wall. I felt a couple corners of some objects go into me on the way down. It hurt a bit, like the way something drags across the skin and pulls it up a bit and leaves a rash. I am just going to stay here for a while. It is after seven. I don't have to be up until after nine and I can resume things then. The only thing I do before I rest is I check that the pen and notebook is in my pocket still and the flashlight is on the floor to the right, real close to my hand. Everything is at my side. The early morning is putting me back to sleep. The lights are down dim and it is coming out of me like muck and thickly aged blood and iron ore vomit. She tells me that no one has ever made her come like that before. I ask her what size her tits are and she tells me that she is a b-cup, but that most people would swear that she looks more like a c-cup. My hand is dead with pain and the line goes dead into a hiss. Her name was Roxie. She lived on the east coast. She flew airplanes on the weekend. When she gets her pilot's license, I won't be able to contact her anymore. I don't mind. We will always have our memories. The shape of the telephone smells like her breath and her pussy and it feels like her tits dragging across my chest. I wait by it. I wash it. I will not, however, mind a bit when all of its fuses blow and it springs into the fires of hell. I pray for that day.

The backs of my legs feel so bare. Today is another day. I don't often think of it that way. I have been so tired lately. I feel worked over. I feel beat up. My body aches. I hobble around. I always pace the floor. It is a much more meaningful thing now. It is physical. I want to keep myself up longer. I used to stay up for more than a solid day, maybe a few days. It always

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wound into catastrophe, but I did it. I can't even think about it now. It just drags me down. My head, my eyes sink. I slouch. I shake and my heart races in the fight, but I am subdued. I am anxious and subdued. Now, that is one hell of a situation.

It is after two. It is a day of the week. My bones are cracking. I was on a search, but I stopped. I was getting very fearful. It felt like there was another person in the room watching me. She was waiting around the corner. Is that what I was so afraid of? Am I afraid that someday she will in fact come back and then what am I going to do? How will I react? Sometimes, I am afraid that I will open my eyes in the middle of the night and she will be standing right there, hovering over and ready to kill me. This brings back memories. I used to have stupid little fantasies like this all the time when I was about a decade younger. I felt plucky with the world putting its hooks into me. I felt full of vigor. I felt full of shame. It was a good time in some ways, in some ways it was not. It was kind of a lot like now, but I am in some ways different. I am reaching for some realization and finding nothing. I feel like a wild little animal. I am just kind of doing things and thinking things and changing and touching the changing ground. I am probably the thing that is wrong with the world.

It has been a long time since a visit from the new body. They did visit me, right? Is that the way it worked? I honestly don't remember. Am I supposed to be finding them? Yes. I did something to get to them. Maybe, I thought it would be different the second time. I thought that maybe since we fused, we remained connected. I kept thinking they would come back for me.

I think I am going to go back to the first visit and be that man again. When I am done doing that, I shall seek them out again.

So, it is the day that I said I would remember forever. My body changed in a short time. Forever is fucked. How will I die hanging to this new body? I am tracing the lines of the form to figure out all the nature of it. I am trying to figure out what part I am. Is she the legs, the trunk, the teeth, the fucking spleen? I am never going to see her again.

I had a desire today to start writing these letters to somebody. I try to remember if I

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have an old friend, someone I haven't seen in a while, but very familiar. I don't want them getting rattled by me striking it up with them after all these years. There is no one that fits into this scenario for me. How will I do it? How will I write letters to people and send them packages with treasures from my findings? I don't know anybody, not the right kind of people, not anybody. Can that be true? I might have to go find someone. I might have to get the car out of the garage. I might have to meet up with that collection of souls that has fused to me and ask them how I can get in contact with Mr. Robes again. I forget his purpose, but he is a person and we can be in contact. I want to say that he wanted that at the beginning. I don't know why he went into that phase and started bleeding outside the timeline. Maybe, he is seriously hurt from the encounter. Maybe, it was my fault. I never considered this, not at first at least. I thought about it a couple of days later while only half awake on the couch. What did I determine from that? It couldn't have been much, but maybe I was on the right track. That is the day, anyway, the day I first encountered them. It would be wise to retrace it all. Mr. Robes seems to be the place to start.

I found a photograph of him in the roll top desk. That will be just great. We will have a séance of the living. What else do you need for a séance, candles and what else? It is certainly different for the living. I will have to account for that. I don't have anybody to guide me. I am going to have to improvise this and work my own way through it. I am trying to constantly remind myself of the purpose of all of it, kind of in the back of my head. I am getting sleepy. I am falling off track. We are summoning Mr. Robes. He is taking us back to the first instance. I am trying to eat from the time and space that is between the girl and me. When I get her back in my arms, I am going to encourage her to make shapes and constructions of disease and marks on me. I am going to make her love me.

I know how that sounds. It sounds terrible. What am I doing? I pause to think and no. That is right. That is exactly what I am doing. I don't have time to justify it to myself either. I am just going to have to live with the way it brings me down. Candles and jars of bone and vinegar in my arm, I am lead by my own determination back to the low table where his photograph

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rests. Are you out there Mr. Robes? Can you hear me? I pray for his safe and speedy arrival. I start rehearsing my speeches, softly on the lips and hoarse in the throat. He will be here soon. I can feel it. Wind throws the window shutters into a violent way. They are going to crack the house. They are going to make me foam at the mouth and fall back. The world is happening, sliding in sheets on top of me. I extend my arms, arch my back, and open my mouth to a very gritty beam of light.

Then a few hours are stolen from me and I am in bed. I have one of those comfortable chills running up me, so I pull the blankets tight to my chin. I want to say that he is at the foot of the body. I am going to sleep with him right there in the room with me. It is a great thing.

I am starting to look at the hairs on my skin. I am growing them and making them stand up. I remember one of our best nights. She was by the fireplace in a sweater and panties and socks and she was groaning with the crackles. I reached up under her sides and felt the sweat and she threw her hair back and spread her legs while standing. I lifted her arms up and pinned them in position and left them there after removing the sweater and letting it fall to the carpet. I could see the shadows of hair gleaming with sweat in her sides, in her pulses and lymph nodes. She was swollen with delight. I tried to stick my head through her skin that night. I tried to get inside of her in any way that I could. I thought we were growing a single mind. She washed in the sink. The moment was fleeting. Spirits were growing along the edges of the baseboards. Something was chasing her away. She went outside in the cold and in the snow and she wept on the front steps. Later, she screamed at me. I shouted back and she had no idea what I was talking about. I had no idea what she was talking about. I shoved the dresser and it jumped a few times and slid to halt in microscopic movements. Nothing was ever so still as that damn, fucking dresser. It was heavy after all, quite heavy. I went back to sleep after she left and woke up later and talked to the room. It wasn't the first time. I spoke to glass shades on the lamps, to faces of wood on the furniture, to suitcases. I told them I wanted out. They circled around me and they pressed the buttons on the machines. I was reeling in hell, in their interrogation. There is a part of me that enjoyed it though. I liked being restricted to brief

moments outside in that beautiful snow. It made it special. When she left, it made her special. It made her a statue, a monument to our torture. It left me to get ready for his arrival, the most crucial. I feel a pity for where she must be now, but how the hell should I know. I am not a Platform Creature and I have only met one once. One meeting is not enough to learn to practice their ways. I don't have the body for it anyway. They have ribs in their legs and lights in their eyes and hands like a chest.

When I think back about her, I remember how excessively tall and muscular she was and the thin pockets of fat that were placed strategically on her body. I had to be completely unhinged and imaginative and painfully honest to reach her vagina. Her hair fell down like a shiny curtain off of her head. She had a blond triangle between her legs. She was always waiting for me on the floor or against the wall, but I am pretty sure she hated me. I wonder who paid her off. This afternoon, when I go to the camp, I will look for her and I will ask around. These beings don't speak, they slobber, but I am beginning to understand their gestures. She used to tell me about visions that she had. In them, she existed in a very biblical afterlife. I can't recall any of the details about them right now, but I wonder if there is a way to remember. I will have to look into it. It will be a busy afternoon. I have lots of things to visit. I don't really like days that have a lot of visits to make. I would rather be at home talking to something or watching something or making something or spending time with myself. I will put out tea when I leave. The chances are slim, but what if she arrives and occupies the house in my absence or if someone else thinks to do the same. I don't know what hope I have in being cordial, but my options are limited and it feels like a very correct thing to do. I put the players and recorders out just in case some being might want to survey their self inside their visit. It is what I would do. It is what would benefit me too. It is not a mean thing to do. I am giving them the choice.

"Your coffee is getting cold."

I am thinking about hitting the road again. This place has been in my family for generation, but what good has it done me really? Especially in recent time, it seems like just a heap of bad luck. It seems like there are things wandering the grounds and they have it in for

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me. Maybe, I am just being paranoid. A lot of these in fact are new encounters. Things can be a bit rocky in the beginning. I know that. I just wish I could explain it to them, tell them that they are upsetting me. I wish I could figure out some solid way to communicate with them. Well, I suppose wishing for things never really got anybody anywhere. Maybe, I should try to do something about it, not too aggressively. I'll just try to start figuring things out.

I am walking down the hall. It is a late hour. It is really dim in here and dusty. It reminds me of the summer in '85. It was hot and dim and the house was dusty. I used to get up in the middle of the night and just look around at things. I think I am trying to have a look around now. It is the feeling I got, just like in '85. Everything was in its place and I had looked at it all for months but it all felt new, every single night. I would move around and list things and pick up a thing here or there or turn something or make it work its function for a minute. It was the pure moments of discovery, over and over. It was a great time then in the night, just like now. The days too were a lot like the days now. They were full of treachery. I have got to work it out once and for all.

I get into the mouth of the hallway and stand with my chest and eyes out into the main living quarters. They are ripe with an orange light, a light that hung just under the dermal air of the space. This place was infected with something sweet and sharp. It was after me. That I can know now for certain. The question remains as to what it wants and to what exactly it is. So far, I have seen many gatherings of what I can characterize as multiple bodies, but to say that they couldn't be just one thing assumes too much. I don't know the nature of any of it. When I think about it, I know little of my own nature. In the summer back then, I used to just rest for a long time in the cloudy water of the bathtub and let the soapy undertow place films of every kind on my body. I had a desire to do that now. I wonder if it could bring me some answers.

"Why don't you just tell us?"

I would do anything to make it stop. The dinner curtains fall around the table and I am dancing in the kitchen in the steam of the preparation for the event. The event is about resentment and revenge. I told them all a personal lie to get them here, to drag them away

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from their fires and brass bandages of oil. His hair was sprouting up from around my feet. I took him down in the basement and then when it was over and took him for a drive in the ink blue night. I put his body and soul to rest in a lonely landscape. That was just last Friday. He was not the first. He was not the last. But don't you think I should continue back to the dinner? What a lovely story that is. Do you still want to hear it?

She makes things very difficult for me. She doesn't call. I got up very early in the morning and I went out to the shed out back to get some supplies, mostly cooking things. I came back in, armful after armful. It was a great, sweaty time. My sweat was bleeding through my shirt and wool coat and through the white paper bags and butcher's twine that I had previously packaged everything in. We had all that was necessary, wine and cured meat and cheese and milk and a variety of utensils. We had porcelain serving platters and teacups and saucers. We had silver dishes and crystal glasses. We had huge cleavers and spikes. I am exhausted. I turn up the radio to keep me going. Some glorious cry was playing. I hated it. I turned it up louder. I let it break my head. It was awful. We had lots of dairy.

The sun was coming up just as I was coming in with the final delivery. I put the curtains around the table and lit fires in a secret way to mark everyone's location. I couldn't wait for them at this point. The arrival would be splendid. It would be like a calling of everyone home. I took a nap to pass the time. I wet my skin with soapy cool water before I slept. It was conductive. It was primary. When the noon sweats began to split my fluid coat with red and yellow sweat, I awoke and reapplied. I gave myself forty-five minutes worth. It would be perfect. I would be in full swing by four. The curds would be ready. I would be ready. I put the telephone down right next to me, off the hook, and I went back to rest for a while.

When four o'clock rolled around, I had paced so much. My blood was roiling. It was just like I had hoped. I was in full stride. I was preparing a great meeting. My body was one with the meeting ground. I went out back and I dug holes in the ground and I sprinkled clay in the lining of them and I sprayed the clay with water from the garden hose. We were going to burn wood statues in them. We were going to assign purpose to our breathing and our beating. We were

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going to lash ourselves under the moon.

It was seven and the streets were lined with them. I was dead tired but very pleased with myself and still very much ready for it all to happen. I don't know what else I can say. They all showed up and did, as they were told and only three of them fought back at all. It was at the very end and they tried to hold my head under water. I blacked out for a few minutes, the big block of purple light, and when I woke up, it was over. Everything was covered over, blanketed with dining cloths. That is a pretty neat trick, huh?

He was getting very impatient, and so was I. His leg was rattling the upholstery and the knobs of the car seat. It was irritating the shit out of me. I didn't exactly know how to tell him to stop. I kept glaring out of the corner of my eye. I thought, I hate you, motherfucker. He couldn't hear my thoughts though. Fuck, did that ever disappoint me. I was shouting mad, bursting my eyes loud and, breaking the sweat and he could only do so little. He twitched a little. You, motherfucker, and stop your god damned twitching. What if I just crack him across the face now? What if I put something heavy to his temple or his jaw? No, that would sour things. We had to arrive first. We had to get to the shrine. Not once did he ask where we were going. Isn't that strange? When I remember it, I see him sitting there like a fool, chomping away on some chewing gum. I know he wasn't really doing that, but that is kind of the feel of it. That is the way I like to picture it when I recall that night. That car seat smelled of urine and all sorts of other foul things, and this dull bastard had the good grace to not bring it up. He didn't give the slightest inclination, not by word or gesture, as to noticing it at all. He was one polite bastard or just plain stupid. I shouldn't be so quick. You never know a person's situation. Maybe, he had no sense of smell and touch or anything that might detect what was going on. Maybe, he was not equipped in a number of ways. I had only known him a short time. So, I start to ask him questions to try to detect if has any of these unusual traits going on in his body and he sits there through every one of them not saying a fucking word, just chewing that imaginary chewing gum. What's your favorite flower? How do you like the winters here, too cold for you? Can you taste things well enough? Jesus Christ, he's hopeless. I almost just want to take him

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back. I'm not enjoying it at the time and I start to feel a little pity for him. I don't know what I want to do, so I make an extra loop, about four miles. It went too fast. So, that's it. I don't want to think about it anymore.

Pull over! Pull over! She was screaming and spitting on the glass and clawing at my prick. So, I did and she struck me with a stun gun and took off running. Three days in a bath of ice is what she got.

I don't know why I keep calling him and writing him these nasty little letters. It is not amusing or arousing or sweet. It is not what he said it would be. I want to do something else. He said, if he ever gets out he would return every piece to me and repay me. I get the idea that what he meant by that was he would kill me. I think that was the only reason I did it.

She had the sun in her eyes, through her hair. We were on a picnic. She had on a sundress. It was all very sweet and normal. It was photographed in black and white. We drank tea and then wine and we ate nothing, some picnic. We slept on a blanket in the weeds with bugs crawling on us. We were happy for an afternoon or so. Then, I don't know what went wrong. She just stopped showing up. I didn't know where she worked. I didn't know where she lived even. We always met at the park. This was devastating for me. I think it was the first time my heart was truly broken. We weren't in love. I won't be so dramatic. There is no need for it. Isn't it enough to like someone and to just lose his or her attention, to let the heart ache and split into bitterness? I really couldn't tell you much about her, but she seemed nice. Then she lost interest. I didn't do anything wrong, although now, I wish I would have. She just vanished. It was not a very passionate ending. I went cold and started to sleep a lot.

Right now, not because of that, I don't give a shit about that anymore, but right now, I am sleeping more too. I am starting to look forward to sleep. This is not at all like me. I don't look forward to it. I need it sometimes or can't escape it, but seldom if ever enjoy it. I don't know what to think. My life can do whatever it wants at this point. I don't fucking care.

I am going to go to bed right now. I am going to split in two and one is going to lumber up the stairs, creaking in the boards and in the bones and he is going to collapse into that

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heavenly mattress. That is what he is going to do. The second is going to stay downstairs, in the chair, the corner one by the nightstand and lamp and he is going to make a third and then a fourth and fifth and sixth and onward until when the other awakes, it will be so small as to be nonexistent. So, that is what we do tonight. In the morning, I will go into the heads of many. In the morning, my sleeping friend will go about my business, and unknowingly, he will stroke me around every corner.

She had wine stains on her lips. She had a very short dress. I could smell her. We fought a lot. She slept in the car when she got angry enough. She smashed dishes on the tile and ripped up carpet in the dining room. She trashed the place. She threw her cigarette butts in the toilet. She was something else. I don't let myself think about her too much. I had a hell of a time getting rid of her in the first place. I got caught halfway through and so I carelessly spilled out into the rest of the world, taking them down. That was almost the end. Some would say, that was the end, but I am thinking maybe I know better. I know something they don't. That will all be exposed soon enough.

I say, some time has passed, maybe two or three days and I am realizing how quiet it has been. I live in the splintered walls of a steeple. It is really getting under my skin. I look for something to show and make a noise and nothing appears. I am so lost without a little bit of sound. I used to think that I lived like this all of the time, but now I am realizing that it wasn't this that I was living in at all. It was something else, a different kind of quiet. I am going to go down into the cellar and see what I can stir up. There is a lot about the cellar that I have never noticed before. I don't spend very much time down there, so most of the features that I have noticed contained down there so far are things that are just essential, things of essential visits, and features that I have seen the other side of from the outside. I know of the furnace and the water heater and the laundry area with the basin. I have a few closets of clothes down there that I wear on occasion, mostly heavier winter stuff. I have a cabinet with some files that I look over from time to time and some old cameras and tape recorders and the like. There are some vents and windows and a stopped up coal chute that I don't examine well from the inside, but I

know them well without looking because I have seen them well enough from the other side. I have just filled in the blanks. It is a great way to see the gaps and what we throw down there.

There are some heavier things in the place though. I have always known it, but now I am really starting to feel it and for the first time, I want to get into it. I have always heard screeching and whispering from the attic. I always knew about that, from day one. It is a pretty simple thing though. It is a child. If it is a child, then this is a beast. I must be desperate to want to stick my face in it.

There is carpet down there, but I have only peeled it up once. It was when I first came here and it rained so hard and so relentlessly that spring that not a pore of any standing thing was left dry. We all start to sweat cold water in ways that we had never imagined. So, the walls and the floor started to bleed this rainwater, this cursed rainwater and I had to peel up the carpet in spots and take care of it. There was some plywood in spots and some cardboard and it was pretty much just a patchwork. Then there was the cement floor underneath and a few drain holes and clean outs, that I swear, seemed to change location at their will and whimsy. It was a damn funny thing to see me chasing them around, peeling at the carpet, losing it, and gripping the utility knife and a bucket of rags. It was real silly.

Not much is happening down here now. I feel uneasy though. I want to go back up the stairs and I don't. I start to go deeper into the room walking along the half-painted walls like a mouse. Had it been so long and so quiet? I got this distinct feeling that I was forgetting someone or missing someone? It felt like I had lost a person down here, many months ago. I don't know how else to describe it. The skin on my arms and torso covered itself with goose bumps. It was electric cold down there. Everything in the entire space felt like that old fuse box on the wall. It was nightmarish. I am going to come back down here. I am sure of it, but for now, I am going back upstairs. The boards of the steps feel thin under my feet, under the spongy carpet. They feel like they are aching to break. I wonder what makes it all so desperate for calamity down there. Maybe, it is the long stillness that has been on its back for so long. That place is gray and dreaming of color and I get the feeling that there is something sprawled

out down there that knows just how to make it happen. Apparently, it is just waiting on me. I doubt I have the option to disappoint on that count.

She wore the evening gown of a military queen. It hugged her everywhere. She was smoking in the back of the car. She asked where I was taking her. I told her we were going to the reeds. She asked where that was. I told her I couldn't imagine how she had lived her whole life around here and she had never heard of the reeds. It was a special place. It was a place that we all knew about. It was an absent place. She told me it would cost extra and she wanted assurances about her safety. I pulled a revolver, a snub-nosed, out of the glove compartment and tossed it over my shoulder onto the leather cushion next to her. She jumped like she had sat on a tack. She said, what's the big idea and you know that could've gone off and killed one of us. I said, either way that'd be bad for you, with me driving the car and all. She said it's not funny. I said that I knew it wasn't and in all seriousness, I never go so fast in a car that someone couldn't jump out in an emergency. You might get a little banged up but you'd survive. Banged up? What is that supposed to mean?

Anyway, we kept going down the road and she settled down, but her body stayed glossy with a nervous sweat. I could feel inside myself how beautiful that must've smelled all over her. We got to the reeds and I fucked her twice in the back seat. We had a cigarette together after each time, just one cigarette each time between the two of us. We shared it. I liked her. I paid her plus a tip. I put the revolver back in the glove compartment and drove her back into town. She asked that I drop her off at Lou's for a drink. She said I could join her if I liked, but I politely declined and went back home.

As soon as I hit the couch, I started to miss her. I had a thought to give her a call, but I figured she was probably either headed home herself or getting sloppy drunk. Either way, I didn't really want to see her anymore that night. I just wanted to think about her for a while. Maybe, I'll start pounding down some drinks myself or maybe I'll just sit here and be still with all the lights off and close my eyes and spend the next few hours falling asleep and daydreaming.

“We don’t have time for all this, Doug.”

You see the big deal about her is that I wanted to tell her everything. She existed before all these places had a need for me. The big deal about her is that I fought through the fear and the shame, and it came often, but I spoke as if from the top of a mountain on daily occasions. I thought about her and I thought about travel. She existed before I needed Mr. Robes. He has been absent, but in a way just constantly imbedded in my form and movements and whispers. He is the kind of person, well, I want to take him down to a riverbed and do some work and really search for something, something grand.

There is a thing that I want to discuss about her and me and travel. The truth of it is that I, in fact, hate to travel in any conventional way. I know nothing. I know a great nothing about almost every geographic part of the world. It doesn’t stop me though from seeing it and wanting and making it in my body. It most of all doesn’t stop me from having it with her right along the sides of her tits and her ribs and her hips and her blessed cheek. I have made things of these places. I have described them into myself.

I have in my womb a seaside town along rolling green hills. I have cliffs and the white foam of wind and the loose speech of a bitter and jealous and wild town. They are peasants with torches and I walk along their gangplanks. It is a special way that we speak in hushes just under the blankets of clinking glasses. It is the green tint of the foggy night. It is arms held for safety in the foggy night and sweat made over wood shavings and blueprints. It excites us. We sleep in itchy wool sheets and soaked lace. My fingers touch her.

When the sun comes up, we are eating fish stew for breakfast and floury biscuits. We are drinking strong coffee in cobalt blue tin marred by scabs of rust and rings of salt. We are dressing for the damn slush and slop and red numb life.

Turkeys are crying in the field. The holiday season is upon us in yellow pages, thick drinks and wreathes of fire. Rocks of bone line the baseboards and burlap sacks are filled with evergreen herbs and dry peppercorns. Her juices run up my wrists. She is a filthy darling today. She is speaking cruel fantasies that I didn’t know I had. She is making a point to behave in taboo

fashions and dress in ways that would usually be quite unbecoming. I am splitting at the seams for it. I am drooling and howling and begging and she is treating me like I am being dignified about it. Her feigned ignorance is the crown jewel. She puts me in my place. I want to live up to it.

The bell tower starts radiating warmth, dull warmth. I am alive with it. I am energized by its massive ways. It has the broad texture of viscera and milkmaids. It is winding me up and there she is on top of me. She is jumping all over me. She is showing her muscles. She is gritting her teeth and laughing in a wailing way. She pins me down and holds her words to my head. She has green words and she has red words and they are each driving and pulling sets of orgasms from thin muscles, stretched to the gills. The yellow pages of war are under her ass cheeks and under the bluffs of snow. Her chest is flayed and bleeding sperm trails underneath. The bones are ached with scratches. Her hair is matted with grease and wet with winter sweat, the special sweat that only comes from chill and burning oil and life.

For three nights she keeps me clawing at her, bound up in her eyes and fresh with weak arms strung around her neck and then her thighs. She puts everything out for me to taste. She is delicate and private and worn down like a survivalist. She is filed like a piece of copper wire and set to the wolves of torches.

For an hour and a half, she is playing like she is my instructor. She is treating me like a virgin kept captive under her charge. She is wearing what a woman would wear, a long flowing black silk nightgown. Its thin straps exhausted under the weight of her bulging tits. Her nipples fully engorged in the deep maroon shades of knowing. Her pussy is full and wet and she wants to do something special for me.

The tape recorder slaps and hisses in the purple night and in the blushing afternoon and in the foaming desperate morning. She is right on top of me.

She says, take me to the bathroom. I want to do something special that I know you've wanted me to do for you. I take her by the hips and she springs out of my hands and races down the hall to the secret room. I am trying to keep up. I was right after her but I find her like

she has been waiting for me, like she's been bored. She sees me. She smiles and spreads her legs and she says, fuck me on the toilet.

"Maybe, you can just tell us where you kept some of the things that you used. Is any of that stuff still around somewhere?"

I remember the first time she left. She was gone for four hours. She went for a drive. She went out into the country. She liked those roads. I think a reason she came back, maybe the only real reason, is because we had liked those roads together. Maybe, she found no escape out there so figured she would just come back. Later, she told me that what she intended to do was to come home to sleep, to get some rest, and then she was going to leave for good in the morning when she felt more up to it. She was tired, that's all, but she didn't leave the very next morning, not that it matters much now. I boiled some water and forgot about it. I was going to make something to drink, but I forgot about it and just left the hot kettle on the stove forever. I don't know what I did for four hours. I think I must've slept a good portion of it. What else was I to do? Oh, I remember I shaved, just to do something. I did a pretty good job, but burned my neck a little. The cream felt so good on my skin afterward. I rested on the couch with a towel over the shoulder but still got the arm pretty messy with the cream from where it had been pushed away from my face. I felt full. I felt opaque. I felt a dull headache. I just wanted her absence to stop.

It is getting fucking cold outside. The wind is getting out of control. It is time to close off the room out back for the winter. I move some things inside, things that won't keep out there, or things that I could need. Then, I'm done and I go for a smoke out in the cold.

We read old detective stories by the fire and slept in sleeping bags and kept flashlights under our shirts. We wore thick wool dressing gowns after getting naked and shivering. Her new moist breasts and the smell of her got all over me and put me in a new body for a few minutes. It was a special occasion. It was the first touch. I put my arm around her scrawny shoulders or I shoved her down and broke her knees into blood. I do not recall. It was a heavy occurrence. It was fusion.

Every Saturday night for two months, I walked down the driveway and listened to the gravel shift around under my feet. Only once did I go into the garage and get out the car and take it into town. I found I couldn't do that well in the cold. Forces worked on me then. I had to have the heat and sweat. I had to have a summer night for driving into town like that after walking down the drive. Every other night, after the walk, I would go back into the house. One night, I started to make something. I thought I was making a tomb. I thought I was beginning to adorn my afterlife. I made casts of plaster and cobwebs. I shaped a case for my body to reside. I thought I was a pharaoh. Then, I made a death mask. Then, I made a shroud. Then, I stripped my flesh. Then, I fell asleep. None of this was working. It was too fucking quiet. It carried me into March when I washed my feet in the rain and photographed myself nude. I put a lot of what was left in postage boxes and hid them away in the secret cubby under the stairs. I love the panel of that compartment and the splinter and nails and gummy paintjob. I imagined it was all for her to come back to or it was something to discuss with Mr. Robes over tea and cigarettes and the flickering bulbs of our golden years. What stupid, stupid things I think and practice. I get quilts out from under the stairs and huddle on the couch. The day is getting quiet and winding down. The intervals between cars are expanding into a place that lets peace in. My feet avoid the floor. It is cold. My hands tremble with the length of the day in them. My joints are swelling with solid fluid. I am gummy and pus and huddled in the shade. Nothing will wake me tonight. The television is thin line of yellow electricity. It is the bulk of the horizon. It is going out tonight. It is overheated. The blip sears the dull cold. My head rests heavy and is perfectly warm and cold in the comfort. My neck is fused with the mean angles of the skeletal lumber. I shut myself to sleep, dreamless sleep.

"Where were you staying then?"

She dressed in clothes to arouse me. Her panties were a triangle of thin lace that was placed over her lips. They were swollen red and bleeding. She had no idea the power that surged in them and made ripples in her spine. She rubbed them against my leg. I was shivering with fearful triumph. She was getting into it. I pressed my lips against it. I could feel it twitching

underneath me and she shifted her pelvis nervously. She had soft moans on her head and a crown of sweat. She burst into petals. She rubbed it harder and harder and spread herself lower with determination. She worked herself up to me. She had never felt it before. She let it rush into her and she squeezed on it with everything. She bit her lip until it bled. She had lost.

I spent a lot of days alone in the woods that year. In the fall, I waited around for the cold. Everything seemed to crunch underneath me or it snapped. The place was untouched, well, more like covered over. I found a lot of things that were left out there and I gathered them up in the circle in the center, the place where the trees went bare and all the surface of the sun could stand up. I gathered it all and left it for someone else to catalogue. I figured that as soon as the temperature dropped to a certain point, I would probably never be seen here again. It was temporary.

I remember another time that we both dressed up really soft and feminine. We lay next to each other, just touching and kissing. Then, we rested. We thought about cold metal laying on us.

I remember sitting in a chair, smoking in the dark. I remember being flat on my back on the floor, smoking a cigarette in the dark. I remember the shutters slamming against the house.

“Is this where we turn, down this road here?”

One of the best things about growing up here was walking to the convenience store. I could never find good walking like that for the rest of my life. I liked turning past the hospital, the yellow lights and silent figures under tons of reinforced concrete blankets. I liked going through the flowing tentacles of the trees. I liked matching her stride the best I could. I especially liked when she caught notice of it and I would try to stop but couldn't. We went to that place almost every night for a while, several months. I always got the same thing. She always got something different. I liked coming back around the last corner and seeing our neighbor's white car parked out front. We let him use the driveway. We parked our cars on the street, so it was all the same to us. I didn't like talking to him. I liked him just fine, but there was something about him that made me not want to ever see him. There was a danger or

discomfort that rode him like a horse. It aged him. I could see it all too well, anybody could. We were quiet until we got back into the house, then we really started talking, every time. It was perfect then. It still is, but then it was perfect and easy. I am not sure which I prefer. It is best to have both, I suppose.

“It is getting to be a bit too much, Doug. You are not telling us what we need to hear.”

Form is breaking down into voices. It is breaking into guts. The thin minty cigarette hangs from lips. All hope and reason is gone. The big slide into creatures is beginning.

They came along on their legs in spectacular bodies carrying spectacular wheels and lights. They were a wave. I eased down into my seat thinking that I could just let it happen. They sprung me into the air. I was filled with heavier drool and feces and a powerful awareness of it. I was filled with suitcases and armoires of new clothes stitched with lights that bled from my heels and my ribs and my temples. It was power. It was communicating. They looked at me with the glowing legions of their eye sockets and the stockings that they constantly adjusted. They were the trickling multitude of aches and new swelling on my joints. They were a hard fluid. They were many in the mass. They were chattering and cleaning their guns. They were readying themselves. I sat there clothed and I was ripped of my flesh underneath in cycles that they had prepared for me. They worked in fantastic ways. They were grinding me out. Their guns were singing with the clicks of operation. Their speeches came in rounds and always followed with the most horrific boom of applause. They were doing it to me and it got them greasy. They spoke of the growing leaves; the ones that I thought were dead under my feet. They told me, no. They showed me how to open my mouth and receive full breaths and gulps of their feeding and digestion. They showed me how to pleasure them. I asked them when we would join together. They mocked me. They said, you want the fusion, then come and get it. They mocked me some more. They said, you thought you could be still and let us crawl around you and then we would leave or we would attach or it would make no difference to you. They said I was foolish. They said I was the maker. My heart pounded. I could feel the pressure on my arterial walls escalating so hot and fast that I was sure it was killing me or at least trying to. I didn't

know how much more I could take. I asked to speak to their prime being. They said they had none. I called them out for liars. They submitted. They said that maybe I should give it time. They said to ask again in an hour and a half. I told them that I felt like puking. They said how could I not? It was only natural. I asked them what they wanted me to do. They said to go ahead and do it. They said that they could make use of it. I asked them what disgusting use they could make of my vomit. They urged me on. They said that if I wanted to find out, I would just have to produce and leave the rest to them, but keep in mind, you would participate. That constant thought that they forced into me, that thought of me being a part of it all, it left me reeling deeper and harder into illness. I could barely hold out. I could barely refuse their request, their taunting request, for much longer. It was going to happen. So, I try to design how I will do it. I try to plan my movements. I think, what will be best? I think what series of actions will give me the most distance and time in the end. What will buffer me from these bodies? I spin in my chair, and catching the stiff cushion of the arm on my guts and pelvis, I come crashing to my knees. I stretch my head out as far as I can and let my spine gurgle. It comes out thick, then a burst of water like a hydrant. It is a powerful column, an arm, and a dress that turns to polished stone when the air strikes it. Its smell infuses the air. I have soured the space and made my first pact with them. They said that it was just fine and lovely and they appreciated it. They said now let me show you what to do with it. Terror and the drain of dehydration put me into a limp state and I couldn't execute any sort of escape. I was feeling it now. I was defeated. Then the ceremonies emerged.

"Give us a name. Tell us the girl's name and how about we take it from there. Can you do that much for us? It would be a gesture. It would help. Don't you want us to help you?"

The first ceremony began in what now had become dusk. The lights in the room were flickering with long sonic booms. It was like everything, instantly had grown to life and was squealing with the pains of it. I was right there with them. I understood. The first ceremony began with the pink flesh ones. They were small and robed. They were hairless with pink, new flesh. I was informed that they were all female. They felt female. They touched me in that way.

They reached long with their small arms and caressed under my shirt. They leaned into my head and gave me the invisible kisses of heavy breathing. I could feel those putting thoughts into me. They breached the heavy bones of my body, the skull, and places around the trunk, my heavy upper legs. They pulsed with invisible speech. I was informed that they desired a showing from me. They wanted me to drape them with tissue. They wanted freshly cut human things to fall from them, to float softly about their neck and shoulders. They had the most slender shoulders. They were flirting hard.

“And what state was that? Was it back east or was it before?”

I was turning ill with the changes. My fingers were stained orange and green with the mash of autumn and they ran with her oil. The hounds and the cats and the squirrels were starting to speak with me. They were speaking through me. The otherworldly creatures of bone and stringy tendon called me the feral cattle, the feral crow. I called them the seductresses of the cave and the table. They were somehow able to interpret my speech and spasm.

The initial ceremony gave way to a trial of forty afternoons. It was torture by restriction. They were grooming me. They bound me. They ran liquid on my face. They marked me. They turned me to the streets in the evening. My home no longer belonged to me. In the dark of night, they had a feast and a breeding ground and they held executions and training exercises. A blue light was fixed to the cedar posts and it served as a signal to me. When it swelled, I was to come home and get into bed with them. My legs ached and my stomach was sour. I dined on extraterrestrial flowers and soups. They were poison. The straps and bandages that bound my bones and shifted them were changed with increasing frequency. I had coffee and chewed on leaves every morning with this sloppy man. I called him simply the sloppy man. He didn't seem to mind. He took careful attention of everything. He made me stroke his cheeks, change his clothes, and feed him. I was to tear it up into the smallest bites. Then, he would take out a yellow pad of paper and make careful notes about my breathing, heart rate, and the alien words I was learning to form. They made my skull very uncomfortable. I did everything I could to take my mind off of the shame that haunted me in these days of labor and lonely wandering

nights.

On the twelfth night, before they set me to the streets, they gave me a small container made of very thick walls of aluminum. Two locks operated it and it was loosely bound in rope. They told me that I should carry it with me that night, but the next day I should find a secure place to keep it. I would be placing things inside it and saving them for extended periods of time. I would look in on them occasionally and there were other tasks involving this item that they would inform me of on very certain occasions. There would be ceremonies for it, but I was not to think about it too much for now. I was not to worry about it.

The days grew quiet. Fewer words were spoken and fewer looks exchanged. It was all but silent. We had still had them stirring and that was perhaps growing.

In the evening, cold wind rubbed me raw. Warm rain turned to cold rain, then slush and ice. Its numbing effect heightened my body's sensitivity to their warm gatherings and the operations they performed on me. My mind was slowing. It was still, and then it felt nearly empty. Finally, I had a hard craving to fill this space. This seemed to please them. They said that tonight, in my absence unfortunately, they would be doing something in my honor. One of them smiled and placed a hand on my shoulder. I gave him a little nod. It was the best I could do. I was drained and shaky. I was afraid.

When I came back that night, everything had changed drastically. There was very little to be seen. The house was empty. They had relocated. They were on a different plane, still there, but gone. They had their way with me, but only me. The rest of the place was pristine order.

"Do you think you could identify him from a photograph?"

Winter came early for us this year. Everything was dreadfully arranged with frost and ice and a dust of snow. It was bitter cold and quiet. He slipped his hand up me. He taught me things and moved me. He moved me into the thoughts and speech and dream of his kind. It was new and awkward and it hurt. My brain was numb and cold and my body burned, ached, and cracked. I was streaming with a sheet of blood. It ran across my vision. It pulsed in my ears. He

said these were lessons while the others were gone. He said they would come to him first for reports when they returned. He said they trusted him completely and I had better not do anything to fuck it up for him or he would make me pay. I thought he was making me pay already.

The chandeliers hung from the ceiling over the table. They were new. He had them installed. He was making lots of changes and additions to my environment. I thought this was my home and he had no right. I told him so and he struck me. My face turned purple. He instructed me in ways to hide it. He instructed me in ways to cover it up. He said this was our first lesson and he smiled. He said the cover-up was a grand thing, a simple thing, but not to be taken lightly. I was in need to learn some responsibility and this is one of the ways he would test me. He told me to go to the bathroom sink and see what I could come up with on my own. I went in there and stood in front of the mirror until he shouted asking me what was taking so long. Get a move on. So, I went into the medicine cabinet and the linen closet to see what I could find. I didn't own much make-up. I hadn't been to the store in months. I didn't think myself much ready to fulfill the requirements of this little game of his. I tried my best, but came out looking like a clown. I suggested for him to give me access to the kitchen when I saw the disappointment on his face. He said no. He said he would show me and that smearing kitchen products on my face was a ridiculous thought. He said that everything that I should need should be in the bathroom and there was no need for me to go out and get anything else. He said, you can't be seen in public right now, except for certain things of course. I didn't understand these vague rules of his. I didn't understand how the hell I got caught up in this. I hoped for the return of other species.

He made me sleep next to him under his stinking arms. He was full of an idle sweat. He ate from dirty dishes and I could still smell the food and fire on him. I don't think I slept more than thirty minutes that first night. When he saw my bloodshot eyes in the morning, he was furious. He filled the bathtub upstairs with ice and forced me down into it, pulling and ripping my clothes away from me as he did it. My skin was red and beaten. I was pitiful in this luxurious

torture device that he had whipped up. I wanted to kill him. Then the seizures began and with them came a purple fog. The days escaped me, waiting for the voice or touch of another being to enter my life. I waited for the smell of booze to smear across my lips and genitals. I waited for glass to break on the floor and I could grind my feet in it and let the blood just do it all over.

“So, what happened next? Is this when you started to move around the country?”

I waited for them to give me a piece to place in my container. I waited for Mr. Robes to snap out of his shaking hypnosis. I waited for the woman to send a letter in the post. I waited for my body to swell.

“Is this when you met him?”

It was so hot and humid when I got off the train, I could swear I must’ve jumped a few months of time on my journey. You know what bothers me most about this life? It bothers the shit out of me that I will never have any idea what this world will be like a great deal down the road. I don’t know what the world will be in a hundred years, or twenty thousand, or a million. I only get a little look. It is irritating. Maybe, some day, this won’t be the case anymore. I am sure it will be a terrible thing, but I hope I am, by some miracle, around for it.

I am still dressed for winter when I descend to the platform. I realize that I have no idea where I am going to go from here. I assumed there would be some kind of visitor’s center or a service station nearby, something with information and guidance for a traveler, but there is nothing of the like. There was a turnstile and a barricade that lifted to let the cars out. Past that, there was nothing but road and weeds and drainage ditches. Everything was bright white and yellow and dusty. The glittery rocks of the tracks cut the sky. I was at a loss. I could smell, no, I could feel the swamp. There was one near. There must be. It was the only thing that reminded me of home. It was the only comfort this port afforded me, that, and the vending machines. I craved sugar often. I ate a candy bar and drank a soda on a bench, and then I smoked a cigarette. The first thought I could have was to wonder what time was sundown in this town. I had gotten on a rhythm back home, but I am sure it will be different here. I need to know how much daylight I have in order to make my plans. I wonder how warm it is at night here. It felt

like the warmth would never quit. I guessed it would stay warm throughout, but you hear dreadful things like the harshness of cold desert nights. Would there be a fate like that waiting for me here? If so, how would I deal? I decided it best not to carry all of these heavy clothes with me if I didn't have to. Should I store them in case I need them later? Where do I do that? Where do I do anything here? A part of me wanted to turn back to where I came, but I knew I couldn't do that. I told myself that I would just have to work through the panic and I got up and started to walk. The place was pretty empty; no one stopped me for a word. I was getting out to where it was about to get desolate for at least a while. I looked at my watch. I never wore a watch until today. I figured I would need it. This one belonged to my ancestors. It was going to mark the time for me today. I counted the mile markers and the minutes in intervals of twenty. I hoped to reach something soon. I hoped I had what I needed to get there and what I needed to arrive.

The first time I met Douglas Tiller was at the Rose Marie Hospital for the Criminally Insane. He had just broken up with his girlfriend and he was really high on something.

Wait. This was before they knew about his crimes, right? What was he doing in a hospital for the criminally insane?

No, he wasn't a patient there at the time. How he got there is kind of an unusual thing. But I guess it is the unusual that winds most of those guys up in there in the first place. Why should it be any different for Doug? It's all subjective, right? Anyway, like I said, he was high as a kite and he was walking, half-nude in the middle of winter, right down the main street when a patrolman picked him up. It was January 1985, I think. Doug was barely more than a teenager. He told the patrolman some wild story about how he used to be a groundskeeper there, at the hospital, and how there was a doctor there that he used to talk to, Dr. Maddrik. The doc kind of helped him with his problems. He asked the patrolman if they could stop there and talk to him before he took him downtown. I guess the guy felt sorry for him.

So, Tiller actually worked for the hospital?

No. He had never set foot in this town until that afternoon when he got off the train.

That is the strange part. He knew a lot about the place. There was a Dr. Maddrik there, but the guy never set eyes on Doug until the night he showed up there with the patrolman. The officer swears he described it all to him before they got there, the garage he worked out of, the cafeteria, employees and patients that used to be there, even the doc's office. We've got hours of tape from Doug of conversations with Dr. Maddrik that supposedly never happened.

No shit. Now, that is unusual.

Yep.

"And how long do you suppose were you out there on the road? How much time was there between Indiana and Minnesota?"

She was a firm prize. She was a deity. She rested at my old home and called me across the space that was between us. It was a considerable distance, many miles at this time. Her voice didn't echo, it didn't boom. It came softly in whispers despite the energy she must have pushed into it to make it travel so. She was not at the bed. She was not at the table. She was in the secret room in the basement. She was in the place that I was afraid to go. She whispered to me. She said that if what drove me from my home was the fear that had infected all the usual inches of it, then perhaps I should meet her down there. Perhaps, I could find my comfort in this unlikely quarter. She would be waiting for me there if I could find the reason to join her. I wanted so badly to get to her, to find her body and discover it, but also to return home. I was certain that there was comfort in these things just as she promised, but to overcome those crippling teeth that had set into me was asking a lot. I decided to sleep on it, to make my decision in the morning. I asked her how long she would wait. She said she would wait forever but that I should be in her arms tomorrow night. I could still make it if I left in the morning. I rested my head on my coat and began to try to force myself into dreams of her. It was as if she was right next to me, breathing and waiting to speak or reach out and act.

She was a wise woman. She glided across the room in black plastic heels. Her flesh bulged and pulsed over the tight bindings of her panties. Her tits stretched her fabric and shined through in dusky shades. She had whispers on her teeth and pale blue lips. She had long-

legged strides that pushed thigh over thigh, and rubbed. She pushed her tits together and she told me that she was dripping wet for me. She told me to come home and talk to her. She said she would be next to me in bed and she would talk to me. She said to come home and see. It would be just fine.

When I got there, she led me down the stairs. It was just before four in the afternoon. She was dressed differently. She was barefoot, her toes painted red. She had on cotton pants that showed her beautifully, every curve. Her t-shirt came off first as she sat me down on the edge of the bed. I could feel the weight of her chest on the air between us. She put her hands on my shoulders and guided me to my back. Then, she got next to me and curled up on her side with her head in my shoulder. She said softly through a yawn, you see, I told you it would be just like I promised. Then we took a nap together. I could feel the fatigue bleeding out of me. It was replaced by tingling happiness and calm.

I woke up to her with her hand down the front of my pants. When she could see me waking, she unzipped them and pulled them down. She stroked me harder and faster, biting her lip and grinning. She said you better fuck me soon before I come just from watching you. I reached down between her legs and felt how warm she was. She moaned and her face turned into a desperate expression. I rubbed her and she pushed me away to strip. She got on top of me and fucked me. She screamed and she slid down on me with her tight body and she begged me. She said, come inside me, come for me, baby. I grabbed her hips and pushed in deeper and I let go.

She went right back into my shoulder and fell asleep, kissing me on the cheek. I smoked a cigarette, dropping ashes on the cement next to the bed. I was tired, so I let myself sleep again next to her. The last thing I thought before I drifted into sleep was that when we awoke, it would be late in the evening. It would be midnight or later.

Mercury is magnetic. Her skin is Mercury. I wish I could be with it. My skin is filled with constant agitation. It is malfunctioning. I am dreaming of the golden breeze. I am stiff and moving with tremors beside her. My body is full. I am delicate. I never imagined myself growing

to be so delicate. It is not the mechanism that I would have chosen for myself. It is not the way that I would have crawled over her if the choice were mine. I would stand taller and stronger and stiff with metal rods. I would have had heat, not the soft cold that radiates from my soft touching hairs. But I am hard and ready to pump radiation into the slabs. I am ready to grow and howl. I am ready to slither on the back of the floor. I am doomed and exotic. I am a contradiction that begs to exist.

She chooses words for me. She gives me codenames. I have dressed up in a costume for her. It has the purpose of making my skin stronger. We huff the exhaust of the vehicle and giggle and get dizzy. We go blind. We go out in the vehicle along silent roads of the back of the night. We have charmed our way into hell. We have strapped our boots up tight with razor wire. We are going to engage the others, the reflections. We are going to fuck and dance with me and breathe them into our own bodies with the physical grunts of our language.

I have a hard body and a soft soul and I have a vehicle to travel in, a vehicle to run right through me. My soul is dripping. My bones are mutating. I am growing the plastic clothes of fluid transport. I am shivering down my body. I am going into the smoking gun. I am meeting with merchants and experts. They are telling me what to do with my body. They are telling me how fond they are of it and how I should apply and work the attachments. They tell me their favorite ones and hope that I will use it. They just want to know it is on me and maybe get to see it once before I go. I please them.

She painted my body gold and said that she would worship her harvest on me. She said that she would push pink flesh on me. She said that she would bleed me in irons and give me purpose. We drank from a fountain together on days that I was permitted rest. She was my comfort.

On the metal steps of rusty old fire escapes in the middle of nowhere, I descend slowly into her soft vices. She is warm like heaven and creamy dust of ancient days. She looks through windowpanes and drinks with her ribs clicking away in Morse code. She sends me carrier pigeons. She sends me disease. She sends me the hides of swine. She wraps me in her kisses

Writing Raw

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and degrades me in the turning wheels. She keeps me savage. She dresses me up.

“Are you sure about the time? What I mean is you have to think about dates. You have to try to remember the dates to make sure you have it all correct. What month was it when you got there and when you left? Was it spring or fall? See what I mean? We have got to get this right. We have got to get this figured out. Work with me here, Doug. Aren't you getting tired?”

There was strange air traffic that night, most nights in fact and even sometimes in the afternoon. One day I remember distinctly a black helicopter eating through the sky. It was loud. The strange ones were always extra loud. One night it sounded like a generator buzzing throughout all of creation. It was a plane circling, but this plane had no wings. It was like a long silver tube with a beam of light reaching out of the nose and an orb flashing red at its tail. It circled and descended and as it went, it hushed until I could no longer feel its presence. I could still see it or at least thought I could, but the weight it inflicted on the surface of my body, the ripples it sent through the ground was fading. It was leaving my mind.

I grew desperate for more of it. I thought that by me not being able to witness it, it must mean that it was working on me in secret. These were days of such foolish thoughts. What difference did it make? I was trying to find a handle on something that flat out didn't have one. I was trying to get a grip. The heat in my body boiled. My skin chapped and burned in the horrible cold of it all. I felt certain that there were terrible forces at work on me. I felt desperate to find her. She was lost to me, right? I tried to remember that night we had down in the basement. How did that get so far away from me? Where had she gone? It felt like I had accepted her absence for some time, like she had been gone for months and my life had gone had, albeit pathetically. But what day exactly was that and how exactly was it that she left? I couldn't remember. Was it yesterday for fuck's sake? Was it last Tuesday? When I tried to remember her and what she did, it all felt much, much closer. This troubled me. Everything in fact was starting to just trouble me. It was all so inarticulate. What a mess it had all become.

You see what this is? This is doubt creeping in. When that happens, forget it. It's all over. That is always the beginning of it. Mark my words. Something terrible is about to happen and it

will be by my hand, but forced upon me by another's will. I was certain that I was no longer in control, so I set my days to trying to locate the source.

"Let's start over. The first time you were out there on your own, what did you do? Think about it. What is the very first thing you did, the very first day? You got into the car, right? You were sleeping in the car by nightfall, right? So, let's start with that. Start with you getting into the car to drive away and end with you falling asleep in the car at night. What town was that in again? It wasn't the town you were born in, but close, right? Tell me all about, Doug, and don't worry. You can trust me, remember?"

I had dull headaches and dry skin. I drank hot beverages just to stay warm, even in the hottest days of summer. I needed the comfort it allowed me. Hot water in me did that. It comforted me. Cold water on the skin did that for me. Sometimes, I had to slam my head in a sink of ice water just to get calm enough to stand up, just to get through another couple of hours or so. It was dreadful.

The really bad thing is when I tried to go to sleep. I couldn't remember what room I slept in. I couldn't even remember what floor it was on. I tried. I looked around, but didn't dare make any definite movement or gesture to a certain direction over another. Making a choice like that could be dangerous for me. I remembered the terror that was in all parts. I remembered her in some parts. I was nearly certain she wasn't in any of them now though. So, what does that mean for me? How can I go on? How can I go to where I am supposed to sleep? I was hoping that someone could please tell me. I was hoping that someone could please take me by the hand and guide me to bed, with force or compassion or something else. It didn't matter much at this point. The place was so still it was frightening. Things can be so quiet when they are hiding, especially the really nasty ones.

I slid down against a wall at the foot of the stairs and I pulled my knees up to my chest. I let my head hang a little. Would this be good enough to let me get some rest? I have slept in worse conditions, but tonight I am not up for much. I am not fit for the struggle. I am feeling tame. I am feeling very dry and thirsty. I don't have my strength in my hands or my legs and the

skin of my face is stretched to hanging. How long have I been wearing thin? I have lost pounds. How many pounds? When did it start? These questions have got to stop. I don't know how much more I can take. That is something that occurs to people at times in their life, but what doesn't happen often is the realization of what will truly happen when the threshold is broken. I caught a glimpse of it. I saw my face in her lap. Then, I realized I was slipping into a comfortable posture. I was coming down. It is going to be fine for just a few minutes, at least. I woke up the next morning to a rising sun. I woke up to a little bit of vigor. I was not so worked up. I took a steamy shower and walked outside into the property out back, down the wood steps same as before. I give myself a minute to think about her. She is just an image for a minute. I go back. I walk along the fence. I am going toward the garage. I hear the sound of running water to my side a little ways away.

Right now there are agencies out there at work. They are harvesting DNA from public toilets. They use it to make clones and diseases. I have seen people like this working. I have walked in on them. I have even had conversations with them. They are not shy like you might think. You walk in on them, and they don't look like a rodent that you've shined a flashlight on. They are too clever to behave like that. They are downright cordial. It is sinister. They are not lurking shadows. They are fucking morning people. It is sick. I don't know what to do with myself. The last time I walked in on one of them was at the grocery store, middle of the afternoon. I know it is weird to use the bathroom at a grocery store, but I wasn't shopping for groceries. I was going to the bank. They had a branch inside the store. I used to go to that one a lot. Of course, I don't go there anymore except every once in a while just to see if I can spot one of them. I keep a pretty safe distance though. I usually just stay in the car in the parking lot. I don't even really do that anymore. That was a long time ago that I gave that up. Anyway, that day I saw him there, collecting. I asked him what he was doing. I don't remember his answer. It was bullshit. It doesn't matter exactly what he said. He was lying.

"But, Doug, that makes all the difference. Don't you see that yet?"

I remember the carousel ride at the shopping mall when I was a child. I remember

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eating boxes of popcorn on the bench and watching it turn. I remember getting lost in there one day. I was terrified.

“What kind of car were you driving then, Doug?”

What the fuck does it matter what kind of car I was driving. I think it was a Buick.

“What kind of Buick, Doug? What year and what model?”

How the hell should I know? It was white or blue or something. It was a really big car and it was fast too. It was like a massive bullet that could just fly and tear through a fucking brick wall if you wanted it to. Since when are you goons so interested in cars anyway?

“Evidence, Doug. Evidence is what we are interested in. For you, that means your history. So, quit fucking with us and just tell it straight.”

I don't want to. Take me back to my room already.

“How about we buy you another coffee instead? Yeah, and then maybe we can talk a little more. You love coffee, if memory serves.”

Yeah, I sure do. I usually drink it black, but tonight I am kind of in the mood for a white coffee, no sugar.

“Is that a yes then, Doug?”

Okay, you've twisted my arm. I'll give you one more story before bed. What do you want to hear about this time?

“Tell us about the vehicle, Doug. What is the vehicle? Is it Mr. Robes? Is it the girl maybe, the one that left you? What is it?”

Why did it have to be about that? You know I can't do that, not while they're watching.

“Somebody's watching us, Doug? Listening to us? Who is it?”

Just pick something else. You want to talk about the woods or maybe the park? Pick one. I'll tell you everything about it, anything you want to know. Just decide fast and how about that coffee.

“Relax. It's on its way. The cafeteria is closed at this time, you know. We had to send someone across the street to the convenience store. It'll only be a few more minutes though.”

You want a smoke in the meantime?”

You mean it?

“Yeah, I mean it. Why not, right?”

Sure. We’ll have a smoke outside while we’re waiting? Is it raining tonight?

“We can’t do that. It’s against the rules. You know that. We can have one right here though, if you want. What do you say?”

Yeah, here is fine, I guess. Can I have one of yours?

“You sure can. You need a light too?”

Yeah, I could use a light too.

When the sun came up, my eyes felt like they were burning and laboring to open like they were afflicted with ages of rust. I had slept too long. I had done awful things while I was doing it too. You could really work your body in your sleep. That’s a secret some people spend a lifetime practicing. I didn’t know it. I knew it, but I didn’t know how to make it work. It just happened and I woke up sore. I woke up punch-drunk or something. It was dreadful what I was doing to myself. I was sleeping in tense muscles and lies. I was sleeping in stench.

The world is getting ugly and I am keeping right up with it. You see all sorts of terrible things on the news or you read about it. I keep trying to figure out why. Why do these things have to happen? Are we being punished? Who knows? If it is a punishment, some have got it worse than others, but we’ve all got it. I don’t want to think about it anymore. I am sitting at the table anyway. I am drinking some milky tea and eating some toast and fried sausages. The television is blasting these awful stories and I am sitting here eating breakfast at nine at night. The volume is too loud. I have got to get out of this place. I have got to make a break for it. If I sneak slowly under the blanket of television noise, maybe I won’t realize what I am doing and I can get away with it. If I tell myself I am just going out for a smoke, maybe he won’t try to stop me. That is it. I am doing it.

The door creaks like a motherfucker. My shoes are squeaking, the floorboards, everything is making some kind of noise. I say hush and don’t worry about it. Think of it as your

disguise. You need it. It is your way out. Please, just keep moving. We can do it.

You need to get to bed. You need to finish this. Just as I am thinking, I can't do it. I can't think straight. I am too tired. That is when it happens. The door slams shut behind me. I see her wading on the tall grasses coated with the water of war. I see her standing nude in the clearing, tall as a mountain, thin as a damaging triumph. She is silently waiting. I imagine she is calling me with her perfect stillness. I can do nothing else but to make the steps toward her. She begs me to walk. I am going slowly, tearing my muscles on the earth's friction. The earth has a friction with me. It is quite deliberate. It is absurd. I am broken against it. The moon is shining in a dull way. She is insect and tree. She is the larva of beasts. She is the thought that gives rise to the waves of people. There are waves of people out there. They are drowning us. They are killing us just by happening. They are seeking punishment.

Her legs are trembling when I get to her. They are naked and muddy and scratched all to hell. I ask her if she is ok. She doesn't answer. Minutes of silence pass and she lets out a sob. She says, get the ropes. I see them at her feet, lingering in the tall grasses. Someone has bound her here. I ask her how it happened. Again, she doesn't answer and we let minutes pass. She sobs harder on her return, but this time has no words for it. I ask her if she wants me to take her in. I tell her maybe I can help. She says no. She says that we have to get away from this place. She says that is the reason I came out here to her in the first place. She wants to know how I could've forgotten that so quickly. I rush to my own defense. I tell her that I hadn't forgotten. It is just that I was thinking maybe it could wait. I was thinking it appropriate. I was thinking I should take care of her first. She said that I had done enough. That didn't make any sense to me. It offended me a little even. I said, so what, are we just going to stand here? She says yes. So, that is what we do for a while. Then eventually, as all things do, this situation ceased to be. It vanished and her along with it. I was back inside just in time to go to bed at the usual time. My head was aching in the usual way. The ache was fading in the usual way. Everything had boiled down to a repetition. As unlikely as that was to happen, it did, just as it always does. We prove ourselves to be dirty little prisoners, one way or another. I was worst of

all. I missed her quite a bit at this point.

I could hear the leaves rustling under their tiny feet. I could hear their snarls. Then it arrived, the pain of wailing. The pain of wailing was singing in my ears and dancing just under the fleshy layers. It was mingling with my existence. It was teasing me in a way.

My bones snapped as they carried me down into the lumbering husk of the earth. I was about to discover something with strings of flesh that dug deep into me. It was to be a torment that laughed into my pools of sweat and lasted for the eternity of minutes. It was going to drag me. It was going to pry misery and begs of pity from my lips. It was to drain me of all liquid and all connections. It was a force. It had a face. It was worn in a way that I had never witnessed. It would, however, not be my end. That was, unbeknownst to me, a long time away.

She guides me to her whipping post. She wears clothing that I prescribed. It was cruel. In a dress of harsh fabric, she straddled me and guiding her claws down my skin with a complete focus, she cut me to the bone. Her hands were at the command of our bones. She called them her servants. They were aged more than the rest of her. They were stretched with time, hard time. They were cold and covered with spines and sores. They were pumped hard with blood. They were sharp.

And to think, she looked so sweet and innocent on the day that we first met. I was on a park bench because I had no place else to go. It was after a long trip across country and I was attempting to gather myself. She lived in that place. She lived and breathed it. I didn't realize that at first. I was not really there to begin with. Who was I to notice anything? I was noticing nothing more than my own breath. I had to watch it keep time. I did this intentionally. I needed to know I was surviving. I was foolishly not expecting anyone to come across me. I was not prepared and there she was. She asked me if I was staying around here. I lied. I told her I was taking a break from the road for a few days and I had a room reserved at a nearby hotel. She asked me which one. I froze. Then I told another lie. This one came out more uncomfortably and obvious. I could see it on her face. I said that in my weariness, I hadn't paid much attention to the name of the place or really anything else, which would've been true if I really had booked

such a room. I told it was probably a mile or so, maybe more, outside of town. She knew better. I tried to be more convincing. I said I had picked up a matchbook from the front desk and shoved it in one of my coat pockets. I begin rifling through my person and mumbling profanities and asking myself now what in the hell had I done with it, that sort of thing. She wasn't buying it, but she played it cool. She said, so you're a smoker. I said yes. She asked if I would mind if she sat next to me and we could have a cigarette together. I said I wouldn't mind at all, another lie. I wanted some peace and quiet. I needed it.

We are sitting there puffing away in silence. She is crossing and uncrossing her legs, maybe a dozen times or more. It was one of those awkward situations that would've been funny or stupid or embarrassing, the kind of thing I would've liked if my mind hadn't been focused on other very urgent and devastating matters. I had to get myself back together. I honestly didn't have time for a little playful interruption. I was in pain and confused, couldn't she see that? Of course, she could. In fact, that is why she was there in the first place. Never trust someone that just kind of turns up. I knew better. So, what the hell was I doing indulging her?

We finally start to talk a little, but after a few idle remarks, I kind of start to apologize and excuse myself and wish her a good afternoon. It doesn't work. She just changes the subject on me and keeps things going. We talked about anything you could imagine. I don't even really remember most of it. We talked about fishing. We talked about the fucking flowering trees. We talked about ants and centipedes. We talked about fashion, politics, and the arts. We talked about everything except my escape. She wouldn't allow that. I was getting frustrated. I should've been getting scared. I was blind to it though. My senses were pretty well damaged at this point, but that is really no excuse. The one thing that is supposed to work without fail when a person is in my exact situation is the awareness of the threat. I should've had that classic option, but it didn't rise up in me, for whatever reason. Because of that, she had me.

With a few more words, she had me walking, having no clue of where I was going. I just followed her. It didn't even occur to me that she was taking me somewhere, somewhere

terrible.

The next thing I know, we are there on brick steps. She invites me to come inside. It is just hitting me now. What is this place? I am well beyond objection though. What is the use in resisting now? We might as well keep moving if that is what we are going to do. So, she leads me by the hand and we go through the door. We are out of the cold. We are miles from safety and the door is locking behind me.

“You need to prove to me that it didn’t happen the way they say it happened. You need to do it now, Doug. Just tell me the truth. Tell me your side of it. Can you do that for me, Doug?”

Her bodies were hanging all over the place. It was a menacing sight. It shook me. I was paralyzed for a moment. She stood there and watched me. She watched the blood slow in me and then return.

“Let’s start over, for the hundredth fucking time. Let’s just start over.”

There was a grand change occurring in me. A new structure was becoming. I was feeding a new life. It was organizing its chemicals and its means of survival and movement. It was showing me its name. It was breathing and pulsing out its shape with my organs and multiplying into existence right on top of me. It spread its wings. They were silver like a tank in their first flash and nearly blinded me. I had to be real determined to keep my eyes on it. Then, it faded softly into womanhood. The female structure was upon us. Drowsiness took hold of me. I thought I had drifted into it, but I had not. I remained awake and alive and operating in this creation.

I got up quickly to go outside, and in a rush, all the old fluids rushed out of me. They were violent with their age and deterioration scraping along me all the way out. They slapped the cement step and vanished quickly, soaking in perhaps. Everything physical moved much more rapidly for a time of a few hours. This was the birthing window. I was in it. When it was finished, when I was finished moaning and my body no longer had reason to wrench me around and force me, I felt whole and fresh and, once again, familiar with the earth. My life was just as

it had been, but I was something completely different. I was something new, but with the memory of age.

I went back inside and I felt what I was wearing. The grime had fallen from me. I was wearing silk, deep and dark and held close to my body. My body moved through the air triumphantly and fully. It gripped in spaces and fell in spaces and it breathed in ways that were miraculous and fruitful. I wanted to rest in a chair with a warm cup of tea, so I prepared it. I put myself in my favorite spot, the antique armchair. I was comfortable there. I shifted myself to feel it. I was absorbed with this new comfort. It occurred to me sharply though that I must listen to what was happening outside. I turned to the window and heard nothing but the window. It was the usual quiet of this place. It was peaceful. It was calm. I searched my head for any signs of impending doom. I could find nothing. I searched and searched around the room and against the glass windows and their frames and the backs of the walls. There was no damage. I had a feeling that something that used to be here, no longer was. I wondered if this should be cause for worry. I brought my legs up and tucked my feet under my body. I rested my face to my hands. My cheeks were smooth and inviting. I brought my elbows on my lap into my belly and I closed my eyes for a few moments. I told myself that I would allow myself a few moments and then when I was ready to get up, I would go searching for whatever it was that wanted to be found. I told myself that it was time to call for him. I needed to find if that was possible.

I rode on her back. That is how it felt for the first day, after I got up out of that chair. I saw through her. I touched her every fraction of the day. We moved across the blue and charcoal gray and red tiles of the kitchen, and when the cold found me, it was like she was touching me with it, touching it to me. It was a bold sensation, the smallest thing, everything was monumental. I felt our shadow drag across the floor. In my mouth, my chest, my legs and belly, it all felt like it was something touched to me. There was a voice that rested underneath my own. There were miles of flesh and whispers that rose behind me. There were little imperfections in the floating of time and space when we walked. There were jolts on my skin.

There were particles of moisture that dug into me as if they were serving some purpose. They materialized in the air and went to work on us. They were breaking the bond, the tether. They were allowing us to fall into one another and begin the rest of our life. It took one day for this to complete. I awoke no longer connected, but complete. It was like breathing water. It was powerful and then it became natural. In only a half an hour, it became completely natural and familiar, so familiar; I could not imagine it any different. So, I started to walk and talk and live, and I took up the assignment. I looked for Mr. Robes.

My body shook with his might. Time danced and died around him. It flayed itself in front of him and twitched nervously, alone in a ball. I watched him. I knew he was there, at the edge of my property. He was along the gravel. He was shipping himself through the molecules in a special way. It was my object to receive me. I was dressed for Occasion One. I had two long red ribbons of fabric running through the slots in my thigh and arterial glow blue. I had tits pushed up with wire arms of copper and planetary rings circling the territory surrounding my bust. I had sheets on my belly. They ran patterns over my pussy and the ridges of my pelvis. I had long gloves of conductive gel all the way up my arms. They broke at the shoulders and became rivers unto my neck and collarbone. I was laced up with sandals. I was curved with oil around the round muscles of my ass. I was floating in waiting and watching. I was wet with observation of his outline, his flickering outline. He was a marauder of physics and chemistry and religion. He was black eyes and nasal cavity of a museum collection. He was the dust of my basement cell. It was the place where we first met. Now, I find him stranded. My arms reach out in waves of air pressure and sonic vibration. My forearms quiver with the tapping beat of rescue. I wrap myself in blankets and fall into the doorway. He sinks into the horizon and the day switches to night. He tells me to make more plans. He tells me the next Occasion will require touch. He tells me to prep my lips and fingers and to strengthen my legs and soften my ribs. He says the body bends and marks time like cold fusion. He says my tongue is sacred and my feet are pure. My back grows in the clairvoyant ruin of evening. My body is full with the first reception of seeking. He is found in spasm, made inches closer to my feet. He is kneeling. He is shaking. He is strong. His

march begins here. I am cement, slick with rain. I am going back in to end the day waiting.

In my bed, I turn off the light on the nightstand next to my bed and gather my body closer to itself for warmth. I am swollen with pride and excitement from this great progress. I have been given hope. I have labor to do in the morning and then I will return to him. Soon, the change will be complete. It will be transferred to another. This is proof of the vehicle. It exists.

“Ok. So, after leaving Minnesota, then where did you go?”

I was waiting in the kitchen when Stanley came home. It was around noon. He had been sent home from work early again. He was in no mood for conversation, so I just hung there, dangling from the counter not really knowing what to do. We had been through this so many times and I still had no clue on how to proceed. Every way I had tried and every way I could imagine to try, it all ended poorly. I was a bundle of nerves. My body was tight with anxiety. I was activated with fear and I was waiting for it. I was waiting for him to loosen me in his painful way. It was carved into him, right down to the bone. He had no other way of walking. He limped and he spoke with pain carved into his body, and when he touched something, living or not, it exploded into life like a shower of sparks. He was cursed. They had laid the curse on him when he was just an infant. They had burned it to the works of his cells. There was no getting out from under it. The only solution, the solution that had come to mind months ago and I had labored to sweat with thought on how to make it happen; the solution was to cut it off somehow. The solution was to wrench him from this plane and seal the wound he would make in space with a cosmic fire. I had to find the tools to make this possible. I had to find the experts that could show me how it is done. I had to have some fucking time to accomplish all of this. I could use a day or two with his fucking hands off of me. I need to stop blaming him. I need to just find some more time, somewhere else. If I could escape for a few days, could I find what I need off of the property? I could come back and do it. He is moving, it is slow and sloppy and there are bursts of noise coming from deep in his belly. I hope he is too sick to do what he is about to do, at least too sick to do it well.

When Stanley put his fists on me, he rinsed them in purple blood. I could see the

particles of dirt and twig under his fingernails. I could see the memories on his wrists. I could feel his heart pounding against me. I watched as his muscles swung delirious around his bones, uncomfortable in the air. He said, look at you. You know what I did. You think I won't do it again? He was starting to slur. You want to call me that name again? I'll kill you. Don't think I won't. You want to call me that. I could never do that. You're fucking sick. You are a sick whore. You dirty whore, hypocrite, your father raised a dirty tramp. You think I'm a bum like him, a pervert. He pressed the pale underside of his forearm against my running face. He said could you smell that? Can you smell the filth on me? He was starting to slow down and sink back to the sad windows of the sitting room. They were all over the walls and smeared with dusty sunlight. I thought I heard him let out a sob. He said that I had hurt him. I could barely make out the words, but I was familiar with these accusations. He didn't know who I was at the moment. He didn't know who anyone was. He had forgotten himself along with everything else in the world. He said that they had built him. He repeated this several times with his eyes shut, and then he began a dreadful snoring.

I would have a little bit of time to pick myself up and wash. I thought that if I wanted to leave, the time would be now. When he awoke, and it would be soon, the pain in his belly would bring him back up with a fury, and when that happened it would get worse. He would be hurting worse and this time he would be awake for it. The beginning was the part I could always get through. It is the rest that I fear I can no longer survive. I've got to think quickly and decide. Do I have enough time to get my bags packed and get the hell out of here? To be caught in the middle of that would be absolute terror.

I rush upstairs and slide the small suitcase out from under the bed, such a cliché, and the one I took with me on our honeymoon. I put everything I need in it. It takes about five minutes. I can't believe it. I rush down the stairs as quietly as I can. When I pull the keys from the hook next to the door, the jingle stirs him for only a fraction of an instant. My body throbbed and I felt a smile come across my face. I got to the car, threw it in neutral, and pushed it down the gravel driveway to make as little sound as possible. I swear I could still hear him

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snoring, loud as ever from all the way out there. I am going to find a county rode and do about sixty-five miles per hour. I am going to have a cigarette, one of his disgusting menthols, and I am going to let my hair swing out the window. The sun is in the trees and I am moving. I bet when he wakes up, he will have forgotten all about me.

“Tell me something, Doug. Who is Stanley? Is he the one that we should be looking for? Is he the one that is really responsible?”

There are the porcelain white hills of the beachfront. This is where I spent my next few months going over the tools that I had smuggled away from the house in my small suitcase along with a handful of clothes and a few other things. I was put there to ready myself. I lived wonderfully and strong in purpose in the castle that I found there. I was alone or with the other natural beings that assisted me. They were native to this building and were quite comfortable spending days with me in a necessary silence or avoiding me altogether when it was best. I grew to love them and share many things with them. I still feel that I carry them or am attached to them in some way. When we did speak, it was vibrantly and in eastern tongues that I was new to commanding. Most nights, we shared warmth and privacy.

“I think I am starting to see what happened and I think I understand why you did it. I just need you to tell me. What did you take out there with you to the beach that day? What did you leave out there, Doug? What did you hide from us?”

I woke up with my hair long and wild. My skin felt extra smooth. I ran my hands along between my legs. My thighs felt full. My neck felt long and mighty as I looked out over myself finding it arousing. My muscles were warm and comfortable. My breasts were heavy on my chest and moving. It reached out to me to communicate. His soft words were like spores. I prepared my body with my fingers. I made the necessary marks in the necessary areas with invisible strokes. They were a calling to him. They were symbols that his kind found tempting. He asked me if I would fuck myself. He said he would like to see it. I told him I would show him, but it would have to wait. I would show him this evening if he wanted, but in the meantime, we had some work to do. I asked him if he would go over some things with me. He asked what kind

of things. I told him it was some tools that I had, some equipment for a job that I had to do. He asked me to meet him around back in the garage and to bring this equipment with me. It would be safe to go over it there. He said he would do whatever he could to help me. I asked him how soon he could be there. He told me to meet him in an hour. I said I would be there and I thanked him.

I got up and went downstairs to take a shower. The water from the faucet moved over my naked body in sheets and it smelled of rainwater. It soothed and invigorated. I got out and dried off with a big fluffy towel. As I stood there with arched legs and back, my body emitted perfumes and the slow buzz of pleasure sensations. I was growing hungry with lust from the fulfillment of being. My body was getting real solid and developing strengths that were new. I was operating in a new spectrum. I was growing accustomed to it and confident in its mannerisms. Sheets of electricity that were lost to this place were finding the way home and greeting me with long-lost chants of praise and affection. My feet were ivory towers that housed spirits in their rivers of gorgeous, milky tide. My thighs were big towers of distance viewing and my pussy, a telepathic radio. My breasts were the wheels of heaven. In my head and facial features, there was action, subtle beauty in shade and light, and the chattering scream of a handful of static charge. Ribs grew on my back, thin and glorious. They were the lumber spines and supports of cathedrals. They were reticulum, and the beams and human as blood cells of sea vessels.

I dressed with thin pieces. The heaviest of them were my panties and shoes. The dress was a thin layer of orange and blue material. My body and attachments underneath bled through it. It was a wanted exposure, an expression to move him. My legs were bare and shining with silky, transparent lotion. I reached for the case and laid it out on the green tile. I opened it up and selected the piece that I was to take for his attention. It was the primary object. It was the largest of the collected units. It felt easy to stand and to be away from the others. I took the full weight of it in both hands and felt the chill of its shiny skin absorb my warmth and accommodate my charge. It balanced with me. It grew into my hands. I place it

gently into a smaller duffle bag and slung it over my shoulder, and then I tended to the rest of the house making final arrangements to depart for the meeting. I made sure this world was in order. I cared for it. Then, I stepped for the door, passed through it, and felt it lock behind me. The sweet smells of autumn caught my cheek and the chill behind them pumped encouragement into my stride. I made for the building around back, the flecked and peeling door.

The doorknob felt dull in my grip. The key felt like it was digging through a stream of flesh and organ as it manipulated the tumblers. It was a heavy wall that I was moving. On the other side, the area was vacuum and stale. The floor was slimy with dew. The walls were rust and acidic in collage of injury. It felt empty. It felt chemical. It felt like it could not be the right place for us to join. I worried for my cargo. I worried this awful place might damage it. I cradled the bag and jumped all over alert.

Behind a wall of rusty garden tools, a series of about a half dozen sharp footsteps broke the numb silence and then I saw him. Stanley stood there, thin and deranged, covered in black pustules quivering on sweaty skin. He was steady and sober, and holding tightly in control the rage behind his eyes and hands. He said he'd been waiting for me and that he knew that I would turn up sooner or later after he found my little friend. He produced a handful of death, the alien's sex, and he let it fall with the tails of its blood. It struck the surface of the cement floor and produced almost nothing to resemble sound, but the sight of it was huge and devastating.

I backed into the door and pawed for release. Of course, he came slowly and it made him grin. Here he was diabolical and in charge. His hand went gracefully along his belt and his bony, white and blue fingers plucked and jittered around its hardware. He was advancing, counting the meters and hairs between us on his breath. The handle of the door was seized and in firm stance conspired against me. My muscles sunk into hollowness. He grew as he bore down on me. He was a tower shade. His muscles pumped with oil of black cancer and everything on him clenched and wore a slick glaze in the final moment. He savored it. He touched me with his eyes. He asked me if, darling, I was feeling okay and he laughed. I felt

defeat. I fantasized my end. I planned a way to crawl from the rubble in the miracle of a broken body if I could just be so lucky. I thought of revenge. If I could just be so lucky this one more time, I would lavish him with violent gifts and set the universe right. Be as weak as you are destined to be, Stanley. My eyes flickered and he struck the first blow.

Just as the seventh stroke bit into me, whirling the grit that was my shining cheekbone, I heard in what seems like miles away, the stretch of growing tissue. Moments of nothing more under the punches, then it squealed like elastic again. Then, I heard a determined little cough and along the level of the floor, a shadow stretched. He was alive, resurrected. He dived to my side and caught Stanley in an explosion. I blinked long breaks. I saw him scoop up the lifeless body of Stanley and chain him to the workbench. He turned to me and said, don't worry, he is still alive. We are not finished with him yet.

He took me and folded me in blankets in an old chair. He nursed me in foreign ways. I sipped on hot tea and felt water move as a device around me, washing me. It held itself freely and independently. It was mechanized. When I came to, he had but one thing to say to me, we must prepare the equipment now. I told him that I had the first piece with me. And you have the rest as well? They are inside, in a safe place. He said good, let me secure him and then we will go in to make our preparations. I will do this quickly for you. I thanked him. He looked back at me as if he did not understand. He said it coldly. Go back to the house. I will be right there. Then, he went to work some more on Stanley. I heard the whimpered screams behind me as I stepped out into the hushing noise of new rain. It cooled the mania of these events. I went inside and took a deep breath before beginning the arrangements.

“Now, this is extremely important, Doug. Ok? What year was that? Do you remember how old you were at the time?”

Cascades of light fell on the property. Each portion looked like an opalescent leaf placed there by the wind or by footsteps. It was cradled by the ground in its floating. It was a cleansing ritual.

Inside my body, I am so thirsty. My lips crack and tear with dry heat and my kidneys

burst on my back. I am drying and drowning. I am dusty in my bathing. My muscles are throbbing. I have set myself to fasting from the liquid for a few days. It is destroying me. I will be just as I was when I continue on the liquid. I will blossom to my usual form. It is three days off of my own body. It is three days without his touch. I do not allow him to see me. I will show my body to him when I fill it with liquid at the end of this. I will let him watch as the fountain fills me and restores me to my usual body. He can take what he wants then. It will be an occasion for him. There is the thing that I am to perform for him. I will do it then. I will give it to him as a gift, but only when the actions have gone through and I am ready. It will heighten things for him. He will appreciate this. He loves to see the restoration of a form. He loves to live in a memory. He will have it then.

My bones are sucking the fluid from my body. They have grown weak and need nourishment. I am attacking myself. I am speeding up the process in involuntary leaching exercises. It is a wanting. It is a sucking tree. I am a circle of carnivorous plants. I am a moving sac of exchange. I am osmotic.

I am chained and the chains are growing skin. They are imitating me. They are reflecting my body and soul and the tumbling thoughts of ritual illness. The chains sweat on my fever and from their fluid they manufacture a papery substance that starts to grow into dead skin cells. They suck moisture from the air and replenish themselves into a glowing and sensual body. They are showing me the path. They are showing me my future. They whisper their encouragement. They promise to soften themselves against me. I beg them not to. They tell me not to worry. It will not steal anything from me. A simple act of kindness and mercy can never steal, it can never deprive. I allow them as long as they leave my lips untouched. They promise to stay at my joints. The bones are getting unruly. This is balance. They are setting their sights down on them, and in their aggressive and long conflict, relief rains like softness on the crown of my head. I am entering a sleepy daze. I am coming into day two. This second day will be the day of preparation. Tomorrow, I find my body and I will produce it for him. I will bring my hips into him. They will be the supple animals that elevate him. Sweet wine will stain me. I will be

released. Gowns will cover my damages. Robotic songs will wake me. He will carry me home to my bed. It is cold in the sleep of the first night and painfully uneventful. Time drags. I am held in the swollen orb of distance.

On the second die, my eyes are gloomy. Pollution is rising. I am exposed. Lines of followers have come to my door to meet me and offer praises and prayers in the form of gifts. These will guide me. These will encourage me. They lay stones in front of me. They lay soft wooden boxes and pearl and gold. They place small creatures before me. They have vowed a year of life to me. They plead with me to pull it from them in accelerated ways. I tell them that I will on the day after tomorrow, after he has had what is coming to him. They will be the ones that wait for me. I will place them in a room and they will feast on themselves and make plans for their bodies. We will need instruction. I will take them from the earth in hours; they will need the rest to make the ascent. And after this orgy, they will be released and remade as something very old. They will be walking statues. They will be records. They will be free to return to the nothing of their old bodies and habits at the simple request of their desire. They can walk and return, walk and return in whatever cycles that suit them. They will be excited peoples. I have gathered a hefty quantity of them. They are lying about in cushions or on mats in the sitting room and in the bathroom. Screens have separated them from any other happening.

I am growing tired. Tonight should be an early night. We should all be asleep before sunset. Tomorrow is day three and it begins before the day begins. We must all be ready. I sleep in evergreen halos of wreathes. I sleep with berries and citrus ground into my thighs. I sleep with my feet in the puddles of sewage. They are splitting. They are drinking. The process is beginning. I am soaking. I hear his footsteps. He will be here for me. A thin, childlike woman puts her hand to my temple and caresses me. The sweat has matted my hair to the sides of me. She eases me with dry rags placed in ice baths to chill. She will stay with me up until the moment of penetration. Her eyes are not meant to see any more than that. She is gentle with me. She is excited under her eyes. She wants this for me. She soothes me to sleep and rests

alongside me when it is certain that I am comfortable. Others wait at the entryway. They have weapons and ways to call terrible things into existence. Everything is in place. Tomorrow, I will greet him. Tomorrow is the first act. It is the preparation. Soon, I will be ready to do what I have set out to do. Soon, I will be ready for the job. All that I see after completion is oblivion.

My body turns and aches in the final hours of sleep. Black sheets of fabric shoot across the sky. The wind howls and pushes across in walls with unbelievable force. I am in the simple grip of burnt orange decay. I wait for the wash of horns and sirens and clapping hands.

Their feet scrape the dust of floorboards and their hands scrape the dust of lanterns. The ceremony begins. What happens first is a routine where they each touch me. They are to touch the first piece of my body that they recognized and then the piece that needs the most refreshing. They kiss me on the forehead and each thanks me as the turn to leave the line and allow the next participant into my presence. After this I am brought dozens of brass pots of tea and coffee, flowers floating them of many varieties. They surround me, on the floor, the furniture, stacked up on shelves and cases, anywhere they can go and all around me. I am not to take a sip. I am not to touch them, but their aroma permeates me. It changes me. I sit and wait, soaking in beautiful stench; a team of beings arrives to dress me. I am dressed simply and loosely in gray wool of thick, itchy fabric. It is warm. I can feel the sweat in my armpits touching it and resting on its surface. I hear others moving about the house. They are applying a thick paste to every flat surface, everything that is prone to gravity. In the kitchen, they are baking bread in futuristic cubes and steep various different oils and elixirs. I hear the fragrant buzz of electricity and witness the shadow of a Jacob's ladder on the wall. Things are bubbling over; beakers are shattering on the floor. Servants become masters. Many shed their robes and kiss outside in the frost, smoking cigarettes and taking early morning swigs of sweet liqueurs.

"You look like you could use some sleep, Benny."

"I know. It's just this Tiller thing. It doesn't make sense."

"He's a crackpot, so what?"

"Maybe, he is, Tom, but I've got stacks of accounts that say maybe something else is

going on. I need to get to the bottom of it. It doesn't add up."

"And why should it? They're all crackpots, Benny. You know this. Why would you expect anything less in this case? A loony surrounded by loonies, it's the way of the world, Benny. Now, go get some sleep. It'll do you some good."

"You're probably right. Sometimes things just don't add up, and anyone that would tell you otherwise is either full of shit, or fresh out of the academy. But there is something else. I've found things here with Doug. I've found artifacts, artifacts of situations that have never happened. How am I supposed to let that go?"

"You're starting to sound like him now. They're lies, Benny. Let it go."

"Why don't you come down to my office tomorrow and have a look for yourself, then you can tell me what you think."

"I'll do that, Benny. How about I meet you for lunch, eleven o'clock?"

"That sounds good. Thanks."

Like a grand maestro descending from the heavens, the meeting with all massive creatures becomes apparent. There were three that I met that were special and became dear to me. I remember their names as Samuel, Martin, and Thomas. They came down from the mountain and spent a great expanse of time with me, at first individually and then as a group. They gave their lessons to me and also they took trophies from me. They carried off a tiny piece and put it somewhere special, private, but on display.

Samuel was the first to come to me. I did not that any of them were coming until I saw Samuel's eyes for the first time. This is one of the ways in which he is unique. He is not menacing now because I have become accustomed to him and his form and his ways, but at the time he seemed huge and frightening to me. His skin was rough. His voice was deep and powerful and on occasion snapped with a shrill scream behind it. His eyes seemed sharp and glowing from the distance, but when he came closer and fell out of the illuminated seam, it was clear that were cloudy with age. He was wise and firm. He was cantankerous and compassionate. He was full and proud, even of the wear he had accrued. It was distinct and

vibrant, worn so courageously on his surface. He came to me with his chin held high, his eyes slanted down at me. He seemed to barely want to look on me. He seemed to have thoughts of me that I initially perceived as pity or distrust or distaste. He moved uncomfortably in long stretches, like he was pulling on our world with too much strength, but when he arrived at a place he could rest, he fell fast and hard into it with delight and looked out onto the world with reverence. We spent many hours sitting and talking together. Occasionally, he would get up to move around and flights of fancy would carry his body, growing smaller, faster and heavier than it wanted to go. He was the first of three magnificent things to enter my company. I could never forget him.

Martin was the next creature to engage me. He was different, much sweeter and bizarre and delicate. His bones flickered and vibrated under pink flesh. He was deadly thin with broad ribs and skull. He said to me that he had insulated himself from much of the pain in this place. He used to run straight into it, bathe in it. It injured me inside and out, but it never could wholly take me or enter me in the way that we wanted. He said it made no difference, not to the gods. He was intelligent and kind and instantaneous. We did not speak much outside of these few lines that he uttered. Much of our time was spent in quiet thought and poses. He liked to brush against things and he could run fast and then go into a burst that propelled faster than sight. He was a miracle man. I believe all three of them were. Some of what they did though was very hard for me, as a human, to recognize. I am not so arrogant as to think otherwise. I usually just consider myself fortunate for always being around them and communicating with them in some way, here and after. He liked to brush against things because he said it reminded him of something or someone. He was so full of love and sorrow.

Finally, Thomas came to meet me. There was a long pause before he broke through the skin. But when he finally crossed, it was a big gesture and he was upon me in what seemed like only seconds. His long snout of a nose and mouth and aperture forced its way in and consumed my vision. It bit in and broke me and lodged itself under my surface. He licked and tasted me, consuming my memories and the sting in my eyes, and then he turned and went to be alone

amongst the trees and dirt. I asked him if he was okay. He said nothing, but stared to me with the breadth of the ocean, the stillness of the years of agony and excitement that could build civilizations. When the sun went down and it was cold and he was the final visitor, he curled next to me and slept, waiting for the others to commune. His muscles bulged in the air. He was without effort a great force. He bore scars. He bore anything. His path crossed in times when it was most needed. He was history and urgency and all of the soft fierceness that these things demand. It didn't buckle him though, not for a second. I was proud of him. I was proud for all of humanity to watch this creature of a man stand up and walk.

When the four of us came together for the first time, the air was sharp and there were stars in the sky when I believed there should not be. It was just before dawn; maybe twenty minutes before the sun would come. Thomas was curled in my side motionless except the moo of his throat and his eyes scrambling under the lids. The others walked with a reassuring gaze toward me. When they stopped, Thomas instinctively arose and stood at their side. They helped me up. The first thing that they discussed with me was the way the near future would be for me for a little bit of time. They explained that it was customary for these first encounters to be repeated. I would experience our introductions several more times perhaps and I might draw from them new impressions. It would not stay in my mind for long. There may be days in between but each time the sky broke for the earth to receive their bodies, my eyes would draw new tears, new birth and I would be like a separate entity from my usual functions. They said not to worry, that all of what occurs we be kept in record by a fifth being that was now invisible to us all. He would make himself present to me and only me on the day that he was to return my thoughts to my head. It would be written on a tablet or tablets and the words would be encoded but the language of it would seem native to me and the typeface would seem more beautiful and ornate than it would under any other circumstances. This man, the fifth invisible, would be close to me for a short time and then push me away, perhaps stabbing me or destroying something that I once held dear. They said again not to worry; the thing that he is to destroy is something that you have in fact grown to despise. All would be well.

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I told them that I feared for their safety. It seemed to me at this point that there was much in the world, new things to the world that were beyond my perception and beyond my means of force. How could I be expected to protect them or even myself if a situation would arise? Some of these creatures do seem dangerous and some even seem as if they do not know if they wish to mean us harm or if they wish to shower us with gifts. They said that I was quite correct and because of this, how could I have any doubt as to our destiny. I did not understand. They explained to me, the best that they could, that there is strength in will as well as in kindness. They told me that would meet repeatedly as only we could and they told me I should try to get some rest, as much as I could stand for the next couple of days. They said that they would likely be returning soon and then they turned and left. I believed that they must have all been going to the same place when they are apart from me. I hoped that they were. I suddenly had dreadful feelings when I imagined any of them completely alone or alone with danger or wicked forms. I hoped that they would be together. The pain of not knowing their immediate fate was excruciating and elevating quickly. I looked for some release from it. I turned myself back into the house and looked for some familiar objects.

Outside the air is sweet and sharp and moldy. I am within the moist willowy ribs of my home. I put on a coat and hat and sit in an old chair, right on the edge of me like I am on a cold steel mesh. I am like I am waiting to go. I am like I am on the rim of movement. I am in the environment of porcelain teapots that beg for my grip. I am in the environment of dusty record players and ancient family portraits. I am in packed cases and dried flowers. The world is pregnant. I am a sterile surgeon that has been taken off the job. I am impatient with my forgetfulness. I am empty and shamed. I am a mother thrown to the wolves. I forget the sex of my body. It is shadow. It is tealeaves. It is possessed and thrown. I am something to be seen. I hate it. I am a private mind. I want my body back under me. I want voices to reach in and paint the outlines, paint the stars, scream the shape of my skin and dress me up. I want them to have a photograph of me. I want to know that they are safe. I am impatient that I have forgotten where to touch, where to wait. I am impatient that my reflection has dulled and blurred. I go

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upstairs to get to sleep in something. I fall into my form reaching up with bony arms at the stairs. I am waiting up there. I am calling. I am in shades and a slip.

Laser beams of war boomed through the sky like rockets. The earth writhed, basking like tubes of serpents in the sun. Horses breathed the steam of morning from their screeching nostrils. Everything went red and loud against my head.

He had his own softly spiced scent to comfort him in his weariness, but his head ached and his body was nauseated and shaky. He waited in the office, lingering without sleep until the ammonia burn of the sun came bulging through the dusty windowpanes. He was sick with thought. He was trembling with confusion. There was a panorama of confusion placed before him like a table setting, like a feast of people. He looked into their photographed faces. They were a bloody wrench on the floor next to dusty footprints. They were excavated concrete that encased the fragmented outlines of a human. They were closed circuit television black and white. They were an ordinary woman, an ordinary man, ordinary alien forms lurking in the shadows of after hour shelves. He looked at piles of clothing, either whole or in pieces. He examined where they had been discovered or surrendered and to whom. He looked at their words, the shape of them. He looked at black and white uttering and the shadow of blood coughed through voices, still alive, still wet with saliva and mucous and food particles. There was the smear of plaster, the shake of nylon, and the touch of every color of plastic. Guns on their hips and hats at their breast, there was a retired group, old friends in a final stance to remember. They were happy in their work, all of them. They had their place. But when you put it all together, when you tried like Benny was now, you could feel the nerves and arteries strapped to your skull whine with rejection. There were two glasses on his desk, nestled in the filth of interlocked papers, one of coffee and one of bourbon and they were both equally stained. The ashtray was packed. The air was stale on his purple eye sockets. His feet and his back were heavy. Snow was falling for the first time outside. He felt a pressure.

Three beings came down the hilltop like roaring thunderclouds. Everything went into bursts of coal gray and ash black. The energy shriveled and parted and there was the clap of a

sound. I was introduced to them in my previous name and there was the faint flicker of that body on my shoulders. They were told to me as Samuel, Martin, and Thomas. They came one at a time and greeted me. Then, we gathered under the fledgling ceiling of extension, connection, and mass growth.

Samuel came to me first and he was ill. He had the look and mannerisms of a child kept long in bed from pneumonia or tuberculosis. He had an antiquated look. He had grease and faded streaks in his hair and beard. He grumbled. He brought me a gift and forced a smile. It was a little scrap of food, a collection of bread crusts and cured meat and aged cheese. He smiled as I took it. The look of pure happiness surprised me. Underneath his blankets, in tired eyes, he was thickly covered and cheerful. He left without speaking much. He asked of my injuries, old ones that I had long forgotten. He asked if they still pained me, if I had any recurring sting or perhaps a constant tightness. Again, surprised and uncertain, I shrugged and shook my head and told him that I had no knowledge of anything like that going on in me. He nodded with a look of contemplation and finally agreed. He said you're probably right, no cause for that. I followed him in what seemed like hallways in the vast open air. He turned a corner and was suddenly gone. I sat down in the grass and waited for an hour and a half. I brushed the crumbs from my palms and shoved my hands in my pockets from warmth, bitter warmth and waiting.

Martin came next and he nearly bounced down the hill. He spoke of nothing but the immediate past. Everything we encountered, he said oh so lovely and waxed on about its features. He drew my attention into tiny worlds of intricate, extravagant detail. Ordinary things, they were springing to life with machinations. He had a gleam in his eyes. He looked almost ecstatic. He asked if we might rest for a while when we circled around to the foot of the hill. I said sure, why not? He told me that time was very important. He said that no one should rest lightly just as no one should prevent his or her body from rest carelessly. He said that I should think carefully whenever undertaking a choice as to whether I should rest or keep moving and thinking. He said and nearly as important is what comes right before you drift away on that

ocean. He said that there are crucial moments in every step of the process. Don't you see that? He said that the winding down is complex and should paid close attention. He asked if I would hold his hand as he prepared himself for rest. I agreed feeling slightly uncomfortable. His hand was gray and fuzzy with singed yellow hairs. He sighed and went to sleep. I watched him for some time and then drifted off as well. When I awoke he was gone. I thought I heard him stir and speak just around the corner. It was difficult to move. It was difficult to go inspect what I thought was his area. When I finally did, I found nothing there. I sat and waited for a while thinking that perhaps he would come back. After about an hour and a half, I knew it was over with him.

Thomas came last and he hugged me very firmly, then he pushed me back, measuring about a half an arm's length and he began pressing on my chest. When he spoke, he spoke strangely and with what I thought was an odd amount of concern in his voice. He asked if I had been examined yet. I said no. He said that we should go over it now so that when the time came, I would be prepared. He paused slightly, looking into my eyes for resistance. I provided none, so he went into his description.

His fists are forces on me. My body pushes back. We go around into the cool tall grasses and bathe in their temperature. Everything is washed in their scent. Rainwater begins to fall from in the air. It permeates me. It penetrates my flesh. It leaks in and makes puddles and rivers inside my inner workings. It mingles with my cells and pushes force on my organs. It grinds me. It works me. It delivers me. I am happening new and growing. I stand tall in the flash of the flowing earthlight. I am standing on a planet.

We meet together circled around a stone. They place their hands on it. I don't understand the significance. More things come, they begin speech that I don't understand, short and simple words that sound confused in my head. They bring me to sit on a mound of dirt. They say that I should place myself there for a while and see what I can figure out. They ask me if I think I know anything or remember anything today that I didn't before. I am at a loss. They don't seem surprised or disappointed or upset or even affected in any way. They give me

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plenty of time to think or answer or do something. I do nothing. I don't understand what they are expecting of me. It is ok. They tell me so. They say that perhaps I need more rest. They tell me that perhaps the rest I had before was no good and that I should try it a different way. They ask me if I go to sleep the same way every night. I tell them that I do not. I tell them that I almost always sleep in different rooms of the house or in different positions. I tell them that I almost never arrive there the same way twice. It is always a different time and a different circumstance and different thoughts and feelings swimming around in my head. They turn and speak amongst themselves, only half in words that I can comprehend. I gather, that at least two of them theorize that perhaps this is the problem. They tell me that maybe for the at least the next couple of nights I should attempt some kind of routine. I ask them how I am supposed to come about developing it. I tell them that I have the feeling that things are getting urgent and it is dangerous to waste time testing things and playing around. I am surprised at the agitation in my voice. They seem please by it, but they tell me that I really shouldn't look at things that way. There are ways that they are making things safe for us. They tell me that it can all be brought back at any time. There is no urgency. It is false. It is a trap. I ask them if I am making myself the victim of many such traps. They say that I probably am, but they tell me that it is proper and yet another piece of it. They tell me to just go to sleep. They say go to sleep for two hours on this mound of dirt and we will watch over you. I tell them that I have not slept outside for a very long time. They ask me when the last occasion was. I tell them I think it was when I was sleeping in my car, traveling. They assure me that this will be nothing like that. I close my eyes and drift into the sounds of their bodies. When I awake, they are gone.

The worms are crawling up through my skull. Decomposition is happening. I am sick with shaking nausea and headache. It is pressing on me. It is the force of a piece handled in a man's hands. It is despair on top of stillness. It is cosmic beings happening on top of me to make a parade of my dead shifting guts. I worry that I am on a death march. What are these postcards that she is sending me? My body hangs in a way that it is jumping out of me. I am told to hang on a bit longer and there will be a motion that reconnects me and solidifies this

body that I have taken. It will make parts burn in the memory.

From the mountain they descended. The three of them were conjoined. We have coffee together. Afterward, I am meeting Benny at his office.

With long tongues sliding on one another's facial structures and gloved hands going up their legs, we convened. War drums, the pistons of freight, and frightening sounds beat in the distance, past the mist and the purple veil that made residence beyond the second building. There were yellow lights to keep a person company out there in the fog and muck. I invited them in for our morning drinks. It was early morning. We were to have coffee. Their plan this morning was to send me off. They wanted to encase me in protection and prepare my hands for the work of an attack. There was little time, yet we moved and spoke with listlessness due to our customs. I was beginning to adopt them well at this point. It was feeling less uncomfortable and I believed that I could finally see the reason in it. I boiled the water as they shifted endlessly in a single chair. They were so filled with awkwardness of their present state that they could not help but laugh at it. I smiled to myself. I don't know if they noticed my amusement, but I am sure if they did, it would've pleased them. We had become quite close. I have no idea how, but I had made friends with these otherworldly forms.

As I clinked away with the dishes and slopped their containments around, adding the precise doses of solid ingredients, they began to work in spurts between frolics of verbal exchanges and groping playfulness. They were spreading maps and transcripts of lectures out on the glass tabletops with synchronized hands. They were making notes with utensils clutched between their sweaty teeth. I organized the giant silver tray and checked it repeatedly for completeness. Then, I took up the heavy burden in my hands and made my way to them. I went under the bare drywall arch and past the guttered out candles into the dining area where they were waiting for me, where they were busying themselves. They paused when I spoke my first words, then let out a sigh, and froze like statues. What did I do to deserve this anticipation? I asked them politely what they had for me. They lit up. Composing themselves, they informed me politely that I should sit down in my favorite chair, the one they had left empty and ready

for me, and I should say something official to start the session. I said that I didn't have a clue as to what the fuck they were going on about, but I would sit down the tray the best I could on their pile of papers and collections, then take my seat. The one they had made for me. In doing this, I raised both hands and I said please, show me this map that you have been drawing and that is how we will begin. I said the hours are passing and we have appointments to keep.

When I got to his office it was nearly half past twelve and I was afraid that maybe Benny would be out for lunch and I would have to wait. His car was still parked outside on the curb, but it could be that he walked to one of the diners or cafes on the block. He was known to do this from time to time. Benny always liked to eat and he fed himself perhaps the most on lunch. He was the kind of person that let things get under his skin quite often, so this is not the routine you might expect of him, but it was the way he was. Benny was a machine, I think. He knew he had to eat. Nothing stopped. Nothing changed. He was on, even over plates of ketchup and during all that was required to make that happen. He didn't need to shut down to let something consume him like most people do. This is what made it so effective in him. He could keep going and living and being critical mass. No man should ever be permitted such an existence, deprived of the burn. I can only imagine what it did to his insides. Benny was running on a clock that had never been invented, not in the human realm. Who is to say how long such a thing could carry a person and what kind of mutated lump would come out on the other side of it. So naturally, as my head started to rise over the end of the stairs and the light in Benny's office, still burning, became visible to me, I did not know what to think. Had something finally gotten so deep in Benny that he had to give in to it, completely? What would this mean for him?

The front desk was out. I looked some more. The entire place was out, empty. The only thing that remained was the shuffling and the flickering light in Benny's office. The door was closed and the shade was pulled. I wanted to stop and wait on the bench like most people were supposed to. I could just wait for them to arrive back from lunch just as business is intended to go. I knew I couldn't do that though. I was supposed to press forward and meet him alone in this empty wooden building. I knocked softly on the textured glass of the door, just under his

name. Not much of a response, but there was something so I inched the door open enough to speak out to him. Benny? It's me. Is it okay if I come in? I heard his footsteps approaching and he let the door open the rest of the way. He moved with such swiftness that by the time my eyes were even in the room, his back was on me again.

I felt an itch on my body that was unnatural. It was all over me. It was in the space around me even. It was all consuming and aggressive. I went to a place to escape it for about two weeks. I went up the stairs of my barred home. I went into the place where I could be alone and constantly near a faucet. I would expel pieces of a body and pieces of an experience, a frightful ride, and an anxious ride. I would be in pieces along the edge of pressed living things. Their cold faces would comfort me. I tore into my flesh with long hands until I was thoroughly exhausted. I collapsed into my bed. The sheets were pleasantly ice-cold, but my body's demeanor transferred into them abruptly and ruined them. They were hot and cumbersome. They weighed heavy on me and restricted me. I left them for some time so that they could be restored to their former glory. When I returned, they were more resilient to my toxins. They held up. They were strong and cold against me and they were light on my muscles. They created my body tingling in soft elaborate pricks. I could not rest. I was under their spell. I was under their arousal and balanced exquisitely. It kept me alive and oh too alert, awfully alert. My eyes peeled up deeper into the ridge that lay on my forehead. It was having an awful effect. My appearance spun into surreal throes and crashed into wreckage. My body pulled up stiff and dehydrated into long, stiff seams. The flesh shined in a glossy sheen of purple bruises and deep and stiff blue lesions. My feet ached, so far away from the blood that sucked and paraded into my head. My spine creaked. I fell into rich oxygen. It nourished my wounds and encouraged them to stand taller and brighter on my shoulders. Whips were remembered and exalted. I spun the handles of the faucet and let everything travel on my face. It moved so quickly, it nearly stripped away the chill. It was all I could do to hold on. The door pulsed with the long tunnels of meat that fed into it. It ached in shadow and sound to be opened and made mercy and love to. She had trapped me. She had beaten the door into some sort of submission or

perversion of dependency and romance. It held some malice for me. It plotted. It hid weapons up its skirt. It was looking at me with eyes that made my dirty skin crawl. I could see what it was thinking. It was thinking to be inside me and as much as I wanted to run through it and escape, I waited and watched and made it happen with her. It was all properly documented and I relive it on occasion.

The fifth invisible creature arrives to watch me do it. He says you have been on this medication for weeks now. Have you been hungry, thirsty, more so than usual? Have you been urinating more frequently, have you been touching yourself more?

The laundry is running its cycle. I hear the water spasm and the friction alive. It is early morning. We are in thin gray blue air. My skin is soft and my hips are wide. My breasts are cupped gently in my arms. I ask him if he wants me to do it or if I should talk about it a little first. I ask him if I should give him a little description of what I am about to do and if he would like me to dress for him. I ask him if he wants to witness the whole thing or if I should just get to the end, the part that he really wants. He asks me to talk and dress. His eyes and the flat plate of his skull are shaking in dark lines and deep burns. He pulls stiff hands around a glass as I place him in a comfortable chair. This man is to be assassinated.

I pull a cigarette from a green pack and stretch nude to light it. The sun is stirring in twitches and particles and the sweat of my morning sleep is baked on my skin. I am dry. My muscles are bulging with strength and stride. I go to the dresser and slide it out slow. I pull out what he is looking for and place it all over me. I take one more item, a silk piece of rough-cut fabric and I go to the bed looking at him over my shoulder. I sit with my back arched and my ass on the edge of the springs and cushion. With one hand, I expose myself and with the other I gently rub and ease the rough piece inside me. Reaction begins. I place myself on it and in the room. I diffuse. Then I snap my legs shut and pull it into the air. Walking over to him, I place it nicely on his lap where he is starting to grow. He snatches it up to his drooling jaws and then shoves it in his pocket and pulls me onto him. I place my head to the side of his face and jet streams of whisper spark to existence. I speak to him of the future, the long planes of skin and

the lips overflowing. I feel his muscles tighten and his grip becomes unbearable. He says that he has seen something else. He has a future in mind that he doesn't like. He has seen my gun and my ideas. I tell him that it makes no difference. I tell him that none of us make much of difference. He said that I was right. He said that one of us would not survive. He said I am proud of you for uncovering it, the myth, and the impossibility of not surviving. I smile, placing lipsticks on my lips. He said that it was possible that this situation may happen a few times before it is all over. He asked if I was aware of this. I nodded. He said that everything would be including in the record that he turned over to me, and of course I knew about that or otherwise, why would I be here. I asked him where I should place him when it is finished. He said in the same place that I might place you, my dear. These ideas filled me with excitement, and finally I was ready to deliver.

These were the oracles of perversion and demise. The mood was haunting. Square shades of light traced themselves. He clenched himself tighter and tighter with my feeble arousal standing tall on his back. I stood and stripped. I pulled away everything from me that was not made by my own body and I left with it in the air. I lay down on the body and stretched myself out, pulling my legs flat and then raising them up and bending them with my knees wide. I was shining. I could see his eyes drilling deep into the soles of my feet. I placed my hand in and exploded into siren wails. Fuck me harder, baby. I am going to come. He crawled to me on the miles of ruffled sheets. He rubbed his covered body all over me and begged for permission. I allowed him. When his body stopped, when it collapsed, I could feel the steel rods of apocalypse drive between his ribs and deflate his lungs. Blood and come dripped and mixed with the greasy sweat of my strong jaws. It was complete. The universe had ended inside our encounter.

I slung his body off of me and began preparing everything to climb him to the mountain, the mound of dirt that was just outside on my property.

His office was painted white. I could see it in the landscape of my dreams, the horrible nightmares that were an overload of days. I felt an abundant swelling and a shiver to new

shape. When I woke up that day, the day of our meeting, my muscles were stretched beyond capacity and the tendons in my legs were inflamed and sore. I was burnt into the morning, gray as celestial bodies. I went through my morning routine, shaving with sharp steel and scrubbing myself to red bumps. I walked down the street around the blocks of brick buildings and iron pipes and cold rain concrete. I stopped at the bakery and picked up breakfast for the two of us, bagels in a cardboard box wrapped in white string. The name of the family was stamped small in runny ink. I turned the corner and saw the white globes of my destination. I went up the cement steps. I opened one of the large glass doors and found myself on the gritty black and white tile. This is what Benny saw every morning and later still in the last hours of darkness. Concern filled me. Guilt took over as I realized that I was more concerned for my own safety than his. I did not know what he was capable of at this point and I knew he was sharp and could pull off whatever fantasy passed through him. He had me. He had us all.

I went to the front desk and asked the officer if Benny was in. I knew he was. I saw his car when I turned the corner. I wanted to keep casual as to not stoke anything in this fragile environment, so I kept a lot to myself. I said what needed to be said and I waited for response. He said yeah, second door. Be sure to knock first, the intercom is busted. I put movement and blood in my fuzzy cramped legs and made my way to the room, the office, smiling and gesturing quietly and politely as I drifted. I stopped suddenly mere paces from the man and turned back. Oh, I almost forgot. Care for a bagel? He said nothing, his nose in his work. I turned and continued on.

The wet, breaking waves of the afternoon shower made a cleansing fog. I twisted in it and settled. My vision was sinking away into other areas, off of my body and into spaces cased in lumber. Then, it went black and released and I was alive again. It was as if nothing had happened. It became every day and unnoticeable comfort. I rested back on my heels and let my head drop back, soaking myself in the spray and heat. I thought about coffee. I thought about paper plates and crisply toasted bagels. I thought about breakfast at the table and making ways to leave, then arriving home in the evening. I decided that I would go for a long drive after I lock

up. The tile was gray and green and smelled of apple blossoms. I dressed myself in the mundane autumn and felt my body sharp and hollow in the sparks of electricity. I bundled up and went to the vehicle.

The wood chair was heavily lacquered and scratched in places. It was like brittle paper underneath me. It was like a skeleton as I stared into his bloodshot eyes. The stench of burnt coffee and stale cigarettes hung in the air drowning in the odor of a creature's despair. He said hang on a minute, Tom. I'll be with you in just a moment. I just need to finish writing this up. I said fucking paperwork, right? He said nothing but a nervous chuckle. I asked him if he was feeling any better today. He put a hushing finger up, whispering mute thoughts as he continued what he was doing. I sat there waiting nervously and adjusting my raincoat in my arms. Finally, he stopped and looked, punctuating with a there, now that's finished. What were you saying, Tom? I said never mind. Where do you want to go for lunch? I was thinking Trunkey's. How does that sound? I don't know, Tom. Maybe, we can skip lunch and just get right down to it. I said I was afraid you might say that and I produced the box of bagels that I had purchased from Estelle's on the way over. He grinned. He said okay and pushed his eyes to the coffeepot as he produced a fistful of napkins from his desk drawer. I went to it, the same machine that he had worked his entire life here, and I poured us small paper cups from the stained glass. He wrenched himself from the photographs and reports, the maps and records and catalogue slips, and he finally received my company with the attitude of open arms, of old friends. A nervous relief entered me. There was the flicker of doubt, and then I engaged him along with the task at hand. We were right on schedule.

My back aches with labor and pause. When I get up, there are more repetitions of the three stars, the miracle men. They warn me again of the coming of the fifth invisible being and they perform miracles for my enjoyment in a feast celebration. The day of the meeting is drawing close, the day of the vehicle, of Mr. Robes. These are more preparations or final ones. It is happening too quickly to tell.

There was a thin bridal veil that fell on me for the first time. It tangled in my tits and left

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spores of attics and furnaces in my eyes, breaching them to tears. It was wispy and transparent and fed in dark lines of shadow into my glistening lips and piled wings. My hands were rough and callused and bloody. My legs were stained and rubbed with clay and dirt and debris. Arches of twigs and leaves ripped through my hair and left square patches of brainy flesh on my head, raw and tortured. Flower petals swung from my hips and from under my fragrant arms. I held delicate glassware along the edges of my finger bones. I danced in moonlight. I danced in swaying fronds of pearls and floating pond lights. I was in ecstasy and awareness. I was held in the mind. I was trickling sweat and gorgeous and raised with growth of hair between my legs and under my arms. I was full with the plans of stone structures and biblical patterns. I walked on worn paths and the buried husks of river. Rubies glittered along sapphires and droplets in my palms. There were massive eyes overhead. Hard cases of silver sleeves pressed tightly around my tight biceps and shoulder blades. I came out in points and soft curves and elaborate nudity. I wore mega-annum.

It was frigid outside. Steam was rising from between my wet legs. I was riding and bouncing with all the body of my sliding muscles. I was the lanterns of temples, the soft porcelain glow. I was the smear of pigments and synthetics. It was a dangerous world, a world that was intent on destroying itself in a productive grip, in an oozing and spurting grip and waking in the sandy eyes of white linen dream. It was all such a mess at this point. It was god damn cold and we were naked in the steam of reaction, rubbed raw by tank plates and cold dishwater. We were starving in the loop. I was moving in a quite becoming fashion, fighting it. I was pulling the food from its mouth. I was kicking it softly under the ribs and smothering it in its sleep. I slept next to him. I could see the spot where a knife could go, right up under his ribs. I could also see the dark circles under his eyes spring to life in rage and catch me, naked and vulnerable, committing sins and crimes. Robes and the sounds they uttered through the mind of his skin guarded him, prickling hairs and blood reactions. He was the network of unholy rigging.

The earth was frigid outside, beyond the plush steps that mirrored in waters that fall

down from the entryway of my home. It was all falling away from me. The frigid world had pushed hard on us and for a very long time. It was tenacious. It was vicious and at its disposable were the sharpest tools and the heaviest of blunt objects. He knew how to hide. He knew how to bury things. He had gray, waxy flesh they he could just peel off in his fitful rage and shower me with the sparks and blood coated dermis. He was the skin of a hairy wolf remembering its fucking birth. He was the shrill scream of something letting go. He was a dreadful little man, worn thin and tired until the heat would raise him. The only thing on his mind was vengeance, for a solid month now. Can you believe that?

It was cold outside, colder than it usually was at this time of year. Most years, we had our first snowfall on Thanksgiving Day or the day after. The days that directly preceded it always felt too warm if anything, but they were always like that so I am not sure what we were all thinking at that time. It felt too warm though. Everyone around town would start to question whether or not we would have snowfall by Christmas. In really warm, wonderful years it would wait until the week of Christmas to snow. This year though, it was colder than it had ever been. It made us feel like we were progressing horribly into a new age. We did not have much precipitation, a few flurries that you could only see if you were standing outside among them. If you just looked out the frost window, you would think the air was empty of it. The cold was what took it all. It made everything solid. It made the objects crystal and heavy as cubes of lead. Everything glistens, but only under the street lamps and rare escaping light of evening. The world felt like a bunker, an underground metropolis, and flashlights and felt blankets. We had some severe winds that drove us underground. Where did I go at that time? I imagined myself in different circumstances, hiding, but I knew that I had not gone to that place. It would be foolish.

The life became a single town before their arrival. It was what consumed me in the promise of their presence. I felt betrayed by space. I mapped it all. I start drawing it in stacks on the floor. It piled up quickly. They would find me and ask what work I had been doing. I would tell them that I was planning their escape routes. They would ask if I had tested all of the

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devices, all the warning signals. I would tell them emphatically that yes, I did. I would jump from my chair and move about the house in frenzy and show them all that I had done, but wait. They don't come in here, do they? Have they been here with me before? I couldn't recall. It seemed as if they had. There were places where things such as them could not go without them staying there for some time, at least in some fashion and that wouldn't do, not for us, not for our plan. They would be called out instantly if I brought him here to take him down. He would see them in the place and then we would be caught. When we are caught, there is hell to pay.

When we are caught in this cold city, there is hell to pay. The rails ran east to west all over the fucking country, and they ran just the same here. He worked them for a time when he was smaller, much smaller. They're part of it, part of the problem and so was I. They always remained close to me, my entire life. I could hear them and feel them swelling in the fluids of my bones, in those fluids of my legs. It was unsightly. It was frightening and a comfort and a medical routine. I did not know what else to do. The rivers here ran north to south as they sometimes do or I imagine they must. Shit. Is it the river or the road that passes over it that runs north to south? The river bends. Where does it take that big turn that it takes? We are in trouble now. Everything is getting blank out there. It is getting confused and then vanishing. That is what happens. I need to get a hold of someone and see if they can find me a way out of here. They are doing it to me. They are making it let go. The world is letting go of me and it is taking its prints along with it. My cargo has been stripped. You know what happens next.

The steam of the cars is a black fog. I am watching them from the edge of the bench that I have placed under the window in my bedroom. He is being dropped off. I have grown to like watching them get dropped off to me. He came in a big yellow cab; an old car that I wouldn't think would still be in service. It seems to run well enough. It carried him here after all. I don't suppose that is some great feat of strength though. He is thin, thin as a hospital veil, as paper clothes, thinner. He is gray and wormy. He is a pathetic mass of cells. He is come to give it to me. I don't know about this. I think I would rather be alone today. I wonder what gifts he has gathered for me. I wonder what promises will spill out of him. I wonder what clothes he has on

underneath, maybe the clothes of a better man. I can't imagine wanting anything to do with this thing. Why bring him here to me? What's the purpose of it? They should know better by now.

The winter night is cold and I am wearing nothing but my coat. My skin is bruised and maroon with the kisses of other women smeared down the outside of my legs. They made it dripping down to my boots. I am cut in guiding lights and festering in marvelous winter pools, cut right into the smoldering snow banks. I am sliding on my muscles, beautiful and full.

I am feeling the tired itch of sundown and spring. I am wearing the flowing hoods of a death trial. I am powdered in evidence.

With brittle bones, he stands tall. He is the delicate microscopic portions and points of a sycamore tree. He is particleboard, rubber foam mats, and opaque ripples in glass panes. He is in the office. He is intense to jump on me. He is in hand and foaming.

"Doug, let's get serious for a moment. Can you do that for me? If I ask you one question, can you just tell me straight?"

Sure thing, Benny, I can do that if you like. What is it?

"Who is Stanley?"

Stanley is buried in the woods. Why would you want to ask a single fucking thing about him?

"Good. And what is buried out there alongside Stanley?"

His tools are what I put alongside him. Anything else you want to know?

"Why are you telling all of this now?"

I am telling you for the same reason anybody else tells anybody anything. I am telling you because I like you, Benny. I always have. You know that, don't you?

"Yes, but why try to tell your story now and not before?"

It doesn't come easy to me, Benny. It never has and it just gets worse. It took a lot of work, a lot of effort. It took a lot of time for the exact right things to happen in the exact right sequence to let it all tumble out. Know what I mean?

"I guess what I am trying to say, Doug, is that it is too late."

You think so.

"I know so, Doug. I don't understand why you don't realize or if you don't realize it. I would think it would plain as day to you. It is too fucking late. They've already come down on you as hard as they can and look at what it has turned you in to. I found something the other day when I was out on the road. I was out on a long trip to a place quite familiar to you, Doug. I was out there interviewing people, long forgotten people perhaps, at least to some, right, Doug?"

Oh, yeah.

"Yeah, that's right."

Fine, so what am I supposed to say now, Benny? How was your trip? Eat anywhere nice?

"We can talk about that if you like."

Since when do we talk about what I would like? It seems like we've been spending most of our time doing just the opposite. Shit, Benny, you're starting to sound like one of those fellows out there in the hall, the ones on the black and white tile. They're both the same you know. Take your pick, Benny. Which side would you like to be on today?

"Either way, Doug, wouldn't you like to ask me who I talked to and maybe what I found out? You think maybe I found out a little something about you, about your past?"

I suppose you wouldn't be bringing it up otherwise. I don't see why you have to pretend with me, Benny. I suppose maybe you're trying to make fun of me, of my situation, my location. Is that it?

"No, that is not it at all. I wouldn't, I mean, I didn't mean to come off that way. I am just trying to make you more comfortable."

So, you think I am comfortable here?

"No, I absolutely do not think that, Doug. The thing is I think I have truly started to put it together for you. I found some stuff out, Doug, and it has made me feel really kind of sorry for you. Now, I am sorry if that hurts your feelings for me to say it to you like that, but apparently I

don't know any other good way to tell it to you. It makes me sad, your situation, Doug. You make me sad."

Is that so?

"Yes, I am afraid it is."

Well, good for you, Benny. Hey, when is Tom getting here? I think I would like to talk to him for a little while, if that is ok."

"Tom's not coming today. It's just me and you."

Okay, well, I am going to take a nap for a while I think. How about you tell them to let me out in the courtyard? Have them get my things. Have them go get my coat and hat and some cigarettes and some of my books from my room. I think I want to read for a while and fall asleep outside. Be a pal, Benny.

"You know I can't do that, Doug. We are required to talk for at least forty more minutes."

I don't want to fucking talk, asshole. Go get my fucking things, now, please.

"Doug."

What!

"Doug, it's over. It's time to pack it in. So, why don't you get on with it?"

I am going to bury my hands and my head between my legs until you are fucking gone. Write it down.

"Doug."

Nothing is over, Benny. Nothing is ever over. You understand me? Now, get Tom in here or I am taking a nap just like I fucking said, ok?

"Fine, Doug, have it your way. I am going to go out in the hall for a while and I'll let you have the room. How's that sound?"

Go use the phone, Benny. Call him.

"Ok, Doug, whatever you say. I'll come back though, ok? I'll come back to check on you in a few minutes."

You do that, scumbag.

“Just try to relax.”

So, which one of those lying sluts gave it up to you anyway, Benny. Doris. Was it Doris, Benny? Please, tell me it wasn't that old bag. You make me laugh, Benny. You make me sick. You're a fucking pig. Do you know that?

There's a payphone on the wall that this room shares with the hallway and I don't hear it making any noise. I heard the door close, the little rattle of the glass. I heard his pointy little footsteps, but that is really it. It is noisy out there, but the phone, that great telephone when it slams around against itself, it can be heard for miles. You can hear the coin return like the blast of the chains of the firing line. It is quantum. There was nothing of that sound today, not the plastic, and not the coin return and not the wire. Nobody went for it, just as I feared. It is possible that I could be stuck here forever. Wouldn't that be just perfect, just fucking great? God damn it, Benny. God damn it.

The dishes were waiting in the sink when I got home. The water had turned ice fucking cold. My hands were cracked and filmed with blood. They were numb too. My back burned with ache. I just felt the weight of gravity all day now. I felt the burn of the wind. I felt like the solar climate was climbing around on top of us, lurking in the bushes. I felt just beat up, real bad. I saw the pool of soapy water. It had run green and cold and copper and toxic. This is not a good sign. I don't think I can put my hands in that sink, not one more day and not even one more time. I just cannot do it.

I listen in the direction of the door, passing through, in the direction of the chair. I wish the earth would open up and just devour him. I listen and hear nothing. I feel nothing, not the weight, the pressure in the air of his presence. I wait and I hear nothing watching the green digital numbers of the clock on the stove. I wait for three minutes before something starts to build. Oh, and fuck, I was just about to resign myself to relaxing. I was just about to enjoy his absence and then there it is. I feel the push of his weight on the room, the air, and the atmosphere. I feel him coming toward me. I hear a little movement of the chair, the fucking

chair.

I wait three more minutes, fifty-three to fifty-six. It is time that I feel nothing. It is an empty stretch, hollow as the trees. My belly is tight and my lungs are wrapped in strips, flattening and pushing up for air, very restricted. Then, I want to gasp. I want three to turn to four, but it never does, not ever. Then, the rustle of the newspaper, I hear it. He is on the coffee table. He is up and moving and shifting things around and fumbling for his glass. He is stained in his shirt. I can see it now. God damn it. What am I going to do?

I could go to the car. I could shout to him. I could say that I forgot to get something at the store and that I needed to go back out for about. Shut up and quit being foolish. You want to make it worse? Do you want to arouse his fucking suspicions? Is that what you want to do? Don't provoke him. But we know it is too late for that. In all reality, if that were an option, that sink would still be empty right now and it most certainly is not. I wonder what he is going to do with me today.

On top of the hill, thunderclouds stir. They are making strings. They are making something to grab me and have their way and mutate me. It is what I want. It is part of my intergalactic contract. I am commissioned to be in certain postures and to accept certain interfaces. It is part of the deal and all I really have to do is waste away here and starve and throw a fit on the tile every now and again. I am drooling with the repetition. I can't stand it anymore. Three conjoined beast with words from the sky fall and make their way for me. They've got something to say. I'll do it one more time, if you'll make a deal with me. Let me be the one to say how it finishes this time. Let me designate the trap. Let me find the perfect little hunk of suckling mass. I am up for the bitter regret. I am up for assignment and arrangement, and meeting. Let me coordinate the place, if just this once.

The place was a dive. It was cold and it was dark and it was late. The shortest day of the year was over, but we weren't with tomorrow yet. We couldn't get there until a few more things happened. I was here for a reason. I was meeting Tom just as was arranged. I came into the room, under green long lights and I sat down next to him in his blind spot, in his shoulder

with his jacket. He was deep in drink. I couldn't understand why. I wouldn't expect that from him.

"Are you doing alright, Tom?"

"I'm great. How are you, Benny?"

"I'm well. It is cold as all fuck out there though and dark. I swear it is too much sometimes. What did you drag me out here for anyway? What couldn't wait? Lunch again would've been just fine. At least there is heat in the office, thousand-year-old radiators, but heat. This place feels like a god damn meat locker."

"The walls are thin, Benny. That's all."

"So, what do you need from me? What did you want?"

"Just to talk, that is all. Is there something the matter with that?"

"I suppose that depends on where the conversation takes us. How many have you had?"

"You'll never catch up, Benny, but I can help you try. What'll you have tonight?"

"I don't know if it's wise, Tom. Lots to do tomorrow, you understand, don't you?"

"I think you'll have what I'm having. How does that sound?"

"I suppose I could, if you insist."

"I do."

"But it's going on your tab."

"That's fair enough, I suppose."

"So, get on with it already. What did you want?"

"Easy, Benny, take it easy. What did you find out in Parker last week? Did you find the missing piece to that puzzle of yours?"

"I'm afraid I did, or at least the start of it. Is that what this is about?"

"It could be. It kind of depends on you. So, what do you know, partner. Are we still partners, Benny?"

"We are."

"Good. That's good, Benny. That makes me happy in a way even with everything else."

"I see. So, I talked to her, up in Parker."

"And what did you find out?"

"I think I found out what started it all. I think I found the catalyst. I think I found the birth of poor old Mr. Tiller, as we know him now."

"Is that so?"

"It's a real shame, Tom."

"Is that so, as well?"

"And what do you mean by that, Tom?"

"Look, Benny."

"You know, Tom. I don't think you look so well. I don't think you sound so well. I'm concerned. I think maybe we should get out of here. Maybe we should get you home and get you some rest. It'll make you feel better."

"Look, Benny, I know this isn't turning out the way you wanted it to. I know you wanted the guy to be innocent."

"He's as innocent as the rest of us."

"Yeah, tell that to all of those girls. Tell that to their families."

"And that is the thing of it, Tom. They are just as much to blame."

"Now, listen here, you dumb motherfucker, and I'm going to keep calm just to be certain you understand me, completely. You come down here and you say something as completely fucked as that, and you have the nerve to ask me if I am feeling well enough. God damn it, Benny. What has this guy done to you?"

"He's opened my eyes."

"He's bruised you. He's poisoned you."

"Tom."

"I'm going home now, Benny. I suggest you do the same."

"And then what's going to happen, Tom?"

"We'll discuss that tomorrow, eight o'clock tomorrow morning, to be exact, in my office."

I suggest you be there and leave all of your shit in your fucking desk drawers where it belongs. I've got some things of my own to show you. I've got my own little investigation going, you see and I think you might be interested in what I've uncovered."

"What are you talking about?"

"You'll find out tomorrow morning. Just promise me to leave all of your fucking shit as it is. There will be ones that will come for it and they will be interested. Got it, Benny?"

"I guess I'll see you in the morning then."

"You bet your ass you will. Good night, Benny."

"Good night, Tom."

I ran for eight weeks straight. I didn't stop, not for anything or anyone. Eventually, I would stop and her name would be Maxine, but for now, I kept going. I couldn't even remember why I was running. I knew it had something to do with something that was said. There was some kind of situation created about me. There was something that made them suspicious, it seemed like I had committed some awful act or that I was filled with some obscenity or filled with some kind of villainy or weapon or something. I don't know. All I knew was that I had to find him. I had to search for Mr. Robes. If I could just find him, I would discover some answers. I was sure of it. So, I kept going, city to city, state-to-state, diner to motel to some grain of material out in the middle of nowhere. I knew it was a long way to get to the point where he was walking up Doug's driveway. There was much that needed to be done and even more uncovered, all of the events and fabrics and catalogued objects that led up to that flickering being, stuck in that space that we must assume to be some kind of private hell. Why had he come all that way just to mutate, to rot as victim and how had he grown and transformed in to such a creature capable of that nauseating shake? I was getting tired and old on me. It was evaporating in the strands of my clothing. It was leaving its foul vapor in me as it needed to escape. It all wanted to get away from me, all of it. I couldn't understand why. Who was I? What was I doing, what effect could I possibly be having on all of this?

I slipped my hand up and felt her. I could feel the bottom of her ass struggling out of her

panties. She wore it for me. It was always a fantasy of mine and she was finally doing it. The bright red stretch was starting to soak through with her come. She squatted and pulled back her robe and the locks of her hair to present her breasts. They were purple with the chill in the air. They were pale and translucent and she shivered when she asked me if I knew what was coming next. I was jealous and I was excited as she took one after another. By the time it was all over, she was panting and tearing up from heavy activity. She was cold. She was emotionless. She was disappointed and so was I.

As she showered in the faithful shower of the room, I went around the corner to the bank of vending machines. I got some ice and a couple of candy bars. I always picked the wrong flavor for her. I was hoping that perhaps today, I might have some better luck with it. All we needed was a little luck. All we needed was something to get us a little farther down the road and out of this god damn cold.

On the mountain, the phases of the moon itched on her shirtless body. The phases shifted and settled growing in nitrites and old wombs. On the mountain, all the trains ran on schedule and I slept curled up in her arms. She was large breasted and glowing orange. She was swollen with the ramming of the yellow sun through stained windows. She was arched and then falling into a tight grip along the edge of the bed. I did not want to wake her. I wanted to touch her carefully. I want to stir her, but not steal her from her rest and her resting thoughts. I eased my body alongside of her. I realized how tired and drained I was. I realized how much hurt and soreness I had acquired over the past several weeks. It was getting difficult to do anything at all. I could go on a little longer though, if for nothing else, just to touch her in her sleep before she recognized the morning sun and the powerful light. She was rising with sighs. It would not be much longer. I put my arm around her belly. She was breathing in perfect strokes. I put my lips to her head. I said good morning. She was with me. She was ready to go. She asked if I wanted to have a cigarette and I said sure. She didn't know that I had already had one not too long ago. She must've thought I had just woken up too. She asked me to bring her some clothes. So, I did and we went out onto the balcony and started talking. She leaned

against the rail. I didn't. I thought it wasn't a good idea.

We entered a diner of very lost and lonely souls. My hands were puddles of sweat and the stench of mattresses. She was frail and godly. She was the inner fiber of a wood statue. She was magnificent. On the corners of us, they were stirring. They were shuffling. There was a frightfully thin woman in her mid-fifties. She had streaks of grease glowing down her cheeks along the age lines of war and ink. She walked with a stutter and always carried something in her right hand and cradled the left against her shriveled bosom. She was dressed in blue paper and hairnets. She took our order with a pencil that looked like it had by some miracle survived a massacre and a thin pad of paper that smelled like the bottom of the ocean. I ordered coffee and toast with jam. She had fried eggs with mustard and a waffle with maple syrup. The old waitress seemed pleased. Her ass was rising and writhing with great powerful muscles as she turned and walked away. They stacked and slid around on top of her. She turned and winked at me.

The skin of my lips and the skin of my hands were both destroyed by windburn. My fingers were scorched with calluses. I was bubbling. I was blistering. I was making peace with the dirt. I was scraping into it and living through it. I was placing in her the sacred objects of the north and of the west. I was trickling them with blood and saying the words of an elevated ceremony. Travel had wounded me. Travel had embedded things in me. I had stopped here to pray and pass on the relics. I had stopped here to lay their filthy souls to rest.

I looked down at what had come to rest in circles around my feet. I looked down at a collection of canvas bags. I had packed them securely and with intent. In a red bag of canvas, I had placed the flesh and bones. In a blue bag of canvas, I had placed the organs in plastic zipper bags secured with silver tape. In a black canvas bag, I had placed tools, their tools, not mine. I kept my tools in a green leather briefcase and an orange backpack. In a tan canvas bag, I kept their clothing, personal statues, and timepieces. I wrapped those items in brown paper and tied them together with their respective shoelaces. I unfolded everything and spread it out before me and the vacant sky. It stretched in perfectly uniform rows and squares for distances,

measured differently in different frames and in different perspectives. I was blocked in my mind how everything should be arranged at specified intervals. The numbers of the minutes were drawn in figures that were delicately crafted. Great significance was placed on the form of the penmanship. Before this method was to begin, I was to make a fire. The night was getting darker. The rules of the season were gone. It continued to grow deeper and darker and thick with emptiness. We were in the vacuum.

With hands and a thick back and legs grown heavy with fluid, I carried and I dragged by sled the selected timbers of the inferno. The earth beneath sheared the wood of its flakes and fungus and moss. It cut deep into its skin. It laid her open and crumbled her coverings into forgetful sludge and musty bait. It called to them, rippling in the bells of the trees. Her skin was like waveform. Her skin was like the lilted roots and tendrils of a predatory undiscovered host. She was vibrating in the swampland and reviving in the hostile drought. She was remembering. She could recall the shapes of legs, the scent of those abandoned, and the genealogical names of outer kingdoms.

They called her pharaoh. They called her queen. They called her sacrifice. They called her supreme.

She lifted jars of cold liquid, foaming in the fog and making shiny chains and brutal reactions. She was sowing the seeds of civilization. She was clouding the minds of everything outside the sonic explosions of our falling feet. She sipped on the sweat produced by the jars and gushed the excess from deep channels made deep into the butt of her hand and down the long, serene hard bone of her forearms. She was lifting the sounds of production. She was smiling the blossoming breasts of solar storms and stonework furnished gardens. She met the boy and night and went over his collection with him. She made sure that everything was in order. She wiped the tears and perspiration from him and steadied his hands with sweet wine and rubbing alcohol. She blinded him. She stiffened him. She prepared him for the road ahead. Everything was once again going according to plan.

“I thought you said it was just Stanley the first time? It was just you in the woods, by

yourself.”

“What are you trying to say, Doug?”

The first night in the house was difficult. In the noise, I escaped. In the water running on my flesh, I moved and worked. I rested in its disappearing grit and the manmade stacks of equipment and hard lines. It was quiet and lonely in the house. I had a jar of candy sweet orange jam. The glaze of the hard rinds squirmed in my gums. I plucked my teeth of splinters. I had a square of cloth and a utensil. They made harsh sounds against me. I was sitting in old broken tables. I was sitting in dust. I was resting and nourishing my body. On the windows danced their headlights and their bloom. In the next county over a fire had taken hold of a strip of buildings and everybody had rushed to it. All of the forces were called. I was at peace without them. The people scurried to help or just to see, to become witnesses, terrible witnesses. They slammed past in jets of air and squeals of racing beat. I went upstairs to sit in the stringy carpet fibers. I went upstairs to let my head fall against the frosty glass of the window. It was a singular window of vast open space and time. I reached into my body. It made me play the watchtower. It had opera sounds for me. It had holy hymns. It had blanket streams of memory, long forgotten memory. They called with a tapping on the wall, with a wail, in the floorboards and dish cupboards.

The beings called with flecks of bone to the mounded dirt. They set up and descended in their acute processions there. I remembered their names and their faces. They were called Samuel and they were called Martin and they were then called Thomas. They had one last task for me. They had a body for me to enter. They called him the fifth invisible creature. They said that I was to ride him to meet my friend, the one that I called Mr. Robes. They said that they would perform three healing miracles upon my body and with these would come the sounds that would call him to me and I could take him.

They came strung together by fibrous cell masses. They called it the alleyways, the hotel communion. They were getting bad, malformed by weariness. They said they had no more left for another meeting, so we were to make it count. After tonight, they would be dead. They

would be erased from me. They would be packing their bags and going, on to the next town.

Samuel came first, pulling free in oozing spurts of separation. He asked me for a robe to wear. He said retrieve the filthy robe from your shower and drape it around me and tie it tight and conceal my nakedness. It smelled of must and mildew. He wore it hanging from him. It emitted terrible scratching sounds against his strange skin. It bled wet. He said that he had shamed my wretched body. He said that he had performed. It was and that I should call the next down and release him. I permitted him to go, but asked that he leave something of his behind. I left a pocketknife on the stove, open. He passed through my home and went into oblivion.

Martin came next and he moved slowly. His cords snapped like quaking earth. It roared like cannon fire. He asked me to kneel on the firmest slab of the property. He said that I should wait there a while. He said that afterward, I could shower. He put things to my knees. He opened them with blades that I had never seen before. They poured slowly and mixed with fruit smashed into my legs. He said I would grow tired in time. He said that it would be good. He left a key ring on my back step. It was painted gold and blue and shined like crystal. It was shaped like a kidney. He went off.

The final to come for me was Thomas. He was a long row of sharpened body. He was long hours of comfort. He was private engagement. He was lost and wondering soul, in from the oceans and in from ancient, inhospitable zones. He was the noxious chemicals of the deep and the threads of holding hope. He embraced me. He had looked to come from a greater distance somehow. He moved in a way that was long traveling. He kissed me and rubbed his hands on me. His fingers worked to the tips and pulled from the liquid stores of urine and sweat. He was pulling from me the human walk, the human tradition. I was going a bit in his arms. The time would come soon. He left them in a tankard on the counter, three books of matches from three different hotels all along the same route.

A red light flashed from the telephone in front of me. I had fallen asleep at my desk. It was nearly noon. I had not been home last night. I had stayed here. The opening people of this

place knew better than to disturb me at this point. Everything was perfectly still in this office. Everything was shoved away. I had stayed last night, but I hadn't worked. The work had stopped. I was instructed to stop and hide. I should probably be running now. Where can I run? There was a plan for this, but the plan had failed me. There was one crucial death-dealing blow. There was me. The stacks I had were from my own hands. As much as I could burn them or shred them or lock them away, as much as I could run and meet with my people in the long awaited exotic locales, I could not escape one sad fact, the entity. He was right on top of me. He knew it all and he was bringing it down faster than I could have imagined. It would take a full overhaul to beat this man and even then, assuming I had the energy and the luck, I didn't know if it was enough.

The red light still flashed. Who were they trying to put through to me on line five? It must be internal. I could feel the nerves, the symptoms. I had been above those since the day I started, until now. They had me. I don't know if it is even worth resisting.

I picked up the receiver and depressed the plastic button. It was coal and waxy and beams of atomic light in the cracks of my hand. It was vibration before thought. Then, she came on. Her voice was full of throaty struggle. She was urgent and needful. She asked me if my name was Benny. I said yes. I asked her who she was and where she was calling from and for what purpose. She repeated. So, this is Benny, right? I want to talk to a guy named Benny. Is that you? I said, yeah, like I told you. I'm Benny. Now, how can I help you, ma'am? She said that we needed to meet. I asked what for. She said that it had to do with a mutual friend of ours and that it was urgent and she didn't really feel comfortable talking about it on a line like this one. I said I understood, but I wished she could give me a little bit more to go on. I said it would be helpful. She asked if I was afraid and she taunted me a bit. I said there was no need for that. I would be there. I trusted it was urgent if she said so and I would want to help if she said that was the case, especially for a friend if that part of it were true also. I had no cause to be suspicious. I could protect myself if need be anyway. I just wanted to be of the best help and information is what I felt I needed to do that. She paused for a long time. I thought I had lost

her. Then, suddenly with a mild air of disgust in her voice, she asked if I had a pen and paper handy. I said I did. She blurted out an address and I took it down. I knew the place. I said I would be there. All I needed was a time. She said nine o'clock and then swiftly hung up the phone. She was smart for being cautious about the security of the line we were holding. I feared she was not cautious enough. I went out into the hall and poked my nose around. It was pretty empty. It was lunchtime. I thought I would sneak out now, get home, and get ready. I hoped for enough time to get there. I hoped they weren't on me yet, not as much as I thought.

The seaside was long as I held onto the edge of my car window. It was blurry and desperate. I thought about her. I thought if I could meet with her just this once. If the end could just wait, I would be satisfied. If the devastation could hold itself from me for moments longer, I would accept the brutality that was coming my way. I needed this one last thing. I needed her.

I got home and it looked like someone had already been there. My clothes were pulled out all over the place, but that was about it. I expected at least as much, honestly, quite a bit more. I wonder if they got what they come for, some little piece of me perhaps. That was all it was going to take anyway. I went to the bedroom and checked my guns. I went to the bathroom and checked that the recorders were in order. Everything was blinking and rolling. I went back to my bedroom. The bed called me. I sat down on the edge. I stretched my back and I allowed myself a few moments alone with the image I had attached to her voice. I had her wrapped around me and digging her calves and bones into me. I had her pushing her muscles long and soaking me. Her hair and her eyes shrank to shadows under the enormity of her strength. She moved fast. She warmed on my stomach and collapsed when I put myself into her. She fell. She drowned. I had a terrible feeling that when I got to her, she would not be well. I looked down at my watch and panic began to rise. I had to wait. I had no choice. I was at every fucking thing's mercy. I am losing.

They were sweet children of wax and clay. The first was weathered and calm, the second was infantile and pure, and the final was fast and spirited, the maiden, mother, and crone. I miss them as they are away.

There were two of us. We decided to move on. We decided to get out of there. It was she and I. It took some convincing. At first, she did not want to go. She did not see the purpose of it. I tried to explain, but it did no good. In the end, what I had to do was lure her. I looked at her sitting there on the edge of the thin mattress. She was calm and content. She listened to me completely. She didn't struggle against my plans. She stayed calm and smiled and gripped my hand. All she did was try to get me to sit down. She tried to anchor me there with distractions. She would say calmly that she did not see the purpose of it and perhaps I should just sit and stay a while. It could be just as nice there. It seemed so strange to me. I knew she hated the place too, maybe even more than I did. I knew she felt it crushing her. So, why stay? What peace did she find in avoiding escape? It washed over her eyes and her cheeks and soft lips. I could not for the life of me understand these reactions in her. The more anxious and excited I got, the more she tried to gently feed me back into the grips of the building. She knew the little sentimental buttons to press. She knew the little pieces of this rotting place that warmed me in some unspeakable way. She tried to draw my attention to these things. She tried to put me back into it. Perhaps, I was wrong about her. Perhaps, she would not be the grand companion that I had imagined we I found the plan in my head. Perhaps, she was one of the villains. She was one of those that would torment me and keep me. She was maybe even working for the place. More likely though, she had just been worked by it so much for so long, that she was starting to emulate the process. It was my bad luck to see her in this way and to be in the proximity of its negative churning. I got to where I just nearly gave up. I asked her if she wanted anything to eat. I didn't mind going down to the cafeteria to see if I could con some food for us, a midnight snack. All she said was it isn't that late, is it? I shook my head and went out into the hall. She was right. It wasn't that late, but damn it, that is not what I meant. The warm afternoon soon was flowing through the dusty winds in huge blobs. It seemed so out of place in the cold and the snow. It was the hour of its resurgence. It never lasted long enough. It calmed me into a drowsy mood. I went out into the day room and sat in a lounge chair for a while. I had to be away from her. There was a man chewing on his fingers in the chair next to

me. He was complaining of the ache from the freeze. I told him that I thought what he was doing certainly couldn't be improving the situation, not one bit. I asked him if it hurt. He looked at me confused. He dropped his hands down into his lap as hard as he could and let out a sigh that trailed off into a squeal. His eyes bulged. He started grinding his slobbery hands into his pant legs. He was getting worked up. I tried to apologize, but it did not good. It fed into all of it. I was getting uncomfortable. I tried to get up and get away from him, but that is when he got really loud and others started to turn and look in our direction, whispering to each other. I was stuck in another situation, this time really bad and really stupid if you ask me. I thought about her. I would like to just get back to her if I could. I would like to just get back to that hopeless situation. That would be good enough for now. I couldn't take much more of this. All kinds of body fluids were bubbling from his head in his vibration tantrum. It was a mess. All I could do, it seemed, was to watch him. I pleaded with others, with my eyes, for some relief, but not a one was willing to come to my aid. They despised me. I couldn't tell if it was because of what was going on with me now, or if it was something they had carried around with them for a while and only now felt comfortable of showing. I don't think it mattered. I was fucked. His wrists were popping and cracking and his fingernails were scratching loudly against the material. I thought he was going to break right through his pant legs and into his quadriceps, and the even deeper, right into the chair, then the floor, then who knows what, whatever was underneath, all the way underneath everything. How much more could I watch? Am I supposed to be watching him? I thought I might try to look away and break the lock that he had on me, but at the slightest suggestion of it, he went wailing like a fucking maniac. I could feel the blood in his screams. I think he was hurting himself with it. It was maddening and I could see no resolution. I started to think that I was going to have to get up and just knock him out. I should just hit him once, right on the temple and put him out cold. It would be fast, I promise, and when it was over, we would be all better off, right? I couldn't bring myself to do it. There is no way out of this.

Then, she appeared. She found me. She had gotten tired of waiting. She just kind of

stood there calling me from one of the doorframes. She leaned into it. She looked magnificent. She moved magnificently and gestured in gorgeous tones and personal ones. I understood it all. She was trying to bring me back to her, to her room. I tried to explain to her with bizarre glances, that it could not be helped. I was trapped. She said nonsense, just get up and go. I tried to tell her it wasn't that simple. It was murder, this guy. I was stuck with him and he was going off. She finally lost all patience and came over there and got me. She grabbed me by the arm. She said quit fucking around and she yanked me to my feet. She turned to the abusive man and said you are going to have to please excuse us. And that was it. We were moving down the hall like none of it happened. We were headed back to her room and back to our struggle of a conversation. We held our same positions, but something in the scenario had definitely shifted. The mood was different. It was foreign and exhilarating. I felt for certain that something very exciting was about to happen with us. I waited for it the best I could.

She had gotten flirty. She put herself down on the bed like she was thinking about lying down on her back but she stopped, and crossing her legs, she leaned. Her entire waist swayed onto one side of her ass and resting on the fingers and flat of her hand. She bit her lips often. She let her midnight curls fall into her eyes whenever she pleased. She spoke erotic words and uttered labored sounds in odd contexts. She poured with sweat. She pushed her chest out with her shirt clinging in wet desperation. She fidgeted with her hands on her thighs. She feigned nervousness. She growled. I could feel the white fabric light moving on her. I could see her. She touched the crisp sheets like she was the thin stab that could pierce it. The room grew to a vibrant hush and I could hear her rubbing against herself. She was needy and firm and tight. She said why don't you come over here? She said do you want me to squeeze you? She said do you want me to feel how hard I can squeeze you, in my arms, between my legs? I am stronger than I might look. Do you want me to prove it to you? Come over here and see for yourself. I wanted to more than anything, but something stopped me. I remembered whom we were and what we were about to do. It would be necessary to get out, to get past the door, and to take her with me. We needed to be free from this if we were to have anything. This is supposed to happen

miles down the road. What is happening now is a trap. I told her I thought so. She laughed. I insisted I was being serious. She looked a bit concerned and then she laughed some more. Why couldn't she believe me? I told her I thought that something had gotten into her and transported her back. She asked me what the hell I knew about transporters. I told her that I knew enough. She got angry. I didn't like to see her angry. She would get so angry at times that she would just turn completely red and fill up with tears. I was afraid it was happening now. I was afraid I was going to lose her in it. Then, she got insulted. Now, that I didn't have time for. So, I grabbed her by the arm and I pulled her up off the bed, out of her posture and I gripped her as tight as I could with my fingers. It was burning in the end of my arm and her skin rushed at the areas of pressure. I felt horrible, but I put my face against and I whispered to her. I pleaded for her to come with me. All she said was fine and then she jerked free and went to her closet for her coat. I said is that it? All she said was yep and she pulled on the coat. There was a long dry throated pause of red sweat. Then, she said you had better grab yours too. It is cold out there. So, I did and we started to do what I had planned.

Now, there really were two of us and we had decided to move on. We were moving away from this place, plenty far enough. It was she and I and we were hatched into our plans. We were nearly in the wind.

The sky was dark and orange and pink. It was just evening. We were moving quickly in a long scene. She said come on Ambrose. Let's go. I said I'm right behind you. Her thighs rubbed together as she ran on the dull pavement and her tits jerked as she turned back into her speed. I was right behind her. I was right on top of her. We got to the car and climbed in quickly. It had been placed there for us hours before. It had been stocked with items that were personal and important. The first thing she brought up from the cluttered floorboard was her briefcase. We both knew what was inside. It was burgundy and soft and she let it slide into the back seat. In another motion, she lit up two cigarettes as I ignited the car and flicked on the headlamps. We turned into vacant traffic and followed the line out.

It was frigid when we left. It cooled our bones and made our muscles so strong, strong

enough for the run and the break. We kept going. We went through the ice and the thick air. The weather broke quickly though when we reached the limits of the area. For about an hour and an half, we lingered in a neutral zone and it was thick and heavy, then in a peaceful way, without warning, we thrown into a new climate. The air softened and then thinned out. The breeze turned lush and romantic and then came sweltering heat. We were in the dead days of summer, miles away, states away, in new bodies and clothes. Then, we realized we had reached our search. We had to find the place to lie down. We had to find the place to be together and baptize this form.

I said it would probably be best if we stopped for something to eat first and besides, I think the place we were looking for would mostly likely be in the vicinity anyway. She nodded her head in silent agreement and began toying with her watch. She had her head down in it and her face cast long shadows on her legs and deep into her hips. She was tense inside the vehicle. I could feel it coming off her. I liked it, but I kept my eyes to the road and the full view of the horizon. Banks of trees came and slammed past us. We flew, climbing deep with the heels of the automobile over tough hills and into abyss of foliage and reeds. Speckles of water were infrequent, but quick and jolting, intensely remembered and imbedded in tissue and light. Most of all, the place was dry and barren and long. There was a wet earth underneath, but she felt herself forgotten and hid, lonely.

We came to a brick wall that stretched into the pasture. It was patched in places with stones and rubble and in others, grown full with moss. The tires bulged in swollen agony. I said I thought it looked like we were coming near to a town. I wondered if this was the place. She said it felt right. I kept it going. The fields seemed to stretch in endless yellows and greens and dust. Brave and solitary were the few animals that stood like grinding statues in the flats. It seemed empty, even of insects, but something was building on a molecular level. It was becoming organized and dense and complicated. It was connecting. I said I was feeling confident. She said yes, I see it too. It is just underneath, isn't it? Do you have a name for the place, either of them? I'd like to know where I'm sleeping tonight. I grinned at her and put my hand to her knee. She

smiled under the rumbling engine. We could feel it shocking through us. There was a power growing and a bond. It was the kind of bond that breaks into the end. It was a revelation.

We pulled over one last hill into a town that was nothing more than a row of buildings and maybe three or four more springing up from their shadows behind them. They grew with ease. It was quiet and empty. We noticed it right away, not a soul walking the streets and not much light. It was midday, but no lights at all, not a single one. It was cause for notice if not concern.

We spotted the town's only diner and parked the car a few yards past it on the street between the other dusty vehicles. They were grimy and rusted. They were rooted in. They had not been moved. The sign in the window hanging said they were open for business, but all the lights were cut off, the doors locked, and not a single flicker of movement in the glare of the big glass windows. She said well, that's interesting. I said it is. What do we do now? She said skip it, I guess. I bet you can't wait to get to the next part anyway. A sly look came over her. I said I suppose you're right. She said yeah, you suppose. Let's find that room then. I said okay and we started walking, very close but not touching except our breath and sweat strands and glimpses. Our pace was quick enough and we felt our way. It was only a matter of time, time and distance and power and sound.

We broke into every building that we could get into. I remembered the first words that he interrogated into me. He said, "Tell me about your birth, you festering machine." He held his hands on top of his legs and he bulged. We kicked our way into every structure. The form and reticulum of the city pulsed along the edges of my body. It stood slightly in the depths of abrasion. We kicked against the glass panes and ground them into dust. We pushed our fists and heavy bones into resistance of mortar and rot. We were strong and boiling into frantic ways. He said turn over your gifts, Ambrose. He put me on the table. I took off my coat and hat to get down into it. I fell into the chair. It was brooding and sweating. It was fast. It was serene. I could see the maps of the city growing in tumor on my nerves and blanket flesh. I was splashed with water. He carried a heavy rusted bucket and threw it as deep as he could into

me. It cut like a storm. It was a cold night. The walls were sweating. It was happening. He was right on top of me. He was pushing down on me. He was bringing me back, tied to his hands by my throat. He was so forceful. I could see the rage in his eyes, splattered with the swimming blood of whirlpools. It was a terrible sight. We were truly locked together. I had brought myself into this situation. I was searching for what I knew was buried right down in the center of it and he guarded it tightly. He required me to mingle with him just to get close and get a touch, get a feel of it. He was messing me up. He was tidy in his stalking circles at first, but you could see in his face that it was just a matter of time before he let loose and broke from the experiment. Then, I would be at his mercy. He said that he was going to separate me. That was his plan. If that is what it takes is what I told myself, but I hoped it wouldn't go that far. That would be quite a casualty and a difficult if not impossible one for me to repair, provided I survive the ordeal. I could see it. I could predict it. I saw my body hanging there in one of his pieces of furniture. I could see it taken from me. It leaves me crawling around in the sewage streams. It leaves me lost and crawling in vile things that can sting and melt into earthy anesthesia.

He said he was going to leave me for a while to let me get acquainted with all of the pieces that he put into me. He said it was best for him if I had some time to think. He called it priming me. That guy was a real motherfucker. He knew how to twist. He knew how to break the spirit. I heard him go upstairs. A part of my eyes followed him. I was on the back of his legs. I was with his person. I felt the kitchen arrangement. He was pouring himself a drink. He was leaning in his dirty work clothes. He was shining in the moments before fury. It was not at all like before. There was nothing sloppy about him. He was fit, perfectly fit. He was set to put the drain on me. All he needed to do was to find his passion and it was right around the corner. It gave to him promises. I could see them coming up in massive skyward spires. They pierced through the sweating hairs of his abdomen. They wore themselves like death shrouds on the crown of his head. It lingered in the wet pasty teeth of his body. It shook in his electric instruments. Everything began to extend from him. He blocked out the maps. He hid the finding from me. I could hear its call growing faint. This was the feeling of complete doom. I had to

fight through it. That is what I said. That is how I pulled myself along. I said just wait the time. I told myself, when the time is over, then the change will occur and you will be poised to come back to form and take it from him.

His feet shuffled above me on the floorboards, pressed firm in friction against my ceiling joists and falling in showers of vibration on the cement slab. The perfectly designed cubes clanked in his glass. They were like music to him, starting music. He had the warmth on his breath and in the utensil shoved in his pocket. He would pull it on me the first chance he got and then he would start to cut it out. He would wait for the exact moment when he could see that my surface could be broken. He came downstairs and found me ragged and drenched and hanging in the throes of gravity. I was weak. I was really just semiconscious, but I was right on top of him too. We were both working the facts. We were both making our setups and waiting the fall. The question had become, who would fall the fastest and take it. He asked me if I needed to be restrained. I told him, if it pleased him, if it helped him on his way, then he was more than welcome to do it to me. He said okay and he turned his back on me, in such great arrogance, and went into the corner. He had his workings there. He had his preparations. It was time to start bringing them into me and placing them on me and in the room. I said go ahead and see if it could take me, the mocking words of defiance felt like thick sweet honey on me. He laughed nervously. He said that I shouldn't worry so much. He said that it rushed him and it wasn't necessary. He asked me if I thought there was any way in hell for me to get out from under this. Do you really think anyone can get here to help you? I am tempted to say go ahead and scream. It will make no difference. He said do you think you can do it on your own then? He chuckled. He was doing this a lot. I didn't know how to take it and perhaps that was his strategy anyway, to throw me off guard, and trip me up. I think, however, that maybe there is some real fear in it, shaking just behind his voice. I think maybe this a sign telling me how to get into him. I wasn't sure of it though. I wasn't sure of my instinct. Hope that can't be trusted is perhaps worse than no hope at all, far worse. This little aspect of defeat, this little flaw gnawing at my mood, it threw me into frenzy. It escalated and arrived on my prickly skin at the exact moment

that the bondage came to join me. Its surface of leather and gold hardware bit into me with gentle swipes of caress. It was temptation. It was fluid stillness. It was binding me to the furniture, to the naked chair. My skin was hard against the back of it and I stretched up into an upright position. It pushed my head out on my neck, the vertebrae rising, and I grit my teeth into him and beamed my eyes. The tank was coming. The apocalypse was pounding. They were the gurgled husk of body and location.

Her big pale tits stood like the horizon and the sun on her prominent, bone white and freckled ribcage. She said, "Where are you going, Ambrose?" I said I was going out for a smoke. I asked if she wanted to join me. She asked where exactly. I said just outside the door. I said what do you mean? She declined. She said it was too cold. She wanted to stay in bed. She wanted me to hurry back. She didn't like it that I was going. I told her again that I would be right back and I said I would leave the pack for her in case she changed her mind or, if she wanted, she could even have one in the room. I didn't care. She said we weren't allowed to do that. They will charge us a fine. I said I didn't care. I said whom exactly, who is going to be there to pass the penalty?

I grabbed the set of keys out of the little square tin that was on the entryway table and I also took one of the matchbooks. She said leave me the lighter. I hate matchbooks. I opened the door and shut it. It was tight and difficult with rust. Outside, I breathed in the cold air and took my first few steps. My coat was thin. It was way too thin. I made up my mind to hurry. I could never smoke just a half a cigarette like some, but I could finish one quickly when I had to. All the time I am rushing, in any instance, a panic automatically sets in, whether it is deserved or not. I feared for her and I wasn't exactly sure why. I had an idea that someone was coming for her. I didn't want to know what it meant. I just wanted to get back.

So, that is what I did. I hurried back. I imagined she was sleeping soundly in the dark, the shadows stretching on her and on the sheets and the furniture. The balls of light were anxious in rest. My footsteps were multiplying. I thought I heard someone on my back. I pulled off my hat at the door to get a full look of the place, of the outside. It produced nothing and I swung in

around the door and placed it on the hook. I dropped the keys and the matchbook back into the tin on the table. I looked at her. She was peaceful and calm. She was restful, but her eyes were wide. She started talking to me. I couldn't focus on the words. I couldn't get so close. I took off my coat and scarf and put them on the hook then too and I stretched my neck and stretched my eyes wider. The weariness pulled back. It was purple weariness. It had no relief, silly little tricks our bodies play. My shoes were thin and quiet as I walked to the edge of the body and sat down next to her. Her body curved and rubbed in the sound of its perfect shape. She was an enormous triumph, a figure, a history and pulse.

She put her soft hand into the valley of my back and her fingers started to swim and drum. She said take off your shirt. Get close to me. My shoulders relaxed. My head sank into drowsy illumination. The globes of light were lit. The square cuts in the universe were shifting. My legs felt the heat, right in the biggest muscles. I remembered the wood plateaus of force. I remembered the spring of '86. I took everything out of my pockets and placed it on the nightstand. It rattled in my hands and pulled on invisible strands as it fell. She was next to me. She was the great preparation, the bathing pool.

From us, the beasts of the land will be born and the final entity. I will place the byproduct in the bucket and make the offering with his slender hand in mine.

I pull off my gloves and begin unbuttoning my shirt with my peeling skin, ripping out my cufflinks, ripping out my necktie and my belt. I can feel her working behind me. It rocks the bed. She is pulling sheer fabric over her body. It stretches around the curves and makes her. She is a wondrous form. She is heaving and rushed to me. Her thighs are full. Her hair is a ring like a monk and a gleaming plate of the grinding earth. I touch her rough pink skin with my lips and she moans. She bounces underneath me, pushing her ass into the surface and spreading it to sensitivity. She takes me, meeting me faster and harder. She pulls me down into her until I reach the deepest walls of her body. She says she can't take it anymore. She is pushing it onto her. I feel a wave of her. I break into her with my head and my hands. They are gripped like hard eternity. She quivers and goes limp falling into repetitive waves. She washes me.

Rising up, I push her legs back and spread her open. She reaches into herself right next to me and, exhausted, she urges me with her tired breath. Her hand feeds onto me and moves me out into the air, gripping and pulling and she guides me onto the stubble of her milky stomach. I fall into the dull gray moments of her body with my eyes fixed on my cock and where it leads. I fall into her stomach with wet cables. She is the orange and pink glow of milky flesh on top of me. She is horizon. We fall into arms. I push my lips into her sweating neck. I curl her up beside me. The street traffic is visible. The neighbors are visible and audible. The world is open. The chain reaction begins and it will drown the population in a hiss.

In the bubbling temple, the final visitor is born. We will have one last conversation. He will assist. He will be the push to one last kill. The turmoil is set. We are painfully on schedule.

He says, "Benny, you want to have one last cigarette before the proceedings begin?" Benny says no. They go in through the swinging gates of wood pillars and past marble statues and books of fabric paper and fabric ink. They take their seats in the screeching, rocking wood, so heavily varnished. Benny says the world is like tar. He is hushed. They said it doesn't make a good case. Benny puts his sweating head down in his hands and surrenders. His bones feel hard and scorched. They are the only things he can feel. Lights turn to candlewicks. Everything turns to distance.

Cloth grinds on teeth in the final arrangement. It is a sprint. It is spacious rugs sprawling on the wet concrete floors of the palace. It is a rubbing sound and a sinister whisper. The being has come with me. He is shaped in the flickering freeze of my longtime companion, but he is not the exact identity. He is come with a different brutality that he carries at my request. He is dedicated to me.

It has been the harshest season. I can see the stretching property along the insides walls of the home. They have soaked through in bleeding lines and battalions. The flowers, the population, have made deep wells underground. We are in the lower home of history. We are in chambers. We are in tanks. His body is a veil atop me. I look up with eyes set in grace and gold at his sprawling structure of magnificence. He is long and slender and painted in the

Writing Raw

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coldest shades. His veins run as hot tubes of pink light. He is pouring. His skull is elongated. He is deep plaster bone and excavation. His eyes are flowing blossoms singing long days on the wind. His shoulder and collarbones hold me in the classic withered infantile stance. He is moved along piercing feet and plucking, groping hands. His whispers keep me in the instant. I am soothed.

He binds me to the chair and opens me. He takes something to his face, a utensil in his hand. He spews mighty winds of blood onto my cheeks. He asks me if I am ready to have him. I look to my companion. It cannot handle the look. It cannot watch me in this way. It hurts him so. Then it begins, every moment in nausea pushing into sleep. It pulls me into its cresting chest in a final gesture. I surrender into it and the speed of sound releases me into him. In the warm vast ocean of buildings, I rest and the pulp is left to linger in shallow breaths and meaty embraces.

A car pulls up the driveway, coughing in the cold, black puffs of moist exhaust. The engine seizes just as it slides into position. A man emerges from the driver's door. He is dressed in mourning clothes. They look familiar. The gravel is noisy under his broken dress shoes. He walks stiffly through the gate and up the walkway with a cardboard box under his arm. He pauses and surveys the land, the ragged land and the bubble of water. Then, he continues to the steps where he comes to rest upon losing his might. He is buried in his own arms. He is too weak to collect. It is moving in the schedule, shining beings, and all of it.

The End

Brandon S. Hursell bio: Brandon Hursell was born in Northwest Indiana on February 6, 1982. He has worked there as an unknown poet and painter since the age of 19. He now lives in his home with his wife, Zuzanna Nguyen, and their menagerie of animals. He continues to work and make use of various techniques such as sensory deprivation, meditation, distance viewing, telepathic communication, etc., in order to analyze and report.