Homunculous| And other stories

Benjamin Bloch

The University of Montana

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Homunculous and Other Stories

by

Benjamin Bloch

B.A. Amherst College, 1995

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts—Creative Writing

The University of Montana

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Approved by:

Chairperson

Dean, Graduate School

Date
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Notes on what Exactly a Homunculous Is

**Homunculous**—(*historical, mythological*) a little man, or a miniature adult that in theory of preformation is held to inhabit a germ cell and to produce a mature individual merely by an increase in size.

**The alchemist Paracelsus once proposed that he had created a false human being through his science. Called a homunculus, this creature stood no more than 12 inches tall and does the work usually associated with a golem. However, after a short time, the homunculus was known to turn on it's creator and run away. The recipe consisted of a bag of bones, sperm, skin fragments and hair from any animal you wanted it to be a hybrid of. This was to be laid in the ground surrounded by horse manure for forty days, at which point the embryo would form. This supposed beast relied upon the theories of spontaneous generation.

**The homunculous is addressing the concept of thoughts as things, or more precisely the tendency of thoughts and feelings to cohere into patterns of attitude and behavior....how mere flesh can give rise to our most deliberate and considered actions.

**(Scientific, biological, psychological) Within the somatosensory cortex is a representation of the human body called the homunculus or “little man.” Neurons in this location can identify the area of the body being stimulated by the information they receive from the somatic receptors in the skin.
A particular body region is represented on the cortex with an area that is proportional to the density of touch receptors in the body part, not by it's actual size. Since your right index finger is very dense with touch receptors, it takes up a lot of cortex compared to, say, your arm.

**infant born with adult intelligence.

(Alchemical)

***To make a homunculus you need certain spagyric substances that should be kept in a glass phial and afterwards placed to digest in horse dung for the space of forty days. At this time there will appear something to be living in the bottle. This is a man who has no body and is transparent. He must be fes with the arcanum of human blood.

***Also means—little man, operator of the will.

**Some Terms**

**Crivmatic Material.**

**Cryptosporidium**—grows in water. Makes the healthy sick, the sick healthy (well, sometimes, depending on the fabric of the heart).

*Cryptosporidium*, children are being taught, is not Crivom but an offshoot, a weakened form of it. A dilute mutation. Often mistaken for crivom, it is similar to fool’s gold in this way. Glass too.

**Metagenesis**—pronounced meta-genesis—is a common alternate process of formation of genetic material. This covers, occurs, broadcasts, speculates—in the broadest senses—the wide airy terrain of supra, this shitty little gray junkyard I call home.
The Early Days

Waking one afternoon in my chambers I find my abdominal regions on fire. Needles piercing, rocks clanking, salysissic burning, like as if someone were sanding and grinding me down from the inside of the guts. The pain was so intense that the walls turned florescent and I saw bright blue south American poison dart frogs jumping to and fro across the room.

"I need to go," I say to Claudel, "It’s really serious." But it’s four o’clock and Claudel is fixed up on the Montel Williams show. He pays no attention. He eats popcorn and sits on the couch in unbelted trousers.

"Ah, go ahead, let it loose, he says, "I’m watching Montel. I’ll change you later, Berm."

Claudel never misses an episode of Montel, and often watches repeats. Normally I’m able to enjoy the Montel Williams show as well, but not in such a state of discomfort. I try to focus on something pleasant. Cool mountain meadow streams and soft white bunny hair, but Montel’s voice intrudes.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he says, pointing towards a panel of multicultural men and women (with angry spouses) who have gambled away their family savings. "These are respectable people who have led hard lives. They’ve made mistakes, sure, but for the most part they’ve succeeded against all odds."

The pain in my guts will not cease. I can’t focus it away with the Television on like this. Leaded sand sizzles on foil, yucca bark pulls hair from the skin, and the scent of burnt rubber, methyalade, and flayed cod hangs in the air.
“Please,” I say to Claudel. “Please,” I need some help. Give me something. I can wait for a commercial.” But he just shooshes me down.

Montel says, “What more I can say, folks, I don’t know? Is it not possible to find some empathy for these people who, having overcome so much already, make some minor deals with the devil....I mean, what bad is bad? ladies and gentlemen, and how bad is this? because it’s not like we’re talking about murder here.” The TV screen shows pictures of the places where all the other money was lost. John Ascuaga’s Nugget, Caesar’s, Harrah’s, the Bellagio, Cactus Jack’s.

“Look,” says one of the panel. “I have a job. I happen to do a job and do it well and get paid accordingly. I’m a father. I’m a hell of a father, AND...it just so happens I have a li’l gamerplayer in me too. You know? I don’t think it can’t be helped.”

“Ah—bleep—you—hog headed bleep,” his wife retorts. “I’ve been packing dog food in his sandwiches for months, Montel. That’s right, you filthy pathetic bleep. — Bleep—Alpo down your—bleep—throat. Can you smell this—bleep—up here? He’s—bleep—up the air on the stage with his nasty—bleep—dog food squirting—bleep—”

“You what?” exclaims the husband

“You heard me, dog food eatin’—bleep—“

“Ohhhh no...Ohh no,” says the husband. “Ah uhn. Montel, you don’t want to see a little fool like myself get physical, do you?

“Now calm down now,” says Montel, “you aren’t the first to be eating dog food, my man.”

At this point the whole length of my innards was completely on fire. I could feel the saliva heat up in my mouth. Gurgle and mend the lip tissue. There is the contractual sensation and also the contractional, the inner tissue so fragile you could press it with the resting weight of the back of a plastic spoon and cause spondochondritis. It felt like my colon was being fileted. “I think I’m dying,” I say to Claudel. “I’m going to pass out. I can’t breathe. You’ll have to bury me.”

“Sit down and keep still now until this is over. You aren’t dying any more than I am,” says Claudel, taking a sip off his Dr. Pepper.
For a few brief moments after this I made an attempt to get into mental exercises like transcendental meditation and zen prayer. I chanted some words I’d read on a spiritual website that were supposed to alleviate the body’s pain. PWONANG. GANANG. SRANGIN. Semi-Asian sounding words. G-words. And again. POW-WINGH. GAN-ANG. SRAN-GIN. But that didn’t do it for me. Whatever was making it’s way through my relatively fresh guts was not at all what I expected. I cried and cried, wailed and wailed, until the pain reached a pinnacle and crossed the threshold when everything just clicks off, fades away, and the skin melts down on the bones. Something in me had forced its way out, and finally, with a hot gasp of sweet relief, I passed out prone in my crib.

crvmatic material.
crivomatesis.
crivii.
crivulum

Esbuledium
esbulum.
esbilitic
esbomil

Esbulesis—Claudel gave me two esbulii once in the form of saw dust. Gave me the empty vessels too and I filled them when the time was right, but I waited awhile. I carried them around in case of emergencies. At that time my diaper rash scars and the subsequent gbdicules had completely disappeared, but I was still unpredictable. I sometimes woke up in
the back of ambulances, gratefully discombobulated. For two or three weeks I carried around the esbulli with the two vessels and a little blessing from Claudel. My instructions were to read the blessing first, and if that didn’t help then I figured it was right for me to release the espulli. I was at an art show in Mexico City when it happened, looking at paintings by some artist who painted trainloads of bananas. The works were infuriatingly awful. They said nothing people couldn’t read about in the news. They weren’t even technically proficient, which wouldn’t mean much anyway.

I took out a knife and slashed one of them. I spit on another and peed on another. I was foaming at the mouth and several guards grabbed me but I threw them to the ground and said: “Do you know the strength of will you’re dealing with? You’re right you should be frightened. And...you should all start going to church!”

I threw my knife into the wall. I stripped the guards of their guns before they could even get unholstered. They ran off and I read the blessing.

When the voices of children are heard on the green,  
And laughing is heard on the hill,  
My heart is at rest within my breast,  
And everything else is still.

It was a hypnotic piece, I have to admit—a simple stanza of a poem written by a. I belched a nacho up onto the floor and released the espulli into the air, causing rapid espulesis which smells, oddly enough, like Lilac. A hundred thousand people died in a one mile radius. ...and 81 thousand in the same radius were saved from dying some other way. When everything shut down I went and had several boast beef sandwiches—still warm—at an abandoned Hardee’s in the heart of Mexico City. The muzak player was still going with a saxophone version of a Michael McDonald song. I forget the title, but it was certainly a catchy song, even the muzaked version.

sbio  
sbiatic  
sbiotote  
ibsidulum  
ombulii
Chebdriosotic material. So rare, so uniquely scented. Claudel found you in some blue artic ice once and I begged him, literally begged him (offered him a husk-hole), to tell me where exactly. He said he was lucky to have made it back alive, because the sight of chebdriosotic material so excited him that his weak heart did in fact stop. It stopped right there in the ice...and the sound of the air whitened, and he felt the back of his hand against the frost before it went numb.

Desibulum  Desibulii  Desibdum

Desibulus—a violent growth—spreading with graceful quickness.
Envelopes hosts with a plastic love. Suffocates the mind. Makes hosts beg for their life in their mind. Reads the mind. Judges the mind. Senses purity and a willingness not to harm.

Ebdullial  Ebdumatesis

Foam
Foam flowed from the walls, green moss spread by the second, birds flew in interiors, you could feel axiomatic kickback, abiogenesis, one living thing descending from another, finning in the foam, massing, softening then hardening then cracking then shattering. It gave me a nun’s orgasm. Five hundred years and then, afterwards, five minutes to impart the same erosive material evidence. All of it set to a chorus of sinister elephant wails in the background like you might have imagined dinosaurs sounding in their time, high pitched trumpet shots bouncing off the trees and vines. Coyotes mated everywhere, biting each other on the back, the spirit of their incessant survival apparent with litters produced at such an accelerated rate you could watch the female belly swell up and laborate in just five or ten minutes. Light blood trickled down the sides of the walls of this unique 50,000 square foot septagonal room, and by the time it hit the plexi-baseboards it had changed completely to fresh, sparkling, cold jewel-like water, and was being lapped by poodles, prairie dogs, pythons, piranas, pelicans, ponies and pigs. I saw this, I say to Claudel. Don’t doubt me.

Rhimbium
rhillum
erhilytric material
erhilesis

Childhood Fear. Crivmatic material appeared at Balthazarius Middle school in Compton, Illinois. A cafeteria worker found it growing out of a suspiciously-packaged mini-carton of chocolate milk, and several of the school kids found crivmatic material in their
milk—from that same batch—later that day at lunch. Children who found crivom this way suddenly found themselves in possession of a valuable material. Everyone wanted it. The boys wanted to roll dice for it, the girls wanted to wear the stuff on necklaces and designer underwear. The FBI was called in to investigate, and bureau workers confiscated six pieces of crivmatic material from the children, many of whom cried when the suited men arrived. I have to say I had a laugh at the scene. It was an exceptionally good opportunity for me to make one of my movies that I’ve had so much success distributing on pay-per-view in the *supra*. What I mean is that it was exciting to see how upset the children became when they couldn’t understand how or why fictional characters changed into real life. I was therefore—quite matter-of-factly—making movies of the expressions on their faces as they wept and cried in fear and confusion. It wasn’t an act that mothers would praise me for, but I promise you there are some who—if only for objective purposes of analysis—will find the footage stimulating. The look of innocent fear on the doe-like faces of children is a valued commodity for more people than you’d think. (I’ve got a group of women with pension funds at the WhiteWoods rest home just dying to get their hands on some new footage.) And a little crivmatic material as set-up never hurt. So undeniably honest is the look of the lambs... it tickles the numbest. The nummies. People whose flesh is dead from age or stress, whose faces have fallen and whose eyes take on the look of crows. People who shoot nailguns through their flaccid cocks or hang from the ceiling by their clitorises or by hooks inserted into their backflesh. Lovers who—for the sake of one last orgasm—will take bites of flesh out of each other and later drop one another off at the emergency room (on the curb of the emergency room, at least) for treatment. They, them, those others and I...probably you too—once again—want the extremeties of tenderness, the hyper-sensitive antennae of a child’s nervous sight. Brand new sparklingly clear trepidation, perfectly conveyed.

At Balthazarius Elementary school I made this movie. It is currently on a number of top ten lists.

*Dazzlingly Real!* said the *Chicago Sun Times*.

*Stunningly Poignant!* said the *Cincinnati Tribune*.

*Non-stop rush. Shocking to the core of the brain!* said the *Denver Post*. 
Then there was the reviewer from the Salt Lake City Eagle, who wrote my favorite review:

So moved was the spirit that it floated up out of my body and I withered like an aged unearthed carrot in the sun, right there in my seat. I was more than happy to get out of the theatre and into the outside air afterwards. I must say, the experience—gut twisting though it may have been—stayed with me strongly! I couldn't get it out of my mind no matter how I tried— for over three months, but thereafter I lived happily off of feelings of relief.

jhuresis
jhurbium
jhuratic material
ijhierarchicalism
ijhivriatic
ijhillum

Diamatite Crystal Substrates Cut Whole Glaciers And Ancient Ice Worms Shiver In Their Hundred Year Holds.

There is the growing sound of separation, rhythm like a black frothing diesel motor. Godly exhalations. Preternatural wind. Humid earth rumbled, roiled and wretched. Serpents shot up from mud cracks like perfect ancient ribbons, determining the colors of all the future South American flags. Venom became a blessing and a cure, and each salt wave turned a new layer of clams. Everything proved itself fated. The harmony of organisms revealed results pertaining directly and inversely to a wide variety of circumstances.

Recently the meadow bulls succumbed, and on that holy day the leaves became auto-fertile and produced a maple seed from nothing other than the long dead, excessively dry guts of a flattened armadillo. Shit, I say, on the leaves, in the air, dirt, rocks, in your sock drawers and in the rain and rivers, fertilize the coils of your
refridgerator, drink the week old petri dish poisons, the bedroom spit, jail cell piss, casino milk, nursing home melanomas, back alley sperm from Hong Kong.

Echoes pound every earthly beach,
through the belly of an ancient scarred walrus with aluminum tusks
who has recently raped a coven of elephant seals
and to whom nature delivered no justice.

A Story Involving Brylic Material

Claudel gave me a vile of brylic material to sniff off of during a trip to Hong Kong. I was riding the Yangstze river there. A filthy, dirty river full of gum scrap and duck shit, but horribly beautiful despite. There is nothing, and I mean nothing, like the sunsetted silhouette of a merchant with one of those wide straw hats that looks like an upside down wok in a smoky pink sky. And when I wasn’t watching one of these humble men, I’d sometimes just watch the ripples in the Yangstze, so different did they seem from other ripples I’d seen on other rivers in the world. The Yangstze light—as it fluttered over the gentle waves—satiated my aesthetic appetite entirely, and the brylic material stayed nicely put in it’s vile for quite some time. I had no need for it for months, I’d say.

I made friends in Hong Kong with a boy all the old men called the river-boy. There were lots of river boys, actually (river-girls too) but I guess he was the fastest, and everyone around him took a lot of pride in his being the best at what he did. The old men bet on him every time he ran a boatless errand, and if the river-boy set a new record time they would all celebrate with some golden won tons and Peking Cod. Boatless errands were a kind of spectator sport in this way. Someone would send one of the children off across the river with a package of premium rice or a business letter in a zip lock baggie, and the child would strip down to their shorts and swim across the river with the materials in their delivery-hole. People discussed the children in terms of their various
styles of delivery. It was not an easy business to compete in, as some children each month were decapitated by drunk boatmen with pre-regulation boat motors. The river-children had to learn to swim like otters, and believe me, they could. It was quite a thing to watch them bob and duck and swerve through the heavy boat traffic.

The river boy was not only good at what he did, he was an excellent artist. The name that he signed his art by was Twung, which means—in rough translation—“the bullet” He was a thin boy, sleek and well shaped with a charming way about him. He moved with grace, kept relatively quiet, wore his smile well beneath deep black eyes. I used to buy him hot tea and squid at the Xiao Bing, and in exchange he’d give me a few of his inked pictures on rice paper.

I catch him one day on his way home from a running a boatless errand at rush hour. His hair is still wet, he’s trying to knock the water out of his ears in a dark, empty alley.

“Whatup Twung,” I say, my gold I.D. bracelets chiming in the wind.

“Fine fine,” says Twung. “A man made me an offer today.”

“Offered what?”

“He said if I can set the time to beat for a boatless errand beneath the Nung bridge tomorrow he’d buy me a small house in the north.”

“Huh?” I said. “Why is it that anyone would ask you to run a boatless errand right directly beneath a walking bridge? And that’s the widest part of the Yangstze, everybody knows that. You’d could drift all the way to Teiping by the time you get to the other side.”

“The international ski-doo competition and sales promotion event are happening there tomorrow,” says Twung. Ski-doo makers from around the world are showing off new models. They’re going to have riders zipping all up and down and across and everywhere on the Yangstze. Besides, Berm, you know boatless erranding is a betting sport. It’s for the bets. No one’s ever swam across the Yangstze in this spot under such unusual conditions.”

“And you think you can do it?”

“Yes, I think, with enough swimming beneath the surface. I believe so. This is too good an opportunity to pass up, and I’ll take the risk.”
I decided then not to try and persuade him otherwise. But the situation did alarm me to the point of distraction, and I found myself fingering the brylic material in my pocket as Twung departed.

I went to the Nung bridge the following day at the designated hour. It was the largest crowd I’d ever seen. Money was flying everywhere. People had grips full of Yuan, shouting and laughing and arguing over Twung’s unknown fate.

I didn’t see him, but it was clear that he was somewhere in the vicinity gathering his thoughts.

I paid a hundred yen to a merchant and took my rented seat by the river. One after the other people came over to me waving their money and asking which way I wanted to bet—Twung lives or Twung dies—and I had to shoo them all away. On the river surface there had to be at least a hundred brightly painted speeding ski-doos, revving it up, leaping off small waves, riders all whooping and doing no hands tricks, front and back flips, nose dives, fish tails. I was amazed none of them had killed each other yet.

Finally Twung appeared by the edge of the river. The crowd grew silent as he put his feet in the water and packed a parcel into his delivery hole. Everyone expected him to take a pause before he dove but he didn’t, just put the rest of himself into the Yangstze after his feet and took off.

For awhile you couldn’t see him as he traveled under water, but he emerged about forty yards out in the middle of heavy ski-doo traffic. He bobbed, weaved, and safely caught his breath for another dive, with which he traveled another forty yards or so.

He had almost made it to the other side when he popped up again and a bright red ski-doo skidded by and appeared to clip him just slightly as he was going down. There was a huge collective gasp. Somebody said they could see blood growing in the water, and my heart stopped inside my ribs.

But then we all saw him climb out of the water on the other side. Indeed, he was injured. His neck and back were red with wet blood and he was holding his head at the top and bottom.

I pulled the vial of brylic material from my satchel and ran across the Nung bridge as fast as my short plump legs could carry me.
I reached Twung on the the opposite side. He was sitting on the bank, nearly unconscious, bleeding rapidly. The ski-doo propellor had scooped out a solid portion of the muscles in his upper back. It was a traumatic site.

“Twung,” I said, putting my hand in his. “You made it, your done, a house in the north.”

He moaned. “This is it,” he said. “This is it,” as he started to crumple.

I opened the vial of brylic material and let it fall down gently over his wounds. His flesh sizzled from the reaction, and it let off scents of sulfur, eucalyptus and burning moth balls. People on both banks began choking and coughing, running from the fumes. A number of children passed out from the potency of it, and others became mad from confusion in the newborn smoke. The water in the Yangstze went bright yellow for a moment, and the air was silent with the workings of a miracle.

When Twung opened his eyes he was alone and the flesh on his back was healed. With the release of the brylic material, poof, I was gone, transported from that place forever.

It happened later that all of the fish caught for miles up and down river from the Nung bridge grew two bodies from the base of one head. But even in this seemingly debilating condition, the fish grew larger and more voracious than any others previous. It is much easier for creatures with two bodies to thrive than it is for creatures with two heads, two minds. It was a startling phenomenon that brought scientists and mystics alike to study the effects of what the media called “an alien spore of unknown origin, capable—now that it’s existence was proven—of reappearing in any given place at any given moment.”
Absurd Conditions

Hot earth oil spouts a black geyser left of the asphalt, flooding the lanes. Absurd conditions. Hailstorms and no clouds. Lightning in the clear sky. Where is the source, I ask Claudel? How do you explain this? How is this possible? It snowed at the height of summer and the branches broke from the unexpected, unnatural white weight. Not one tree but every tree, broken from the result of a mathematical formula off course and awry. Clams thrived out of water. Elk took to swimming and grew webby legs. I spotted a small milk snake swallowing a domesticated St. Bernard and watched a possum eat a TGIF dinner salad with silverware and napkin. I was beaten by an angry walrus, cheek-slashed by a kangaroo, rhino-raped, hog slammed. The animals sniffed me out wherever I went and all of them, even the rabbits, had their way with me. Of course there was nothing I could do for or against them. Against the authenticity of their wild spirits I’m helpless. I wither. Moose chew my scrotum. Gila monsters lick urine from the tip of my penis. Armadillos bite me for magnesium.

Attack On The Baldecchino

I was taking a tour of Rome. I had some free time (When do I not?). I wanted to take in the Baroque monuments for their splendor. They’re absolutely outrageous! Bernini, Borromini, Maderno, Borromeo, Vignola. I had just recently made the transition from diapers to underwear, and my testicles were shrinking from the rapid burn of my life. Supposedly no
humonculii have lived past their tenth year, so I’m forced to think of myself as aging similarly to a dog. Actually, worse than a dog. In any case, I was standing under the Baldecchino in St. Peter’s cathedral, where for hundreds of years the world’s top priests do their transubstantiations, sucking down the Eucharist like jello shots. It is a phenomenal thing (I can’t believe it’s actual) rising up towards the four story dome in black iron with gold trim. Six years it took to realize. My knees shook. The skin on the back of my thumbs—which I still sucked—peeled painfully off. My metabolism doubled. Bernini had lived to be eighty-two years old, that bastard.

Standing transfixed I let go of a load of pee and it ran down my leg, soaking into my long underwear and socks, staining my new Allen Iverson baby shoes and finally making a glassy pool on the marble. Subdural cross-sections of my brain sent nerves to my eyes that welled me up with joyful water. Extravagant! was all I could think. Marvelous! Take me across the threshold! I felt I might vomit from the intensity. But instead of throwing up, I pulled out a hammer I had been carrying around with me in the city for protection, and BAM!, take that! Whacked off a big chunk of iron from one of the colossal Baldechino columns with the electronic claw. The cathedral rang with the screams and yelps of tourists, and these sounds echoed off the multiplicity of golden domes above. People ran. Of course they ran. I yelped like a hyena. A man in religious garb finally walked calmly towards me with his hands out in a gesture of peace, and I told him gently to “Let me be! Or get the hammer!” Then I gave the Baldechino one more solid crack so that another clump of black iron took flight. Black iron took flight! Two whacks was enough, then. I no longer felt nauseous or that my own skin might dissolve from the sight. It was a good bite I’d taken. I drew my nylon Adidas windbreaker over my head and casually walked out, de-arming one geriatric guard who was brave enough to try and arrest me by himself. I prodded his chest and may have cracked one of his rib-holes, but he’ll live.

**New Hole List.**

horn-hole   lobster--hole   monk-hole   chime-hole
Case-hole   fridge-hole   Disk-hole   Speaker-hole   Base-hole
Recommended Daily Homunculous Intake—Diet Devised by Claudel Hodge:

4 B-1 bomber (formulated by Claudel’s friend Dr. Walker, a fellow supervisor) as advertised on Art Bell (150 milligrams each). 2 HGH (Human Growth Hormone), also as advertised on Art Bell (500 milligrams each). 2 poached eggs with white pepper and basil. 1 Ginkgo (160 milligrams). 2 Pain-Aid packets—2 tablets per packet (ingredients=acetaminophen, caffeine, aspirin) for head pain. One box Junior Mints. Amantadine (twice daily for flu prevention). Cranberry capsules to prevent bladder infection. 2 Calcium. Powdered Broccoli and Garlic capsules. 2 Zinc for white tissues. 2 Magnesium for sinew tears. —.35 grams cat’s claw thistle for higher plasma output. 3 Milkweed thistle tablets for rapid diaper rash recovery. 1 bottle german Underberg (stomach settler). Lysine for lipskin elasticity. .25 Ounce Glucosamine cream with high grade emu oil, bromellin extract, and pregnanalone from South American Yams. 1 capsule chondroitin for joint flexibility. Pumpkin seed oil for clean pores. 1 capsule powdered pineapple. 1 Oriental cup-a-soup or low salt ramen. 3 sheets matzah. 3 capsules powdered asparagus ($50 for a bottle of 20). One Hydrocodone (Lortab 5) for lower back pain. Atavan and/or flexeril for supposedly sound sleep. Upon waking, one Sobe Adrenaline Rush (Ingredients=68 grams of sugar, taurine, caffeine, inositol, Ginkgo, Echinacea, Xanang Ginseng, more Vitamin B-6). Dried kelp for anal fissures.
Saw Palmetto for prostate health. .25 grams high grade white widow herb (4-8 beers. 2-3 wines. 2-3 mixed cocktails. 1 order St. Louis style BBQed ribs. 1 package Certs.

Ithvillum
Ithviliosis
Ithsillum
Ithsim-esis
Ithbillatic material.

**A Day In The Desert**

The desert winds were so strong that the only thing you could have called it was devil’s breath. No one could see two yards for the sand. You couldn’t see the hood of your car if your were driving. Food stands were overturned, and hot dogs, pretzels, and Snapples flew across the air threatening to injure the exposed. Parked cars were turned over and their mechanical undersides filled with airborne sand. People were temporarily blinded by the vicious grains which in these conditions were nothing short of shards. I sat in my clear anchored chamber and watched the turmoil unfold. I lit a cigarette, washed my hands with Perrier, combed my hair, and put on an old Nat King Cole record.

eeephligma eephligminium eephligmidial eephligosis eephligmatic material
eephligulum eephligulus eephliglicular eephligliculum eephligesis eephligone

Oblelesis
oblelium
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yovium
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yovendum

Metagenii. phreenk ombdiliail
Metagenae. nmesiotic ibsidical
Itch and flinch. There. There. And there too. Flinch and itch from the heat generating lightless vacuum. Helpless and wriggling, me, with a mind alert and instantly full as the sea!

Paper geraniums (scented)—in plexiglass water boxes—line my room-hole, and splattered about the place are flourescents in red, orange, yellow, purple—in a variety of shades and patterns. These marks, I understand, are from the mucal skin residue of bright blue South American poison dart frogs, injected in the name of potency, heated as anti-lethargy serum, chilled, tin-wrapped, shredded, capsulized for insertion into a multitude of holes.

I find that I have no will to sleep hence, and am forced too often to slumber by means either of flexeril or the sounds of distant breaking glass, or both. Like all people I am made drowsy by the hypnotic effects of an ass rub and a story. Last night Claudel read me two recent editions of the National Enquirer. There were detailed descriptions of Alec Baldwin beating ex-wife Kim Basinger, Britney spears losing virginity to a gun-toting cohort of Puffy Combs, Cher has a new cybersex port with genital electrodes built into a bathroom bidet, a dog named Reuben sleeps each night with a fifty year old alligator called named Allison off the Florida Keys, Brad Pitt’s penis enlargement, J-Lo’s hemmorhoids delayed the making of her last video, Be Polite.

None of this is a long-term problem, Claudel says. My sleep, that is. He’s developing some combo capsules of hog hoof gelatin extract fused at the cellular levelswith Melatonin. Should work like a knock-out, he says with a light spank.

You what?” exclaims the nurse.

“You heard me, dog food eatin’ —bleep—”

Ohhhh no...Ohh no. ah uhn. Montel, you don’t want to see a little old midget like myself get physical, do you? I might have to clip somebody in the head.”

“Now calm down now,” says Montel, “you aren’t the first to be eating dog food, my man.”

Claudel is what in the supra is called a supervisor—not quite a parent, not friend, not a lover, not confidant—but supervisor. I suppose you could say he supervises me,
which of course makes me very angry at times. Obviously, I am compelled to shit my pants on occasion to spite him, but he cleans me up with a cool head and throws me back in my room where I polish off huge plates of matzah, aparagus and potatoes with ebdil salts (in addition to a whole host of supplements). Ebdil salts, it has been said, cause a brain to develop in a certain way. The memory area of the brainflesh develops two to three times the vesicular pathways. A little like Ginkgo leaf but more manifest, certainly more permanent. So, supposedly, that’s me. How do I know if it’s true? I don’t. At peak weeks I could remember all seven digits, no matter what lady I might have got them from. And, you know, it’s a very strange thing when full grown adult women lust after you before you can even walk or change your own diaper. I already have a list a hundred pages long of women who want my sperm when I have some. Claudel says the doctor thinks I may have sperm as early as next year, but other supervisors doubt that. Already I am beginning to lose some acuity as I can only remember six out of the seven digits of a phone number for at least two months before it’s gone. I used to never write down women’s numbers. I had a list of hundreds of them perfectly stored. But that’s going from me at just one year. Claudel says they are going to discover ways soon to slow down the hot burning growth of humonculii (we live too hard), and that my sperm will be worth a fortune then.

Metagenii. phreenk ombdiliai
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Metagenicular

**Crivmatic Material**-- It appeared, and you, colleague, must accept this. There were no available references. It literally popped up in a frozen diaper. No one could say where it came from or what it was for, but people had an intuitive sense that this was true because they could see it. There intuitions were ruffled, and it only took a few days to embed crivmatic material into the conscious mind of the nation. Many publications decried or debased it. But no one could deny it. Enquirer and Star, People and US, then finally Koppel, Brokaw, Rather, Letterman, O’brien, Leno and all the rest of the believable sources so every Scotty and Joey and his mother began nodding their heads and admitted that crivmatic material had indeed been found and was actual. People made a lot of
jokes, as they will do when they are unsettled. Did you know, for instance, that upon hearing the news of a death, many people, for lack of what to say, will laugh. What do you get if you mix Crvmatic Material with Donatello Versace? was a joke that went out all over the internet. Did you hear how Osama Bin Laden harnessed crvmatic material on a camel? Fear breeds humor, ladies and gentlemen. I was knowing that my first free moment, straight out the pipe. Unpredictable. I come from chaos. Esbuedium thrush. esbulum.

Esbullum esbulessis esbilitic esbuludium esbulum.
espulum.                         esbomil       esbulimium

ibsidulesis
ibsivum***                          ibsilular
ibsimium
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ebdullial
Doctors

I sent a note to this one doctor, doctor Burell, after he prescribed me chromium thorazine for psoriasis, which I put that on and got Chaucerian warts, boils, and pee burns. "Dear Doctor." writ I. "I thank you not for your so called remedy. I lay bare at your office with one ail, and leave with three more. Do you think you should be ashamed? I pray for you." Now, I show this letter—copy of letter actually—to psychiatrist and he says I hostile. I hostile? "No," I say. "I don’t understand. I honest. Simple, honest, servant of the lord. I say everything actual, like it is. Nothing fudged. Just what happened, and causes." But psychiatrist says people don’t send no thank you’s to people, it’s not done, only thank you’s. So I seal psychiatrist’s lips shut with Elmer’s new crazy glue. Seals wet to wet.

AND you don’t see hardly none of these thugs in a church on their knees ever, like they should be. If I saw one of them there I take pity.
Symphony

From the sound of silence into faint first bow fibers running against the strings, begging for the winds. Pure growth mirrored in sound, whisked from the eardrum to the brain. Potential combinations of instruments an infinitude stretching to fourth and fifth dimensions. I close my eyes and feel only freedom, get sad inside from the sound of joy, which also sounds like the sound of tragedy. Deep dark brown bellowing cellos slide steadily across one sunny African beach and then, at exactly the right moment in shoot corker canaries, spraying light fresh-smelling yellow gases and diving—in parabolic paths—across walled fields. There is order here, I think.. Fugues unified, within and surrounding and containing a continuous spectrum of synaesthetic effects. There is logic in these bright bent beams of holographic crimson—cold fluids, cold solids, cold gases, cold notes, whole cold creatures who eat cold cuts stemming from fowl entrails developed off feed from feces dropped sloppily out of pork butts. Transformed by compression under hoof in the muddy blood brown life-muck. It hits me hard.

The Laundry

Crivmatic material appeared. I had been doing my laundry, doing it for hours, talking on the phone to the wife of my ex-girlfriend’s psychiatrist. Hard to register, yes, but true. The truth is I was discussing the male g-spot, how it was real and I’d found it and then why it takes so many humonculli so very long to find it. I opened up the washer—into which just five minutes ago I’d dumped a sack full of slobbered on tee-shirts, and I nearly bit off my lip (Lucky for me, I’m toothless, I suppose). There was crivmatic material! Crivom. Full fledged
and wholly developed, sitting, hovering, shining in the thick bubbles. It moved and bobbed and shifted and it made a humming noise too. At least that’s what I thought I heard. Other people have said they hear tinkling or subtle radio voices. But I was overwhelmed, flabbergasted, at any rate.

Formerly I had been a doubter of crivmatic material from day one, when some investor, one of the first crivom seers, was on Montel via satellite ready to shock the world with crivom growing in his freezer. When he opened up the fridge all there was was some Costco sized mayonnaise and jar of maraschino cherries. That farm funder was wide eyed like he was seeing something fantastic, and Montel kept saying to him: “Hey Hey... Listen. Listen Mister, mister...mister Mister, we...we don’t see anything here from where we are in the studio. We’re looking at a giant jar of mayonnaise and you’re trying to tell the world on national television that this is crivmatic material and all you have is mayonnaise.” But the forever changed chump would no longer respond to Montel, so transfixed was he on what appeared to be nothing special in his fridge. “Well, folks,” says Montel from the mouth core of his marble smooth brown egg head, “Either we’re all fools, or the cameras don’t see what Mr. Hodge sees. Now who are you gonna believe? The camera or Mister Hodge? I don’t know about you, but I’m gonna be believing that camera, ladies and gentlemen. Kids, learn a lesson from this. People don’t always deliver the goods. This man clearly has a frail mind. Who knows what he’s been up to. I don’t even really know how my producers let him through to get on the show, but we’ll talk about that later. You know this is one hell of a crackpot, guys!—is he gone yet, you guys?” Good. Follow me.”

Montel always looked to me like a living version of Mr. Potatohead, and it was extremely unprofessional of him to say “you guys” so many times on national television.
Sickly luminescent (how can anything be both? you ask. They can!) overpasses lit-up under yellow and blue caged lights. The bike racks empty, stark, not a human body in sight. No organic electrical fields. Everything protected by the absence in fact.

The rain then...relentless, persistent, oppressive. Unconductive. For days it falls like God’s preparation. I see skinned hearts too open, splayed out for a meal. My mouth waters but I’m on a diet, believe it or not, and I have a good will to resist this sort of thing.

For anyone.
My family, for instance, waits sadly on the third level of a six story parking garage in a coupe de ville.

Wait? What am I a part of?

We have separated finally. After thirty years. All of us. Each one cast out upon a different ocean.
**Faux Avocadoes**

I dried both the skins and pits of the faux avocados, known to some in the supra as ambdulum. I painted the insides flourescent. They excited me when I hung them like wind chimes to spin in the breeze. Fwoop Fwoop they go, until the strings wind up and break free from the torque. They fall to the ground and appear to be dead. At least they smell dead. Weeks later a new flesh arises fresh and full. These faux avocados are hard to kill, like ticks or roaches. They fester. You crush them and they pop back up. They make love to the oven. The oven, friends! They love to hump each other on the hot and cool coils of a refridgerator I seal every crack and crevice and somehow they still fall down on me in my bed. They speak to me in my sleep. In the middle of having my hand against some soft cheek they rush in and rub against me like sandpaper.

Crivmatic material appeared again. It was an unusual sighting, on a bus stop bench. But the humidity, so they say, was optimum....

**Gbdicules**

Every time I ate gbdicules my heart rate doubled and I was brought closer to the realization of the end without the end. Lights shot off in my head. I revelled in the bright red thrush of the dam breaking, tunnels full of wet life-pudding gushing and gushing and gushing, painless, full of husky odors caused by mixing things in new ways, like rosemary with vinyl, dog shit, bananas, and blood...all of it shoved in a blender and put into scented candles, shake flavoring, bubble gum, Pace picante sauce even.
I became highly aware of my breaths about this time, and would sometimes spend
an hour breathing, counting the number of breaths I took in an hour...seeing if I could
bring this number down by ten to twenty breaths each time I tried. I never bought
anything to mix with the gbdicules, never used the stuff to poison pets or rodentia, never
ignited off any gbdicular particulate—which, by the way, is highly flammable. Nothing,
just placed the raw material in my orifices (my ass once too, to be honest), smelling and
tasting the purply blackness of it and thereby getting high. It was very useful in this way
alone.

Rhimbium rhimalistic rhillum rhillatic material
erhilytric erhilytiaticus erhilum erhilesis
erhilibius erhilustrial material
erhilosis

Brown entrails stink over the dropping night temperatures.
They take longer to cool than expected.

Another Week

I started to get excessively lonely. My groin was swelling mysteriously and I
didn’t know what to do with myself. Claudel said it meant that I would soon become
lucrative, and I should be very enthused about that. He bought me a pair of acid-wash
jeans with a backhatch, and some tickets to a Blue Oyster Cult Reunion concert which I
have to say was stimulating.

I have recently discovered the joy in boxing spectatorship as well,
injury prone as I am,
I enjoy injuring the witness as much as witnessing the injury.

jhuresis ajhurbium ajhuranium ajhurbiesis ajhuratic material
ijhibrialism ijhibrial ijheliatic acid ojhubrialistic
ijhivriatic ijidrum ijhillum ijhurvalic krinium
Some Reportage On Crime


Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Drunk driver trying to get home, disobeys police orders to pull over. Police resistance. Refusal to obey the law. A cell phone held as a gun. Woman tried to get police to kill her in front of her house, so her lover can watch her die.

Golf club war over the register counter. Mugger has 4 iron. Clerk has driving wedge. Clerk is feistier. Clerk wins.

Sat. Night. 10:15. Inebriated women unleashes a torrent of rage. When crime races in, it’s all police can do to hold back the tide.

Ottawa Hills, Ohio. Expired plates. “Turn the car off.” say the police. Buick skids across the road and shears off a fire hydrant.

Atlanta, Georgia. Plateless vehicle. The turbo charged sportscar rockets ahead. Charges around corners like a jet fighter. A drunken damsel comes on strong. A midnight marauder comes to the end of the line. When crooks start rockin’, troubles starts knocking. Do you all understand how prevalent this sort of thing is.

Size

Everything I do is intrinsically funny because of my size.

If I so much as wave at a group, people break out in laughter, unused to seeing someone so significantly smaller than an average midget.

And who speaks to them as well.
It’s a troubling existence, and alienating, being mentally advanced and relatively uninhibited.

Yet no matter what I do I cause laughter.

Laughter and Laughter and more laughter. I am a breathing fleshball joke. My miniatureness unconquerable.

emnigone  emnigonominal  emnigometric

A Random Appearance of Crivmatic Material

Crivom appeared in frozen alfalfa fields one night. It had appeared prior to that in frozen wheat and frozen asparagus, but then popped up repeatedly in the frozen alfalfa fields. It was mystifying. Again, there was no reliable predictor/indicator as to why/how they were best suited to show up there. But they did.

Another Statement

Ah, well, I’ll try and explain this to you a bit. In a simple way, but still it’ll be hard for you to get a grip on what it means because it’s eaten as much as it’s dispelled and conjured. It maintains as much as it retains, it’s manufactured and construed as much as it’s destroyed. And no, it’s not a riddle. It’s probably one of the simplest thing in the world. It’s all there is, my friends! It’s once upon a time, the one and only, the magnificent and stunning, heart-stoppingly delicious. It’s a worthy material thing in the world because it’s immaterial as a result of its materiality. The circumstances under which its generation occurs are not predictable, my friends. Regular, yes, but never wholly so. Organic anomole, if you will. Reverable (worshippable even) as much as it’s spit upon. Yes, hombres, Yes! Doubted as much as believed. Yes! Certainly! Evidenced as much as rumored! Pleasurable as it is uncomfortable (Come on Down!), but it is unsettling comfort, not dissimilar from laughter (do you understand what I mean? The way that art should work in an advancing society), and an unpleasant comfort (similar to curling irons against the scalp).
It inspires coitus as much as it marks the onset of death.

The Pit

In a single giant ventilated pit was combined the blood, spit, mucous, breath, urine, plasma, feces, and tissue of thousands of types of living material. Included also was adder venom, scorpion shit, whiskedamphibious egg whites, zinc powder, chlorine, denim, silly putty, wolf bile, breast and computer silicone, and blown out radial tires. A multitude of purposeful products produced by a smorgasbord of purposeful living things was thrown in the pit. Every thing, I say. It’s useless to try and make a list because a list of this is not makable. The airtight pit smoked. It got hotter and hotter and lived on it’s own self-perpetuating heat and stench.

Though it was hard to believe, eventually a school of brown trout could be seen eating baby ducks on the surface of the pit, which was becoming more and more liquidy and clear each day. It was like a miracle. Every stinking thing dissolved into one clear pool.

The Fleeing Gophers.

Flames leapt and grew, spread like a hot green-orange carp across the cosmic plains. A hundred thousand gophers were driven up from under. They traveled together through North Dakota, the heat nipping so close at their furry asses that not one of them—not one of them!--had time to stop and try to dig another hole. When they finally made it to Nevada they didn’t have much left on their bones, but the heat had stopped pursuing them somewhere in the middle of the Idaho panhandle. It was a real event, not a cartoon episode of Alvin and the Chimpmunks. Upon their near dead arrival in Nevada, nine hundred and twenty one of these gophers were taken in by citizens staying at the casinos for a vacation week-end. From this point some of the creatures were taken home as pets, some were plugged in the head with bb’s, some fed to dogs, used as live
sexual aids, skinned and made into dollhouse pillows or fishing flies, collected as mementos, preserved in formaldehyde or stuffed in valued memoriam of such an unusual event. One of the taxidermists who stuffed a little beast happened to notice that the two year old gophers feet were stained with the crivmatic biproduct crivalys, or rinz. When word of this discovery got out everyone else who still had a whole dead gopher checked the critters feet and found traces of the same. Evidently crivom was at the roots of the story.

**All The Blood Drained From a Cooled Off Body**

A woman I admired (I didn’t actually know her) had a terminal brain swell. She had gone to a dozen doctors and asked their opinion, and they all agreed she would be dead in about a month. She went home, got in bed and prepared to die. It was a task to speak to her friends and family. As it turned out, she was not a person who wanted to do everything she hadn’t done with the knowledge that she only had a month to do it. Instead she resigned. She wished she were dead right now. She wanted to get it over with. They prescribed her prozac and amtryptoline in large amounts, haldol, xanax, atavan, codeine, morphine, valium, chervil, whatever she wanted. She wished to take her body out from under her, so that when the overly thin wall of her main brain line burst, it wouldn’t be much of a transition. Everyone around her was sick with the sadness of a disappearing life. All the walls looked gray and the cracks spread an inch or two each day, like worms. The doors between rooms seemed heavier on the swing, and as all this happened the woman’s eyes changed from dark blue to a milky yellow. It looked like they’d been smoked. Eventually she stopped eating and you could see her ribs.

Through the grapevine of the community one relatively unrespected doctor got word of her condition and wrote to her.

Dear Maa’m,

I believe I may have developed a new type of operation for people with terminal brain swell which could possibly be the only hope for saving your life. Indeed there is obvious risk, but given the circumstances I think I could have the
operation performed at St. Luke’s with the very best assistants. If you’re interested please contact me.

Sincerely,

Dr. Claudel Walker

When the letter arrived at the woman’s house her family opened it and brought it to her, but she was too goosed on opiates to read or ingest in any way the letter’s information. She breathed but her eyes remained shut. There was no time for deliberation, so finally the children decided to say yes for her. They made a videotape as evidence that their mother had agreed to the surgery. To do this they set up the camera so it was controlled by remote. They hand-opened their mothers eyelids and used tiny dabs of crazy glue to keep them in place (they reasoned that tearing the glued skin apart later would be a small sacrifice for the greater good), then kept her eyes moist with a squirter full of ReNu contact fluid. The son kneeled behind the bed (out of the cameras sight) with the back end of a plunger pressing into the back of the pillow supporting his mothers head. The daughter read the letter to her mother (very clearly into the microphone): “Mother, do you want this operation?” and the mother’s head moves limply up and down as the plunger point presses up and down into the pillow beneath. Nothing more is said then the camera shuts off. And no one in the future ever saw the video anyways.

Didriumesis didrial
tribdimum tribdilitic material
efliosis eflibulum eflibulitic
diblititic material diptithesis (dyptythesis)
gwel
cillum
oxom
lun
triblesis
qebdumatic material
sivinic nebriotism
nebrillum debrilosis nebriumeisis
**Update:** Scientists in Prussia have discovered yet another potential effect of crivmatic material. Rats exposed to crivmatic material were prone to lick each others retinal membranes in the open eye holes of other rats. It was discovered to be a type of affection. Rats who licked the retinal membrane of fellow rats lived 36 percent longer, had healthier prostates, mated indiscriminately with same and opposite sexed rats, produced fewer deficient eggs, twice as much sperm, and never committed murder.

**Attack on a Malevich.**

Bored one afternoon I decided to visit a museum outside of Hamburg where they housed a couple of Malevich’s. I cared for Malevich paintings briefly, when my first week of life needed white-washing. Back then I could find something in tumblesome rectilinears. Geometry soothed me temporarily, and I would be lying if I didn’t admit that Malevich had heroic sensibilities for his time. But now I couldn’t get excited over them at all. On the whole they bored me. I’d seen too many of them and too many of them were alike. I wanted for his works to be replaced by the museum with something more suitable to the present, something which would relieve my boredom, if only temporarily.

Numerous Malevich’s at the Hamburg museum are valued at over 5 million, and that’s what a little piece of the coveted past can cost. If society would or could possibly be given a collective case of memory erasure, it’d certainly be viewed tragically, but at least the tragedy’d be forgotten...alas...how would tragedy exist without memory, and memory is information which is stored by genetically produced brainflesh material.

Inside the museum my disgust only grew. One could see as well that the museum had ceased to be uplifting. Nummies with bellies full of crackerjacks and Dr. Pepper were dragging around children who wanted to be home with a glass of milk and a quesadilla watching Survivor. It was off the scale—the pressure, the swell, the surge, that is—everyone in a blue gray blazer and there was I in a yellow nylon Adidas jumpsuit, and very dangerous. I don’t know why the gentry took their children with them anywhere, since all the children did was bitch and moan and drool (I wished I could have
starved some of them). The guards at the museum all chain-smoked. The tourguides were obvious after hour sluts, and every floor of the museum carried a different brand of coffee.

I bought a reduced fat gold topped Boston crème flavored Yoplait yogurt from one of the coffee stands. I carried it with me to one of the Malevich rooms, took one bite and purposefully dropped the container to the ground. The attending guard came over to me, lifting her radio out of her belt. She muttered to herself “Can you read, Mister. No food in the viewing rooms!” “I’m sorry.” I say. “I’m real sorry. I certainly don’t mean to spill yogurt.” She looked down at the pinkish splooge on the maple floor and said something I didn’t understand into her radio. Communication. Again I say “I’m sorry” and start walking away from the obese guard. Now I feel the vibrant jingle of the spray paint ball in its cannister. This plan will come to fruition. Out comes the can and I give it a swift shake and run towards the whitest Malevich painting in the room. Not finished, think I. Not done. Dead with no end. I break across the laser lines of electric eyes and the alarm sounds and I spray down the white painting in oily camo green. I dance with the can before I’m tackled by a whole fleet of guards “I’m sorry,” I say. “I’m real sorry! But this painting wasn’t finished! Malevich never finished this painting! Can’t you see? Please! I’m sorry!”

One of the guards tried to shove his bandana down my throat to silence me, but I spit it out and shot viculum (produced from the yogurt cultures) in his eye. They pinned me to the ground and I thought I might not get away. My nylon jump suit was torn from my body and I was naked. Someone had a tight twisty grip on my hairless crotch. I peed and diarrhead on the floor. No matter how hard they tried, they couldn’t get their cuffs on me. My wrists—even with their baby fat—were too small. Eventually I wriggled them all off and managed to get away. I did unfortunately have to bang two guards’ heads together though, and this did spill quite a bit of blood on things. Neither of them, for the record, was killed. The museum floor was covered in the secretions of the populace, though. Me included. One could have done some beautiful drawings with the stuff if they’d have only had the time and tools. And also if they could work through the strength of the odor.
Again, The Sick Mother

...The children put her in a wheel chair and wheeled her down to see this Dr. Claudel Hodge. The mother was still too doped up to know what was going on. Claudel Hodge had a beautiful office with hardwood floors and newly painted walls (so newly painted you could smell the blessed smell of paint!). There was no receptionist, so the children just walked right on in, wheeling their mother. At the end of hall (you know how halls look in doctor’s offices) they could hear music—a cello—being masterfully played. The mother’s eyes lifted as the cello-playing doctor came into sight. He stopped playing and lifted his cello bow with remarkable grace. His hands were immaculate. Unquestionably a surgeon’s hands. They were the hands of a greek God. Dr. Hodge’s hands were as close to perfection as any hands any of the three of them had ever seen. They glowed. They vibrated. They were obvious divine tools; it was clear they could do no wrong. How did they all three know this? Well, some things are simply agreed upon and need no discussion. Listen and do not ask! Besides, consider the circumstances. It was an ineffable quality to the hands. The four of them agreed to do the surgery the next day.

...
Crivmatic material: ineffective Crivom particulate and prediction difficulty in the effects of Crivmatic Material. Lecture delivered at Duquesney University--School of Pharmacology.

Crivmatic material, in particulate form, is of very little value to us. Australian scientists have firmly concluded that ordinary citizens need at least one complete piece of Crivmatic material (consisting of eight naturally assembled multivarious particulate) to experience any of the productive and/or deleterious crivmatic effects. Additionally, the presence of multiple complete pieces of crivmatic material, placed in proximity or (preferably) touching--exponentially increases crivmatic effect. A single piece of crivmatic material killed a puppy who found it in an irrigation ditch near Moscow, Idaho. However, this of crivmatic material, extricated dog's belly and placed in a for rapid distillation, after which was used to successfully (and quite cauterize separation wounds in a pair of infant siamese twins. In another case, a thirty one year old man suffering from premature fibromyalgia found crivmatic material inside the frozen torso of a lamb (hung in his meat freezer for an upcoming luau). He found the material so hypnotic that he took it from the carcass and had it encased in glass to display in home. He made a religious practice of looking
the piece—with unusual intensity—and found that his joints became as smooth, flexible, rubbery as ever. He made his wife and children look at it as well and as often as he. But surprisingly (or not so surprisingly—as we are coming to understand), soon after they all spent time focusing around the crivmatic material, his daughter came down with lymphonemial hypertrophy (her thymus was removed and she later lived with a colostomy bag). And soon after that, his son was hospitalized (institutionally) for terminal sadness.

First Birthday Party.

Claudel invited me to dinner for my 1st birthday. He sent me a formal card made of chebdriosotic material. Highly precious. Congratulations, it read. A very happy birthday to my favorite, and certainly the strongest, humonculi yet. I was pleased, flattered. I showed up early at his door with a bottle of Chardonnay from the Cote du Rhone. Yes, when you live as I do, you begin drinking in your first weeks of life. My vesicle-filled brain easily handles frequent lubing. I was surprised to find two other guests at my party—an older slut (decently attractive) wearing sparkly wet purplish lipstick who I’d never met, and another humonculi I’d met only briefly who I knew was called JoJo. He greeted me with wordless nods. He was nearly eight years old and appeared to have little life left in him. Jojo is an ugly little homonculi, and though I didn’t know who my sperm-father was (homonculi never get to know the names or whereabouts of their parents) I imagined that it couldn’t be him. I took my place in the high chair and put on my bib.

“So,” says JoJo. “This is the one who took a chunk out of the Baldechino, huh?”

“Yes,” Claudel responds. “Berm the unstoppable. Firey little son of bitch, aren’t you Berm? Gets away every time, too. And cleans up real good.” Jojo shoots me another one of his nods (gesture reminds me of frowning china-men with lives set to gong sounds, filled with indubitable honor and the will to do violence), and winks (winks that remind me of sped up film from actively feeding venus flytraps). I nod and wink back. Little fucker.
The slut leans forward with twinkling grape lips and places her hand (I think she had Loovrium Musk on—classy for sluts) on the top of my head. She thrusts her breasts at my eyeballs. There are milk droplets falling out of them, wetting down her her blue satin blouse.

“So this is Berm,” she says. “He most certainly is a fine looking humonculi, Claudel. How much did you say it would cost the society to reserve some sperm?”

Claudel burps. He folds his arms and stares down at the two of us. The beautiful slut and the humonculii. What a mythic pair!

“Oh I think we’ll take at minumum five thousand dollars a shot. But the shots will be guaranteed active. Absolutely guaranteed!”

Claudel has more faith in my nut sack development than I do.

“Okay,” says the slut. “That’s reasonable. He really is in beautiful condition.”

_Update_: Scientists, microbiologists shake heads over appearance of brand new unidentifiable rash. This rash has appeared in Pa., N.Y., Va. West Va., Or., Ohio, Washington. No dermal cream can remove such rash, no oral or anal medication either. Found, thus far, primarily on the torsos of pre-pubescent children (girls and boys alike). Hundreds of tests in progress, schools shutting down one after other. Home schooling on rise. So far the rash has not been shown to kill (or hasn’t killed). It only maims. Spreads slowly, not rapid. When something can’t be eliminated, you have to call the current presence of it a scar.

Ithbulium Ithsumial Ithsil-esis
Ithsimiamatic material
Ithvillum
Ithviliosis
Ithsillum
Ithsim-esis
Ithbillatic material.
One Whole Page of In and Out

One two three one two three one two three one. One two three one two three one
two three one. Come on, get with it, one two three ladies and gentlemen. Breath! In,
and out, and in, and out, and in, and out, and in, and out, and in, and out, and in, and out,
and in, and out, and in, and out, and in, and out, and in, and out, and in, and out, and in,
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and out, and in, and out, and in, and out, and in, and out, and in, and out, and in, and out,
Sand High On The Beach

Sand high on the beach at five am I raise my head from beneath a melted pile of rubber. The smoke from the still warm blob wafts out over the lichen to the sea edge. Helicopters surely call this fog, and me, splayed in the sand, a beach bather, red from lack of coconut oil. Ah! I savor the smell of black burn, and suck down in the nascent skies like oxygenated light hurdling and furling further into brainflesh. My throat is sore, eyes bulging, ears full of waxy crust. My nuts are tender, my liver dully aches. My skin is dry and peeling, and I am only three years by the calendar. My pants, unsurprisingly, are torn from the nights of revelry, from wasted efforts at change, from doing the splits on top of the bar. Yet still I walk with ease. Even injured like this I can fucking glide with the grace of a ballerina if I put the pain out of my mind. I collect my crivmatic residue (mixed with my own withdrawn blood) in ziploc bags and sell it by the vile in a variety of Asian towns where they dry it and make it into powder, pigment, pewter, penis enlarger, remedy for blind children, jaundice cures, rhino horn substitute, wrinkle remover, jellied viper egg substitute.

May all vicious approaches pass through the mind as the wind does a sieve. May my being be assharp and clear as a laser. and harmoniously we all are soon to be absorbed by the sea.

From here I get myself up, take a few swigs of red wine, a hydrocodone, a tylenol with codeine, two Costco multivitamins, an espresso shot and an Underberg. If you’ve never had an Underberg, I highly recommend them. People who’ve formerly relied on Tums or PeptoBismol would all do better with a switch to german Underberg digestant. Ingredients: eucalyptus sap, molasses, potato alcohol, cola syrup and cumin. Hardens guts like ice over lava.
Ceilings
It's Tuesday night.

Motherfucker I told you to shut up. Now get on. Wash up.

I wheel myself over to the other end of my apartment and there it's some Jackie Chan or Bruce Lee flick being played too loud. Staticky whooshing and whacking and HaYaas and the cracking of legs and arms and snapped necks. Then it's quiet for a stunned second as a lesser man crumples to the floor and dies, and finally a round of high fives, commemorating the scene for its thrilling action. The walls here have no insulation; they do nothing more than block my view. I never know who says what or who hits who or what voice goes with what face I see in the street, at the mailboxes, or at Walgreen's. I put my earplugs in, lift myself down onto my mattress, and toss and turn.

Don't you go on talking nothing. I get up at six, little man, and don't you forget it. It's an hour and a half before I sleep.

In the night I dream of a small roomful of men and women, me included, with hair growing all over our bodies like wolf-dogs. Chewbaccas. We coo expectantly at a locked door because a great leader who knows the secret of hair removal is about to arrive. But when the door opens it's only a young boy I've seen once or twice in the laundry room, carrying in his arms a bag of Cheetos. I am not upset, but when the other wolf-dog people see him they get angry, gnarling their teeth at the fact that there is no leader, just the cold, gray lines of the outdoors, and an androgynous child.

The phone rings in the morning. It's Matilda, the secretary from Legraft middle school, where I work, wanting to brief me on a new arrival. His name is Bernell Treatus, a hyperactive foster child. Sweet but difficult to keep in his seat, and loves to draw.

Physically and mentally disabled kids were coming to Legraft this year as part of the new "Living Future" program that the district recently initiated. Part of the deal is that the teachers for these programs be handicapped as well. Physically handicapped. So here I am. The hope is that kids, even disabled kids, will feel more comfortable taking a mentor by internalizing what we share.

"Okay." I say. "Sounds standard. We'll deal with it as it comes. See you in an hour."

I hang up the phone to the eruptive flush of a toilet m listening to logs of crap as they roll through the waste drainage strapped to my ceiling. I almost smell it.
Monstertreats, McNuggets, Goobers, Chicken of the Sea, Hostess. Pure waste in small packages, half-digested, shat out and washed down through my room. I hear an angry stomp and a door slams. The faucets wrench on and off in an amplified, discordant symphony of whines and screeches; then a car fires up and leaves from the back lot. There are people around here that keep roosters, too. I'd planned on a farm-life before I heard that, maybe with some nice grass and a barn; someplace I could take a couple of cockadoodle doos each morning and still get up and feel great. But as it is the birds get going at about five along with the showers and toilets, and there's no relief. Earplugs won't stop it. At seven or eight there are men smacking wrenches against the metal engines of their cars, jackhammers from the highway retrofitting project, heavy airport traffic. It's never totally quiet here, not even in the wee morning hours when the family of night-workers above me clomps out of bed onto the squeaking floor boards, yelling at each other: motherfucker this and motherfucker that and get out the bathroom before I whoop your ass. I keep control; tell myself that what I'm hearing when I hear these sounds is something else entirely. A rainy thunderstorm, an endless herd of wild horses, an earthquake.

"All of this is very natural," I repeat to myself. "Nothing could be more natural than this."

Bernell Treatus turns out to be a distantly familiar face, though I can't say from where exactly. I probably saw him once or twice at Henderson Elementary, where I trained. He would have been much younger, but I do remember an awkward child with a gait like his, and the same delicate hands dangling from raised forearms, the way dinosaurs are sometimes drawn in picturebooks. He comes in with his foster mother, Janice, who draws me aside to tell the horror story I've heard a hundred times. Crack baby, abused, abandoned, left for long periods alone, etc... She's looked after for him for two years now and he's made some real progress, but still Bernell barely speaks and prefers to draw.

"He has a sharp brain up in there," she says. "And he's a tender soul."
Our first day begins well. After a couple hours in a corner, Bernell comes over and asks me why I don't have a "electric chair like Jorge?" I tell him it's because I like my arms strong. I flex for him and he shoots a tiny smile my way before receding back to his corner where he stays until lunch. Later, I go over to tell him that we do a lot of art in the class, and he can draw whatever he likes. I tell him I like it especially when someone draws a story and can explain to me what's going on in the picture. I tell him I've heard he's a great artist; that I'm looking forward to pinning up some of his work on the wall, and I give him a set of used markers with colored paper before I wheel back over to the rest of the class. If he ever does a story he'll get extra credit points, I say to myself. Instinctively I have the feeling that Bernell is going to get on with me; that he will flower in my classroom more than he has in past ones.

At lunch time I get a call to come down to the cafeteria because there's a problem with Bernell. He threw a fit about a couple of spilled tater tots, overturned some kids' trays, then took down his pants, which were soiled, and tossed them off onto the floor. It was a real mess. All the other kids at school were talking about it. Some were scared and others were ready to be mean. I heard a chorus of comments.

_That crazy boy shitted on himself._

_He a stinky little shit boy._

_That boy don't never wipe._

_Bootyshit boy! Bootyshit boy!_

I grab Bernell by the shoulder and tell him to come with me, and we go to the bathroom and get him cleaned up. There's no one else at the school who'll do this sort of thing but me. The other staff would just as soon send shit home before they'd clean it up.

I, on the other hand, have crapped on myself plenty of times. In lots of places it's hard to find a bathroom when you have no legs. One time I caused a scene when I shit on the floor outside the bathroom at a Macy's in Fairfield. After trying to get through the door but finding it wasn't wide enough for my chair, I asked for someone to please come and lift me the twenty feet or so over to the toilet. But I couldn't find any volunteers, so instead I spilled myself down onto the floor and tried to crawl there, but was too late. I couldn't have gotten up on one of those toilets anyway, so I tore my pants off and let go on the floor, which when noticed, caused a kind of emergency in the store. Security
came over but didn't want to get too near. I heard some people telling their children to stay away. No one reached down to help me until an old, fat woman with a beard appeared, pushed through the small crowd of stunned onlookers, cleaned up both me and the floor, and helped me get back in my chair. I threatened to sue Macy's but no one cared. A security guard wheeled me to a door, swung it open, thrust me outside, and locked the door behind me.

After things are cleaned up, I call Janice, and she comes and picks up Bernell. She feels awful for what happened but I tell her it's okay. Bernell gives her a big hug when she arrives, and he doesn't let go. The two of them stay embraced for two or three minutes, rocking back and forth, and I can see that Janice is all torn up. People like her amaze me, taking on the burden of a Bernell in a world like ours. I'm just a baby-sitter. Bernell will be in my classroom for a couple of months and then move on, but Janice is in it for the long haul.

"Things'll get better tommorow," I say, and put my hands on both of their waists. They release each other and move somberly through the door. I note how calm Bernell is after being squeezed tightly, and I tell myself that this is a good sign.

At home I find the only other person I talk to in my building. It's Carlos from the third floor and he's fixing a car. When I first moved into my first floor basement he was the only one who took a look at me and offered a hand. Others shied away. He helped me wrap some of the pipes with noise insulation, lay a tight weave carpet over the concrete, and put up daytime privacy mirrors on the windows. Sometimes he gets a few groceries for me, or tries to get me to go to church with him. He says he knows men who can, by their simple and divine touch, cause my legs to grow back. He rants about some movie he saw called "Simon Del Desierto," in which God, working through the body of Simon, makes men grow back their chopped off hands and dried up crops. I tell him that there's about as much chance of my legs growing back as him fixing his car, which hasn't moved in three years, and besides, I'm convinced he likes to work on it more than he likes to drive.

"You know?" he says to me, sipping a Tecate. "If it's like hell where we live here, then it only gets better for people like you and me. God is dark prince AND bearer of
light. We go to heaven in the name of Jesus after we finish here." Carlos dives back under the hood of his flame-detailed Firebird, spilling beer on the pistons.

"I'm heading in, Carlos. Stop by sometime, alright. God's renting from me for a couple of weeks, and I'm attending to him while he's there. You can get his autograph if you want. See ya."

Carlos chuckles. I say a silent thanks for the fact that even though eighty-five percent of his free time is spent attending or volunteering for St. Paul's Episcopal on East 28th, he can still laugh at my religious jokes.

"Hey!" he yells as I roll away. "You want me to junk this motor and make you some high-powered electric wheels? I need a new one anyhow."

Inside I start a bath running. The children upstairs are already home from school, and I can hear two young girls quibbling.

_Gimme that blue sparkle._

_You get yo hands off me now, I give it to you when I'm done._

The front door opens and one, maybe two boys roll in. The girls let out a shriek.

_Get on outta here. Go on. Stop that._

The romping gets louder and, like always, I start to get both scared and excited for the floor to break. Just picture it. There I am. A naked half-man sitting in his handicap bath when three vicious siblings come flopping through the ceiling, locked in a struggle over some senseless object, right into my bath, so that there we all are, all three and a half of us, cleaning ourselves up. If nothing else, the sight of me naked like that might teach them a lesson.

A window slides open and I hear the faint tink of glass breaking out on the lot. I will notice the blue and red sparkle polish baking on the concrete for the next three months. At least now the noise dies down a bit. It is reduced to a muted whimper and a couple of recoiled cusses.

I still smell more like Bernell's disaster than I'd like, so I sink down into the bath for some heavy body wash. I hold my breath for a long time underwater, savoring the warmth against my skin. There's no noise down here. If Simon Del Desierto could touch me now, I'd pass on the legs and opt for gills.
In class the next day we make picture books. Luckily for Bernell, none of the kids from my class were in the cafeteria for yesterday's crisis, and none of them seem to know about it. I tell my kids to think of their favorite animal, draw it and then draw what their animal is going to eat for dinner. Bernell is out of his seat standing next to Juanito, watching him as he draws turtles eating crab soup.

"See, Bernell, it's easy. Your mama tells me you draw really well. What animal do you want to do?"

Bernell reaches down, grabs his crotch and begins galloping around like a wild horse; then he shifts gears and raises his dangly wrists above his head, growling while saliva hangs from his lips. The other kids laugh.

"He's Smoky the Bear!" exclaims Jorge. "The fire bear!"

"Yes! That's it, Bernell. You've got the idea. Now sit down and draw it."

Bernell, proud of his entertainment value, finally has a seat with his pens. He begins to draw and I leave him alone for awhile, making rotations around the room. I am pleased with this activity because it has induced the rare momentary silence that just barely keeps schoolteachers at their jobs, one of those fleeting moments when you sense progress and can for a moment believe that hope exists outside of being a presidential catch word or atop a pamphlet praising Jesus. The other kids are doing just fine. I'm seeing zebras eating bananas and chimpanzees munching on broccoli. Then I get back to Bernell and see the most surprising thing of all. On his paper are three identical figures, all balled up with brown hair, like little Chewbaccas doing somersaults. The resemblance to my dream is uncanny. For a moment I am wrapped up in mystical notions, but I snap back and ask Bernell to continue and draw what these animals eat. I watch him this time as his normally shaky hands move with a sudden steadiness. He draws four big apples for the Chewbaccas to eat, and I commend him, patting him on the head for his good work.

At lunch I get the call that there is another problem. No one wants to sit within fifty yards of Bernell because of what happened yesterday. He's been branded the "Bootyshit Boy," and he's not oblivious to the fact. Rather, Bernell senses it acutely and acts out in a fit of rage. I arrive in the cafeteria as he's jumping about like a wild horse again. Worse, he's stolen the bicycle pump from a teacher's bike, and is whipping it
around in dangerous circles. Mr. Porter from the yard patrol unit charges at Bernell, grabs the pump, and restrains him from behind with some exaggerated martial arts hold.

"C'mon now!" I yell at Mr. Porter. "That's a twelve year old boy with underdeveloped muscles you've got there. Take it easy."

Mr. Porter releases Bernell, who quickly scurries out of the cafeteria. I follow him, cranking my wheels in Olympic fashion. I catch a slight downhill on the yard and reach Bernell. He is out of breath and crying.

"Bootyshit boy booty booty shit shit boy," he sings sadly. I can say nothing. I am powerless against a mass of children.

"Bernell," I say as tenderly as I am capable of sounding. "It's not true. You're not that. You had an accident." He turns around and looks at me for a moment, taking a step toward me.

"Bernell be a bootyshitter," he says.

"No, Bernell. Bernell be a beautiful boy. Bernell be Smoky the Fire Bear."

He stands still, turning his body right and left off planted feet. He has never known what to do with his hands. They're all over the place in pain and frustration. He settles them finally on my brake lever and pumps it up and down a few times gently, before turning away and running out to the gravel edge of the school yard. This time I let him go. All in all it's been a better day.

I remain where I am for a few minutes after he leaves. Seagulls are circling in the sky above me. They caw and coo and wait for the kids to leave behind their picked-through lunchbags before descending, eating, and shooting white, uric juice all over the yard. Above the birds two planes from the neighboring airport have crossed each others path, leaving a smoky gray X in the sky. I listen to the the fading drone of the engines, trying to imagine how I look to those birds: a gleaming weave of steel spokes, stuck idly for a moment in the sun before gliding back across the concrete and into a bungalow.

My father had trained as a pilot in the Navy, and after the war in Vietnam had flown Cessna floaters for the coast guard off of Los Angeles harbor. On weekends he would take my mother and sister and me up in the air, and from 5000 feet we'd look down at schools of leaping dolphins, diving pelicans, and fat seals. I remember my
astonishment the first time I could see the cohesive beauty of the earth, in all its
symmetry and color, from that distance. I understood why my father flew planes. Even
the curve of the interstate gave me pleasure from above. I sometimes pretended that I
was not in a machine but had morphed into a bird; the sound of the engine would fall
away as I danced through the rich cloudbanks, swollen with moisture thick enough to
hold me up.

Then one time we hit a rarely-encountered wind gust...something pilots call the
white sweep, inside of which it become exceedingly difficult to maneuver a small plane.
It had been a perfectly clear day, but when we hit the invisible force the plane suddenly
just dove straight for the ground. My father pulled out of a tail spin just fifty or so meters
too late, and was unable to swing up before hitting water. This is what was told to me
after the whole thing happened

So it happened just like that. The exact moment itself was painless and surreal. A
blast of white was all I could remember and the rest was recreated for me, per my
request, by a pilot friend of my dead dad. One moment I was a complete body falling
down through the sky, and the next I was in a hospital, my brain and heart undamaged,
but missing my legs and my family. I was a lone survivor, bleeding and cast adrift on
the ocean where I was rescued and revived by a helicopter trauma team. The rest of my
family was recovered and taken to the morgue. I have to tell you, for at least a year after
I spent many days wishing I could have just cashed in with the rest of them. There were
days I begged nurses for an overdose of painkillers, but never got one. Then eventually I
had to tell myself that all things and events in this world have some mysterious purpose,
and if my being was not taken off the earth with the rest of my families, then so be it. I
had a being with a half a body. They were many people like me all over the world, and
all of them had to have a purpose too. The great creator has his reasons, and I had to
learn to accept them, small as I was. So I did.

Now here I am, twelve years later, still paying off hospital bills. Still here.

The next three days—Wednesday, Thursday, Friday—are smooth sailing. Bernell
and Juanito begin to sit together at lunch and I can see in Bernell's face the joy this gives
him. The teasing storm has quieted, and I've told Bernell to puff out his chest, to imagine
himself made of steel so that nothing can hurt him. After school on Wednesday I pick up a pair of specially designed ear plugs from an eye, ear, and nose specialist. They cost me seventeen dollars but they prove well worth it as I find they reduce the cockadoodle doos enough for me to sleep through them. Plus, somebody cleaned up excess garbage from the back lot, and there has been no rain.

Friday night I get the idea that I'm going to relax, enjoy the relative pleasantries of the last few days, maybe watch a movie. I catch the handicap-ready 40f bus and get off at "Reel" video, where the first thing to jump out at me, believe it or not, is "Simon Del Desierto." It turns out to be a wild little picture indeed; the story of a man who stands on a pedestal day in and day out, resisting the disguises of the devil but never doing enough to achieve complete holiness. Just as Carlos said, he does make a man grow hands, and no one believes there is any holier man in the whole desert. He gives up food and drink, finally standing on one foot in order to prove his devotion to God. A bearded female devil comes back, again tempting Simon to come with her, but he refuses, until one day when he is too weak to refuse. The devil gets to him on his pedestal and says, "C'mon Simon. You and me. Were going to take a wild ride." Then there comes flying across the biblical desert a giant Boeing 747 that sucks both Simon and the devil into its hold. It transports them instantly from an old world to a new one, beaming them into the heart of a hip, drugged-up urban dance party. In the new world the people all smoke cigarettes and let go of their inhibitions on the dance floor. Simon, however, holds his face in his hands and exclaims that now he is "indeed in hell."

I turn the television off and think of Carlos. What a strange movie for him to like. Perhaps he doesn't get the message. Then again, perhaps I don't get the message. I can hear the hollow distant thumps of a gangster rap bass being played somewhere in the building. Another set of turds comes tumbling down my pipes before the bed above me starts squeaking to the rhythms of sex. I hear that bed squeak often but I have never heard the moans of the humans on top of it.

I put in my new earplugs. It's a half hour before I'm asleep.
On Monday all the wonderful momentum I felt at last week's end is put to a halt when I arrive at Legraft to find that today they are fumigating for termites which have started to eat at the bungalow foundations. My class is to be moved in with Ms. Gutierrez's for the day. She already has thirty kids in there and now the eight of us--four in wheel chairs--are supposed to cram in with her. If it weren't raining again, I'd have simply called it a free outdoor play day, but it was coming down hard. We wheel ourselves over to the main building and squeeze into the room. There are no extra chairs for standers like Bernell and Juanito, and so they roam around the seats of other children, fascinated by the foreign classroom. The kids in here use a normal water fountain and large scissors without blunt tips. I go up to the front of the classroom to greet Ms. Gutierrez and offer my help. The rumble of thunder is constant. Somebody lays a loud fart and all the kids laugh, some of them whispering about the "Bootyshit Boy" under their breath. I watch Bernell, who's already on edge from the loud, dark weather, bobbing his head nervously.

"Okay, children," Ms. Gutierrez cuts in. "Settle down now. I know it's crowded in here but we will all be all right" when Boom! Flash! Loud as I've ever heard a crash of thunder and lightning rocks our overcramped room. The lights flicker as the kids buckle and shriek. Bernell jumps up on the nearest counter in panic. He's sounding off like a mad donkey, Eeeeeeaaaww! Eeeeeeaaaw, reaching to get a hold of anything tangible, which unfortunately turns out to be the machete-like handle of a large paper cutter, something he's probably never even seen before. He latches onto it, thrusting the arm of the machine up and down like a plunger.

I move quickly to get over to him but everything is in my way. My chair gets snagged at the first turn, so I throw myself on top of students desks' in an effort to traverse the room at this level. I pull myself adroitly across a row of wobbly desks until I am near to Bernell, who is swinging his free arm all over the place.

"My God, Bernell!" I exclaim as I pull myself close enough to get a hand on him. His loose arm swings up one last time and, as if by some divine miracle, only mildly grazes the blade. For a millisecond he pauses, checking the sting of the shallow cut, and it is then that I get my other hand on him, roll over off the desks and drag him onto the ground with me. We hit the floor hard and in the immediate aftermath of the chaos I'm
well aware that here I am again, out of my chair and wriggling on the ground, stuck in the
familiarly vulnerable position I've experienced far too many times. A fish out of water.
A snail without a shell. I stay on top of Bernell for a moment while the class stares drop-
jawed and silent at the avoided catastrophe. I hope that my warmth against him will be
calming, and I whisper softly that it's going to be okay.

Eventually Ms. Guitterez comes over and gives me a hand getting back to my
chair, but I have to ask first for her help. I call the office and have them send one of the
secretaries down to the room to look after my kids while I go to the office and get some
first aid for Bernell. We call Janice from there and she comes down and picks him up
again, apologetic as ever. I ask her if she can keep Bernell at home for a couple days,
because I will be taking a short sick leave until Wednesday, and I don't want to subject
him to a substitute on Wednesday. As always, I tell her that "everything will be all
right."

I pack up my things and sign out for two days. Even my noise-polluted apartment
sounds like a nice refuge now. At least I'll get some physical privacy in which to breathe.
But as I pull up to my place I wince when I see a group of voyeurs mulling around
outside my building. Some of them are laughing, and I know this is a bad sign.

"What's going on?" I ask an old man wearing a Glad trash bag on his shoulders.

"They think a main drainage clogged up back in there. There's two feet of
standing water." I know my first floor pad flooded. My mattress of a bed is no doubt
ruined. I try and remember what things I kept up on tables. Most of my valuables, at
least, but it is frustrating not even to be able to wade through the water and take a look at
my own possessions. Finally two Utility guys come treading out of the back lot and tell
me I can go back inside. I ask how bad the damage is on the first floor and, as I expected,
they tell me that everything left on the floor is probably ruined, but that the building
might be insured and I should call the landlord.

I change my mind then about going inside to assess damages. I can do that
tomorrow, when the rain will have stopped and things have calmed down. I decide to
rent a room at some handicap-equipped hotel. Take a nice long bath, sip a whiskey, try
and forget the horror of the day.
I do all of that. I even spend the extra money on getting the quietest room in town, with a king size bed, right next to the golf course at the foothills Ramada. No ear plugs necessary, and the softest mattress you could ever hope for. I lie in bed thinking of my apartment, a giant organism filled with the sounds of unceasing function, frustration, and decay. My building has been overripe for years, and yet in the midst of this paid-for silence I manage to convince myself--perhaps only because I knew I would go back tomorrow--that there is a perverse comfort in living in the bowels of a giant concrete box, channeling the waste of families.

I get a much needed sleep that night, and just before I wake I have another dream. I'm up in the air again, gliding through the clouds, with veiny sheets of tough, organic tissue attached to my torso beneath my outstretched arms. I have perfect control, diving from great altitudes to mere feet above sea water. From up high I can't see any of the sharp and geometric man-made structures I expect to see, only the blue of the sea, the brown of the beach, and the green of the hills.

Down on the beach, I catch a glimpse of a blinding metallic shimmer. I fly closer, landing finally on the other side of the sun's rays to discover, exactly where the sea meets the land, an entire fleet of brand new wheelchairs, an impressive steel armada, all empty and perfectly aligned, as if a crippled army had just landed and disembarked on the shore. Then I see them up on the hills. It's the wolf-dog people of course. They're running wild, celebrating the new, beautifully lush and solid earth beneath them. It is they who are dancing in this dream, and it is then that I look down to discover that I am standing up on the beach.

I wake up and it's Tuesday again. For the moment the rain has stopped and I savor the hotel's silence which is peaceful as ether. Checkout time is eleven and I stay right until then before heading back to my apartment. The floor there is indeed soaked and waiting to mold. I open the windows to make a draught way for the drying to begin, and am surprised to see there is a message on the machine from my usually absent landlord, assuring me that the building is insured and all my damages will be covered. Good news. There's a double flush as more shit tumbles through my room. The
wrestling upstairs continues endlessly. A motor revs, loud and bellowing, just outside my window, and I hear a knock at the door. It's Carlos wearing one of his church suits.

"All fixed," he says with a clap, pointing at the purring Firebird before leaning over and picking me up out of my wheelchair like a newborn baby. Gently he puts me down in the passenger seat, straps me in, and gets in on his side.

"Ready?" he says.

Before I answer my eyes move from the cement below up to the window just above the entrance to my apartment. On the ground directly beneath it there is still a faint patch of iridescent blue. I know what it is, but from here it looks like water.
Inside Out
My lip is messed up. When I was seven this older girl Tisha from down the street attacked me. It was the only time I can remember a girl choosing me; but I was too young to even appreciate it. She said she was gonna fuck me and she put her tongue in my mouth and gripped my crotch. I beat my arms against the side of her head and she got mad and shoved me to the ground so hard that when my face hit the concrete my front teeth tore off most of my upper lip and then broke to pieces. When I opened my eyes I was in the hospital and didn't have a clue what happened. My parents were there, and they told me I had to have another lip grafted on, and also have some surgery for my mouth and teeth.

My lip is still pretty jerked. I can't quite cover up my bottom teeth even when I want to because my mouth doesn't close fully. Birdlip they call me. They also call me stitchlip, zipperlip, hemlip, graftman. Not as much now but I took that clownage in junior high, man, let me tell you, like everyday. It got to where I sometimes walked the halls with my hand over my mouth, and sat only in the back of classrooms.

I do have a couple of friends though, Troy and Q-bert, so I wouldn't call myself a total loner. I'm not like the Elephant Man or some shit: somebody who you'd never even go near. And Troy and Q-bert are sufficiently clowned too--Troy for his nasty acne, Q-Bert because he's only like four foot one. Out of the three of us I might even be clowned the least.

The only girl I ever talk to is my mother, and that's usually against my will. I look at girls a lot, though, from my corner. I fix on a new girl about every week but I never do anything, never. I don't even choose good-looking girls. I choose the ones who don't have much going for them, no jocks looking at them, calling, posing, staring. I figure I'd take fifth, sixth, seventh class the same way my parents went about it. *How else could two people so ugly meet and start having sex with one another?* I can take some zits or some fat or pigeon feet or a big nose with beady eyes and I know how to make it turn me on. I've never touched a live girl, never even seen it, and it tears me up inside. I want to smell it and taste it so bad. My journal reads: *Girls I'd like to eat: Janine Lunkenheimer, Jody Bails, Laura Grossman. God what I'd give.*
One day last week this girl comes out of nowhere and sits down beside me in the back of computer typing class. The top of her notebook says Felicia Biggs. I look at the scars on Felicia's hands, a fresh bandage with tape by the wrist, and I know we have something in common. She's got a bull ring and some eyebrow rings and a stud in her chin, too; she's pasty and caked down with layers of make-up but I see the sores on her face she's trying to hide. Her jean jacket's all torn and shredded and has the word *nauseous* written on the arm, tag style. In a flash all the other crushes I've ever had drop off the face of the earth. Get vacuumed.

Mrs. Chang says, "Fingers loose, wrists high. Page two forty seven," and all the keyboards start clucking. I don't pay attention to the assignment but instead write a letter.

Dear Felicia,

I wanted to write you this letter so that I could tell you that I think that you are fantastic. You are the sexiest girl I have ever seen at this school, at any school I have ever been to for that matter. If you would consider going with me some way anyhow I'd like to be your man. Call me my number is 344-2365.

Much love,

Manny

p.s. If you'd rather I call you, give me your number and I will do it like that

Of course as I'm concentrating on hitting all the right keys Mrs. Chang makes her rounds and comes up right beside me and say's, "Well, isn't this interesting. Good job, Emmanuel," and moves on. It scares the shit out of me and even though she says nothing I delete everything and look up the assignment and try to do it, but a minute later I just type Dear Felicia again like six times, and then delete and re-delete the words that follow. I experiment with many angles. *You remind me of a flower*, I write. *I am very dirty*, I write. *You are very beautiful. Do you ever have nasty thoughts? I write. I don't mean that in a bad way. I'm not cold-blooded.* But when I read this I have to delete it. The bell rings and everyone else prints up their completed assignment and gets up to hand it in. This one boy Charlie type's crazy, does 84 words a minute or some shit. He gives me an
eye as he walks past with his perfect sheet like *man that was an easy ass assignment and you didn't even do it?* I'd like to beat his ass one day, but I know I never will.

After school I hook up with Q-bert and Troy for a second and I tell them about how I'm in love for the last time, with Felicia.

"Man, someone needs to cut your dick off." Troy says.

This isn't funny, but it makes Q-bert laugh.

"You fools just don't understand," I say. Go get yourselves a girl and you'll see what I'm talking about." Troy and Q-bert think I'm not a virgin because I told them a mutated version of the Tisha tragedy. I gave them a story about being attacked by my babysitter and having her fuck me—at first against my will, but later I took charge and would fuck her every time she came to babysit. Sometimes doggystyle.

I don't stick around when they act like jerks. They aren't complete friends and I don't know if I've ever had a complete one so I take what I can get and I leave it when I have to.

Later that night when everyone in the house is asleep I lock myself in my room and try not to think about Felicia. I can't and I can't sleep. *I must be so fucking ugly. I am. On a scale she's almost as bad looking as me and she won't even look at me. No one else but me even wants to get with her probably, but I bet she's not a virgin. I don't know who did her, but it turns me on that someone did. Who gives a shit about naive and pure. An ugly girl can get some dick, but an ugly guy like me can't get any pussy.*

I slam my journal closed and reach under my bed for my sacred tool box. I don't expect anyone to understand. What else has anyone understood? It's wrong, sure, I know, yeah, right, but don't tell me people don't do wrong things all the time just for the sake of wrongness, because they do. People smoke and lie and jerk themselves to kiddie porn and I could care less. Power to them. I used the sharp tools in my toolbox to carve a happy face between two anarchist symbols on its top, and inside there's a set of razors, a pack of needles, some scissors, a box of tissues, alcohol, a towel. Felicia's out of my mind, at least for awhile. I hold the towel to my nose and sniff the dried blood and the smell is still there and it sets me off. Same way I feel like when I'm gonna give myself a big orgasm. Really work it. I feel like an overblown balloon. I need to let off some
steam. I rub a tissueful of cool alcohol on my arms and fingers, and it evaporates quickly and there's that tingle. Then I choose a new razor blade, kiss it, and start to cut. Tonight I slice my arm on the inside of my left bicep. Four slashes. It doesn't even hurt when I do it. My skin sears and breaks and the blood flows and I love that moment when everything turns inside out. Toss it all over like a salad. Sweet floodgates. Blood looks different from every place I cut and I put my mouth directly on the cuts and suck it into my mouth. I do this for awhile, then I take the razor and open up the slashes a little more. Then I lie back on the towels and focus on the throbs. After this I'll be able to sleep.

Next day the cuts feel fresh and I still don't think too much about Felicia, but damn if I don't have to go to school. Part of me wants to, part of me just wants to stay away. I wrap some new bandages around my arm and put on a long-sleeved shirt. At breakfast my mother says, "Manny, if you don't up your grades from the midterm report you can forget about that iguana."

And my father says, "You can already forget about the damn lizard."

I don't have any money. They're not about to give me any, and I'm late. I run out the door and up to the bus stop but it's just pulling away as I round the corner. I try to run after it, hollering for the driver to stop, but the bus speeds up. I swear I can see the driver in the side mirror grinning and shaking his head. Probably thinks he's teaching me some sort of lesson. Punk.

When I finally make it to school it's already halfway through first period, so I decide to just skip out. I brought a packet of needles with me and I go into a bathroom stall and stick myself in the fingers. I drive one needle in so far that I can feel it hit the bone and I leave it there for a minute. I press it into the bone, but the bone doesn't give off nerves really. Someone comes into the bathroom and I have to stop so I slide the needle away and suck the blood off my finger. It's almost time for typing class. My name's Emmanuel. What's yours? No no no. Just let her see your fingers.

When class starts Felicia takes the same seat she did before. I try and draw her attention to me many times with an artificial cough, holding my punctured fingertips up high on the keyboard keys, hoping she will have a look and see how alike we are. But she doesn't ever look at me, not as far as I can tell, just watches her computer screen. It looks like she does assignments really well. Twice I've seen Mrs Chang step up beside
her and give that same nod I've seen her give that dickturd Charlie. But the class goes by
and even with all my efforts she doesn't seem to get distracted my way the least bit. And
let me tell you, she does not look good! Her ass is way out of proportion with the rest of
her. She doesn't have taste in clothes--she wears tight black spandex shorts around her
big thighs--, and she's not popular, I can tell. AND she walks a little like a duck.

After school that day I find myself following Felicia home. I stay a good distance
behind her so she'll have no idea. I have headphones on, connected to a Walkman with
no batteries. I AM a Walkman with no batteries. She walks all the way to a run down
pink stucco house on the east side of Richmond. I've been in her neigborhood a lot
because I went to daycare there: Sudie's Daycare. All I can remember though from back
then was having big round ladies wipe my face after I ate and my ass after I went to the
bathroom. I remember it seemed like there were hundreds of power tools being run at all
times in that neighborhood. I used to get scared by the noise; sometimes it was close up
and sometimes it was far away and sometimes both. And it screamed whenever it cut
through wood.

The saws and drills are still running like they used to. Just across the street there's
a crew of carpenters working on a broken fence. This neighborhood used to be pretty
crappy and run down, but all the years of work have got it back in shape. Felicia's house
doesn't even look like it belongs here now because it's the most busted one on the block.
The paint's chipping, the porch is sagging, there's a couple of broken windows, and two
rusted out lawnmowers next to dirty dog bowls in the front yard. She goes inside and I
stop and stay standing across the street trying to decide what I should do from here. I put
my sweatshirt hood up over my head and let it hang down over my forehead, laying
shadow on my face. I pinch my needled fingertips. Okay, let's go. I cross the street
quickly and walk across Felicia's front yard. Crouching down I approach one of the
unbroken windows on the side of the house, stretching the hood even further over my
head as I lift up real slow and try to have a look inside.

When I do this I see the back of a television and Felicia across the room slouched
down real sexy on the couch. Her head just barely climbs up the back of the couch and
most of her back is where her butt should be. Her legs are spread out. The television
says, "Look how easy: just pop your chicken on the spit. Set it. And forget it!" I've seen this infomercial a couple of times and it is pathetic but I get so damn bored sometimes; it's funny when all the people in the audience clap like robots with every new technique the rotisserie man shows them for roasting a chicken. Rotisserie man has a big plastic syringe and injects the dead chicken meat with things like bottled lime juice and soy sauce. It gave me the idea to rub some lemon juice in a cut, which I had started doing more often. A little lemon juice or vinegar could double my rush, get all the garbage out of my head that much faster.

I'm enjoying thinking about how much Felicia and I have in common when a full grown naked man with giant wings tattooed across his chest walks into the living room, sits down next to her and puts his arm on the back of the couch just above her head. Beneath the wings, written in big gothic letters, reads "Freebird." It's so shocking I have to duck back down beneath the window for a second. When I go back up and have a look the two of them are talking, casually. His dick is limp and he's not groping her or anything, but Felicia reaches down and grabs his balls real quick and squeezes like it was a joke. They both laugh and Felicia gets up, gets a glass of water and sits back down and starts changing stations. Agewise it looks like the man in there could be her father, but they don't look anything like each other. I watch for a little while, wondering, half-dreading and half-hoping that I'm going to see Felicia and this man get it on, but they don't do anything, just talk like they were friends watching TV together. She doesn't grab his balls again or do anything more.

After five or so minutes of this I hear a police siren getting louder and I worry that someone spotted me crouching like a burglar outside Felicia's window for ten minutes, popping up and down like a piston. I make a run through her backyard hoping for a clean getaway, but wouldn't you know it the fence to her backyard has some shit eating bells strapped to it, and I don't notice this and when I whip it open and closed to get through it sounds off like a gang of salvation army volunteers. I find myself in Felicia's backyard and the police sirens are getting closer. All around the border of her backyard is a rotting wooden fence that's high—too high to jump—but has a bunch of small holes in different areas where I can see through to next-door neighbors' yards. Climbing the fence doesn't look possible; it looks too rotted to support any bodyweight. The cop car screeches to a
halt out front as the back door to Felicia's house opens and she comes striding out with Freebird. I turn my back toward them so she won't recognize me, then with last resort instincts I run straight for the biggest hole I can see in the back of the fence and do a divejump, head first, right into the middle of it with all my weight. It doesn't do any good. It's just me running straight into a wall and crumpling back down to the ground, the way baseball players look when they hit the padded backfield wall.

Next thing I know I have a chunked-up policewoman on top of me, her knee in my back, strapping me in cuffs. I can hear footsteps like an echo against the ground, but when I look it's just Felicia and no Freebird. There's a couple of giant splinters in my face from where my head broke a rotted board in the fence, and others have gone through my clothes into my body. It wouldn't be too bad if I wasn't about to go to jail.

When the policewoman has me cuffed, she pushes off my head to get back on her feet and says, "This sure isn't your day, is it junior?" I'm doing everything I can not to break down. I've never been arrested before. My lip is ripped again, in a new place, and I taste that blood.

"C'mon," I say out loud, "Damn."

Felicia approaches and the policewoman says to her, "You know, there's been five or six robberies already on this block this month. We've maybe got our guy."

Felicia's got the tip of her index finger in her mouth and she's shaking her head. Freebird comes outside but now he has on shorts and what looks like a cooking apron on top, covering most of his tattoo. Freebird aims his hand at me and says, "No, that's my cousin. He was just doing a fence run. That's how we got all those holes in the fence. Usually he wears a helmet."

"Are you telling me that you don't wish to press charges against this perpetrator?" the policewoman asks.

"Yes, I am. No trouble here," he says, looking back at Felicia. Felicia gives a jerky nod.

The policewoman shakes her head. She bends down and puts her weight on me again to take the cuffs off. I'm totally silent, amazed.
"You sure?" the policewoman says, and starts walking back to her car. "Too much," I hear her say. I lift myself up off the ground and watch her walk. She's still shaking her head and about to get in her car when Felicia sticks out her middle finger and yells, "Pig! You can't touch this!"

The policewoman looks up and sees her and just keeps shaking her head, then gets in her car and drives away.

"Whoa," I say. "I can, I mean, like--"

"You're the guy that can't type...in my typing class" Felicia says.

"Um, please."

"You type like three words a minute," she says.

"I guess, sort of. I mean I didn't for this to be really sorry," I say. "Really."

"Yeah," she says to Freebird. "We go to the same school."

"For real. I walk a route and I, well, I saw you and there I had some, or a, question."

Freebird looks me down while whispering something in Felicia's ear.

"What's your NAME?" Felicia asks.

"Manny."

"Manny," says Freebird, "you got some bad splinters up in your head. Why don't you go on in and we'll do some work on those. We got some first aid inside. You know where it is, Feesh?"

"Yeah, C'mon," says Felicia.

Felicia pats some dust off my clothes before we move towards the house. Oh my that feels nice. I can't believe I've actually spoken to a girl. To THIS girl. I know I sounded like a fool, but I'm still headed inside her house, aren't I? Even old Freebird seems cool.

When we get inside Felicia shows me to the couch and the television is still on and there's another infomercial with some washed up broad from a sit-com I've seen reruns of ranting about some face acid to get rid of really bad skin. The house has a smoke and vinegar smell. On the wall by the couch are ragged posters of Troy Aikman going back for a pass and Hulk Hogan flying off the ropes. There's a coffee table in front of the
couch, and on it is a giant glass ashtray with like a hundred plus cigarette butts in it, and a couple of empty plates and glasses, one with a pile of leftover ketchup.

"Wait here," Felicia says. "I'll get the first aid." She goes down the hallway and comes back with a red pouch.

"I got a lot of splinters, huh?"

"Yeah, some of these look pretty deep," she says.

From across the room Freebird asks, "What'd you say your name was, kid?"

"Manny!" I say loudly

"It's good to meet you, Manny," he yells. "My name's Vert. I'm Felicia's foster cousin."

"Um, oh," I say

"This is my house. My folks left it to me when they died. Car crash. Off a cliff," says Vert, making a dive motion with his hand.

"I'm sorry," I say.

Vert says, "Yeah. You got the cigarettes, Fee?"

"No, you do," she says.

"No, I don't," says Vert. "You had them. Where are they?"

"I swear I didn't have them, Vert," she says.

"God damn it, Felicia. You did. Now find 'em before you start that nursing shit."

Felicia gets up and starts digging under all the crap everywhere, frantic, while Vert picks up one of the old jars, dumps it out and fills it with water from the tap, no rinse. He takes a long drink and when he's done he takes his apron off. Felicia searches madly, flinging stacks of miscellaneous papers and some old empty fast food bags; tearing the cushions off the couch. She gets up and runs outside and comes back empty-handed. Find those cigarettes, please. Come back. Finally, she goes down the hall and comes back with a pack of Parliaments.

"Here they are, Vert," she says, handing him the pack. "Sorry about that."

"Just keep track of them in the future," he says. He pulls one out, grabs a Strike Anywhere match from a loose pile on the counter by the stove, drags it across the counter top for flame, then lights up.
Vert comes over to the couch and puts his hands—one of them still holding the cigarette—on my head, and moves it around, doctor-like, up and down and right and left. "Shit, you almost pierced your brain, looks like."

"Look at this one here," Felicia says, fingering a splinter I haven't even noticed on my backside, going straight through my shirt. "Look at the size of that one. That's a fucking lance. Does that one pierce the skin? Here, we should probably cut your shirt off. You need this?"

I shake my head. "No, go ahead."

She takes some scissors and puts her hand on me and cuts around the giant splinter and goose bumps just fly up all over my body like a chain of dominoes. I can't help it. I got to keep my wood down. I think about how Felicia squeezed Vert's balls on the couch before. At least I have on jeans and not sweatpants like I wear somedays.

"Let's just take this off," she says.

And then, she takes off my shirt and my torso is exposed.

"Damn," says Felicia.

I shrug.

"You see these, Vert?" she says.

Vert still stands over me. I can see the six pack of his stomach flex, and the tip ends of his shoulder length hair. Some of them are already starting to gray.

Vert says. "Cool. You do those?"

I nod my head once, bold.

"Look at this," he says, lifting up his arms. On the upperpart of both sides of his torso are two big sections of small pink scars, like a decorative pattern.

"This one here's a V, for Vert, and this one's Q, for Quanek. That's my name. Did 'em with a lighter."

"Cool," I say.

"Show 'em yours, Feesh."

Felicia pulls up her spandex shorts and reveals a big bubbled out circle on the inside of her upper thigh.

*I'd give anything to kiss it and just move right on up.*

"Man, you cut, huh?" Vert asks.
"Uh huh," I can't remember ever feeling proud about anything before, but this must be what it's like.

"Hey," Vert says, "let me take some pictures of you two kids. Fee, work on those splinters and I'll take some snaps. That cool with you, Manny? Those scars are something else."

Felicia shrugs, looks at me, and I shrug, too.

"Sure," I say.

Vert runs down the hall to the same place where Felicia went for the cigarettes. He comes back with a fancy looking camera on a tri-pod. I was expecting something more like a disposable. He loads up some film and puts on a flash and gets down on his hands and knees and starts focusing. Felicia begins to dig at one of the splinters in my cheek, and the pain is easy; shit, it's the polar opposite of pain.

"Stay still. Does that hurt?" Felicia asks.

"No," I say.

Vert's camera clicks. The flash goes off three times in a row, like a strobe.

"Feesh, take your shirt off," he says.

Felicia doesn't even look at him, just follows his command the same way she did with the cigarettes. She doesn't have a bra on under her t-shirt, and her little breasts are mostly nipple. But big nipple. Her stomach folds up in four rolled sections when she sits. Her skin is white as could be, and has red pimples all over.

"Okay, I want a shot with your thigh scar, too."

Felicia complies with this the same way. She takes off her spandex shorts so she is totally naked and spreads her thighs out, exposing the burned circle on the inside of her thigh to the camera. I swear I'm in heaven and I can't help but look down at Felicia's crotch, half filled out with dark black hair. I realize I can smell it, that smell I've wondered about for so long. It's not too far off from how I imagined it would smell: sweet and salty, kind of like a beach. The camera keeps going off and I turn so Vert can get some shots with the fresh bandage on my arm and the splinter in my side. Tell me to eat it. I will. I will do as you say.

Felicia tugs at the side splinter and pulls the main part of it out; it starts bleeding down my side and she grabs a napkin from the table and wipes the blood off. Snap snap
goes the camera. When the blood flows again I reach down and get some on my finger and suck it off in my mouth. I can't help it. I let the inside out and then I have to put some of it back in again. That's the way it is.

"You want me to take my pants off?" I ask Vert.

"No, that's okay. Not now. Maybe later," says Vert. "Let me just get a picture of you two looking right at the camera."

Felicia gets up from where she's been kneeling and sits down next to me. She puts her arm around me and my naked torso rubs against a girl's for the very first time. It's fantastic. The blood from my side keeps flowing and some rubs onto her and this time I reach down and get blood on my finger and put it in her mouth and she accepts, sucks it even and it feels warm and gushy and so so nice. With my finger still in her mouth I get carried away and bend it so it pushes against the inside of her cheek, like a hook. I draw her face to mine, slip my finger out and Felicia presses her cheek against me. We look directly into the camera, smiling, watching Vert who is also smiling, and I think yes all right. Vert takes his photo. I lean back with my arms over my head and Felicia puts her head in my lap, gently. I can feel her breathing on top of me. I can feel myself breathing. I feel the splinters throbbing all around inside my face, the old and new scars over my arms, and I bring my hands down softly into her unwashed jet black hair, and weave my fingers through.
Concrete Lottery
First two weeks we worked side by side, Hector didn’t say a word. Neither one of us was good at breaking new ground. I didn’t know where Sugarman found him, but he brought him over to this tile job, said he was from Cuba, showed him how to mix up thinset, and made him part of the crew. I figured he was fresh off the boat, didn’t speak the language. But one day on break I walked into the owner’s kitchen and there was Hector, all up in the colossal fridge.

"Fuck this bullshit," he said, eating goat cheese and salsa off a Saltine.

"You should not do that," I said slowly, loudly. "If Sugarman sees you, or if the owner finds out, you could lose your job.” I threw my thumb over my shoulder to drive the point home.

Hector shook his head. He was hungry and didn’t care about my warning, whether he understood it or not. He kept eating until he was full, then he went back to work.

That encounter broke the ice though, and after that we started conversing some. I asked him questions, and his English it turned out wasn’t half bad. I had to work some to piece it together, but Hector explained that he’d tried to come here once before. That was on some rickety Cuban craft and he’d been caught and jailed at Guantanamo bay, where he spent a whole year. He had three friends that drowned, and another two that committed suicide. Someone taught him English in jail, and when he got the hang of it he taught what he knew to incoming inmates. Hector told me he’d wanted to come to America his whole life, but now that he was here he couldn’t stand it. There was genuine despair in his brown eyes.

"Marlon," he’d say, "Marlon, I am idiota. I miss my mader, Marlon. This is bullshit."

Working for Sugarman wasn’t his first job. His first job had been digging water trenches in Florida, where he worked with a bunch of shithheads who made jokes behind his back about his dark skin. He talked to a friend in the Bay Area—another Cuban immigrant with a couple of connections—and came out west. Here, a friend of a friend of
a friend in the Bay Area hooked him up with Sugarman, who—partly I'm sure because he'd be able to pay him low-end wage—had had the kind heart to give him a job.

Hector got to trust me some, since I'm old. He said I had a battle face resembling his grandfather. He teased me about my bald head because his head was bald too. "Good fashion," he said, and laughed.

Fortunately in his case it WAS good fashion. He had easy luck with ladies. Those deep brown eyes did a lot, and within two weeks he’d shacked up with an Argentinian woman named Bertrice. After that every day at work he’d sing "Guantanamera" and say again and again that he could hate America but it was okay as long as he was "making her."

We finished the tile job and moved to a new site: patio job at a mansion. The job was at the home of a very rich couple. There were two Mercedes parked in a port, gardeners, a pool, Steinway pianos, copper gutters. Sugarman somehow landed these jobs, probably with some very confident lying. He put in huge bids to these people and they blindly took it as a sign of his expertise.

For a long time we never saw the husband, but the woman of the house didn't work. She stood by the window, or sunned herself on the deck or by the pool, all the time playing with an unusual-looking cat. She never came over and chatted with us, just gave all the instructions to Sugarman who then relayed them to us. She had a round red face that made me think of my ex-wife, Irene, who also never worked but wasn't what you'd call a housewife either. Believe it or not, we'd had a house like this, with a dalmation, a fishpond full of carp, and a housecleaner.

But I tried not to dwell. "Marlon," I told myself, "life is a series of chapters. Try and be glad you’ve had so many."

Hector had been working steadily, and it was clear even Sugarman had developed a liking for him. Living with Bertrice his expenses were low enough for him to compile his first small cash roll, and one day he putted up in this beat-up mufflerless Tercel. "Take a look, grandfader," he said. "First carro."
I walked down and he opened up the back door and proudly displayed the duct taped interior.

“Luxury mobile!” I said.

"I drive you to lunch!” Hector said, excited.

"Well, that'd be fine, Hector. But let's nail some of the baseplates first. Okay?"

“Okay,” he said. “No problemo.”

We went at it, nails flying and saws buzzing and Hector sang his usual De Donde Creces Las Palmas. I learned the whole song from him. I caught the slow, laborious rhythm of it; it took my mind off the stiffness in my back, the unfreshness of my feet. We were singing it together, coming to my favorite part about the ciervo herido, driving ten pennies without even thinking, when I accidentally walloped the top of my thumb with my hammer. It flattened out and split open. Blood squirted everywhere. I let off a tortured grunt and Hector came over immediately for a look. He was okay with blood, even off a dry old man. Over in Cuba, he’d told me, they drank it hot out of the veins of goats and sheep and cattle. I lifted off my good hand and showed him the damage.

"Fuckin-A," I said. It was bad, worse than I thought. Hector took me by the arm, escorted me down to his car and helped me get in.

"You too old for dis," Hector said to me on the way to the hospital. But I wasn’t in the mood for jabber. I had that double-powered throb that sets in after numbness, and I was worried. This was a serious injury because I was feeling around for the top bone of my thumb and it was nowhere. All I felt was three or four loose pebbles up in there, and I needed to hold that skin flap together so nothing fell out. The older I got, the longer it took for these things to heal. Just give me something to hold back this pain, I thought, I'll never ever take up a hammer again. I shut my eyes tight, wished to God He would just remove the little part of my brain that answers to nerves. Then, when I lifted my lids there was something new next to me on the seat. Had it been there before? I could have sworn not, but there it was now: a cafeteria tray with random objects on top. Two plastic dice, a jar of wet tar, stones, a rum bottle, colors.

We zoomed up to the emergency room and Hector ran around and helped me out. He knew one of the boys cleaning the hospital windows and exchanged a few words with
him as we went in with me leaning on his shoulder. An x-ray revealed that my thumb was indeed smashed to the core, but they gave me a shot of something that did the trick on the pain. I got nine stitches up the front of my thumb and a cast around my whole hand up to my elbow. This took three hours and Hector stayed with me the entire time.

"Grandfather," he said. "I do not want to work without you."

I'd been alone for just over a year at that point. Most of that year I'd been trying to prepare to spend the rest of my years that way. My looks were well faded and I had no security to offer another woman. I couldn't imagine landing one on personality alone. I didn't even have the sex drive to go out and waste a day's pay on a night of purchased pleasure. And now this Cuban boy was acting like my son. Shit, what's he got to gain looking after me like this, I wondered. His plate's already full. Maybe they just bring them up that way back over in his Cuba. A house full of rats and in the cracked streets his mother taught him how to sing and dance.

Same as Hector, I had no benefits with Sugarman and Company. I did have a two thousand dollar deductible on a base rate plan I paid myself, but my job'd been under the table that whole year. I knew it was my own fault. I suppose I could've been taken in for tax fraud at some point, but I took my chances—they were probably pretty good ones. I had about double that two thousand in a bank, and no retirement. There were days I hoped to wake up and discover it was all just sleep, but always when I rubbed my eyes clear I saw my overalls were real and hanging on the wall of my filthy one-room studio. On top of this. I couldn't throw out my pictures of Irene. A counselor at the public health clinic told me I had to forget, had to not dwell on my old life, be only in the moment or perhaps look towards the future. But that was nearly impossible.

I had had problems with money since I was younger, living in Reno. I worked hard and got my own business started running a fleet of concrete trucks, which pulled in a fair share of cash. But I gambled. I counted cards, went hot and cold on craps, even got in a backgammon tournament or two. I was so good at winning I could do it maybe three out of five days in a week, which averaged me on the upside. Two decades passed like this, working concrete in the day, gambling at night, enjoying an occasional fling. Then
when I was fifty-five I met lovely Irene at Harrah's Club and we fell in love fast and got married. Irene didn't mind my gambling so much because she knew I knew how to win, and she wasn't planning on working herself. Plus, I did cut down some. She bought new clothes and a Lincoln Continental and for many years we were happy as doves. The nights I didn't gamble we dined out and went to the symphony, and I fawned over Irene as much as any husband could. She eventually asked me if I wanted to try to have a baby, put down an anchor, invest some of my winnings; and I was all for it.

We tried and tried to have the baby but were unsuccessful. We went to doctors and tested my sperm and her eggs, but found nothing unusual. After a year or two of this we got frustrated, communicated less, basically stopped trying. She went out and bought more things--Italian furniture, burnished brass--and I increased the pace of my gambling.

One day I came home and found that Irene had bought a used Porsche 944 for thirty thousand dollars from a man who--it later turned out--had given her false identification. She hadn't told me she was going to do this, and she hadn't bothered to check the checking account before she wrote the check. That week had been a bad one for me at the casinos. I'd lost fifteen of the fifty or so thousand dollars we had in the bank, so when her check cleared the next day we'd have just pennies left. A terrible fight ensued, and objects were thrown and broken and Irene ended up hitting me in the face and I am ashamed to say I hit her back. We sat in silence with the realization that we had hit rock bottom. I got it together enough to apologize for getting so out of hand, tried to give her a hug, and suggested we sell the car back to someone else. Otherwise where would I get the necessary capital to make more money gambling? She agreed, but when we went out to take a look at the car I discovered that the engine inside had been transplanted from a Volvo station wagon. This Porsche 944 had a top speed of 75 miles per hour. Another fight ensued and I ended up storming off in a rage. I rushed to the bank, took out the remaining five thousand dollars, and went on a mad gambling binge at John Ascuaga's Nugget. I was so worked up I remember spitting on myself whenever I opened my mouth to yell "C'MON BIG SEVENS!" Then I hit a couple evens on the roulette wheel. I had about twenty-five thousand dollars back when an acquaintance at the Nugget talked me into joining a highs stakes poker game full of high rollers at a private home across town. There, after losing a couple big pots, I bet my house and
business—I might as well have just bet Irene—on a five card draw no wilds full house which I thought had to be a sure thing.

If only I’d been brave enough to run towards the problem I’d have run towards Irene...loved her so much that my sperm would have had no choice but to swim harder. But when all that went down, short of taking my own life I couldn’t think of a way to overcome feeling pathetic about myself: a wrinkled divorcee with four thousand in the bank, no retirement, no sick leave, working for a two-bit unlicensed contractor, and my thumb was broken so badly there was a chance it’d never feel anything again.

Rarely do I gamble.

On the way home with Hector I thought to myself the one thing I had to be thankful for was the large amount of Vicodin that were prescribed to me. They were working well already, and I was going to need a lot of them, maybe a whole four thousand dollars worth. But I was also glad to have Hector’s ride and not be in a taxi or on a bus. I noticed then that the cafeteria tray was still there with the same things on top of it, that it wasn't the pain-induced illusion I thought it might have been.

"What's that you got here in the back-seat?" I asked, pointing my new cast at one of the stones.

"That, grandfader, is stones of the Orisha."
"And these?"
"An offering to Olodumare. And dados from my mader."
"Dados are dice?"
"Yes, dice, you say?"
"You use those dice?"
"No, grandfader."
"Why are they on the tray like that then?"
"Santeria. The Orisha are found in colors, number, drum beat, dances. In lightning flash we see...Orisha. And in the stones, and the rivers going over."
"You take your Santeria seriously," I said.
"Yes. No bullshit."
"Voodoo magic, huh? You know that sort of stuff?"
"I learn and I know something but I am not powerful, because I am not a priest, grandfader. But I have seen muchos."

"Well tell me something then. I'd like to hear."

Hector proceeded to tell me the story of Juan, a friend of his from Cuba who was dared one night by his group of macho buddies to get a particular beautiful woman in bed. He didn’t know this woman was the daughter of a powerful priestess. People placed bets on whether he would or would not get the bonita to bed. Juan, in the midst of his pride, even made a large bet—a month's wages—on himself that he would sleep with the girl. He gave it his all, started smooth but when she refused him over and over he got angry, and eventually grabbed the girl and took her against her will. He was to be tried for the rape, but still no one knew how to settle their bets, since technically he had had her. Some people wanted him not to be tried for rape so that they could collect "cleaner" money. When her mother the priestess found out she prayed to the Orisha below Olodumare with great passion and anger, and kneeled low against the ground to bring about power which would turn the young man Juan into a mouse. Juan disappeared that same day as the charges were being disputed. People thought he had left town for fear of being jailed, but the frightening truth was discovered when several days later Hector himself found a mouse chewing the letters J.U.A.N. into a discarded piece of bread. Everyone who had placed bets that night no longer felt the need to settle, for they all feared the priestess would revenge them too.

"That's a fairy tale," I said.

"No, it is true, grandfader. I found Juan when he was mouse. Later he got ate by a big bird."

"All right then," I said, shaking my head, holding back a chuckle. "If you say so."

"I do."

Hector drove me up to my flat and offered to come in and help me with some food, but I told him he'd done enough for the day. "Go home and make Spanish love with Bertrice," I said. He did a little two step dance, sang "everyting is gonna be alright!", and escorted me inside anyway.

"Go on," I said. "I'll be fine."
He headed home and I called up Sugarman and left him a message letting him know what happened. He probably showed up sometime in the afternoon and either got details from one of the several hired hands, or saw blood on the ground and figured things out for himself. Being hurt with Sugarman having no insurance almost made me want to just call the city and have his crackeijack company hung up, but I didn’t do that because I thought sometime I’d recover from this and need my job back if it was still available.

At home I fumbled around with the TV for awhile, thinking at least it was my left hand not my right. I still had solid command of the remote and could eat with a fork. I hadn’t eaten all day since we skipped lunch, and though I didn’t feel very hungry, the Vicodin had upset my stomach some and I went to the freezer to see about a TV dinner. As I did this though, I noticed that one of the stones from the back of Hector’s car was now on my kitchen table. How the hell? Hector stepped in the house but I didn’t think he’d gotten as far as my kitchen table. The objects on that tray, in retrospect, had a curious harmony the way they were all so different but somehow gave me the feeling they belonged together, like they were objects with personality, interacting. Like art, I supposed. Even this stone on my table. It was round and smooth and pinkish. I picked it up and it felt cold in my good hand. Felt nice. I didn’t know why I was getting like this, but I started to think maybe these things had some mystical power or meaning I didn’t consider when Hector told me about them in the car. But still, I was confused about how the rock ended up on my table.

Before I went to bed Sugarman called me back. He said he felt "real bad," specially because I was the oldest guy that’d ever worked for him. He said he felt so bad about not having insurance that he’d give me a hundred dollars a week while I was out, and he hoped I’d get well soon and return. It took every last ounce of my patience not to snap. I could shove that hundred dollars up your ass twenty times and you still wouldn’t be worth a doughnut hole, I thought. But I knew better by then. That’s the kind of frustrated move that leads you to further advance the jacked circumstances of your life; circumstances from which you cannot retreat. Before I hung up the phone I did deliver him a rattling suggestion.
"I think it’s about time we did things officially,” I said. “You get some insurance and I’ll file taxes...Or I WILL sick the city on you."

"Okay," he said sheepishly. "Let’s do that."

A few minutes later I got a call from Hector asking how I was.

"Not too bad, not too good," I answered. Then I told him he left one of his rocks here and he said: "Yes, I was warming it and left it down on accident. I will come see you and pick it up tomorrow. After work."

Then I popped a few Vicodin and went to sleep.

In the middle of the night I woke in pain. The Vicodin had worn off and it was dark and I was confused and didn’t want to get out of bed. I tossed and turned and eventually got up and fumbled for the light. When I went to look for the Vicodin though, I couldn’t remember where I’d put them. I felt sure I took the last ones in the bathroom, and there weren’t too many places for them to be in my tiny apartment. The rock, of course, still sat where Hector had left it on my table. I had useless rocks appearing out of nowhere and my indispensable medications had vanished. Somehow figured. Ice wasn’t going to do anything with a plaster wall in between it and the skin. I couldn’t get back to sleep with that ache, so I sat for ten minutes in the stillness of my room trying to think the pain away. I don’t feel this, I thought. My body isn’t real. It’s dust. It’s only a figment. Fake nerves. Everything’s in the mind.

This does not work. Real quickly I came back around to thinking of Irene and how much I had had and could have had and should still have had. I thought about how I missed the comfort of leisure, the joy of companionship. My mind filled with the face of the rich lady and her odd little cat. She was beautiful, but not as beautiful as Irene. I still had never seen her husband and I wondered how he treated her, if he paid her attention when he got home from a long day. I thought how I’d like to be in his shoes for just a week or even a day, play that piano, make love to her elegance in the middle of the night under her clean satin sheets, drink fine liquor.

With these fantasies, unable to sleep and still in pain, I found myself unable to resist the desire to go down to the 24 hour store and buy a few lottery tickets. It was a minor indulgence; just a tiny dose of risk and the excitement of possibility. I maintained
the faintest hopes that things could get better for me with the same quickness they had originally soured. Like a snap. I put on my shoes and jacket and walked out into the early morning chill.

At the store I took out three hundred dollars and bought two hundred and seventy seven scratch-off lottery tickets. That was just the number that popped into my head and felt lucky. Plus, it was never good to put it all down. I had learned that. I knew at least some of those tickets would be winners of two or five dollars—which still felt good; but what I was really going for was the big spin. With the remaining thirteen dollars I bought some milk, bread, a bottle of ibuprofen, some SNOOZ pills, and a couple of Snickers. I had the cashier put the lottery tickets in a separate bag and when he handed it to me it had a nice weight, like already it was solid gold.

I hurried back up the street to my apartment with a sudden rush of glee so strong I had—believe it or not—momentarily forgotten about my thumb. Once inside I didn't even pause to throw down the six or eight ibuprofens I'd planned to, just got immediately down to scratching. One after the other I placed the tickets flat on the table and scratched them with a dime. I tried to make this take as much time as possible, tried to pause in between each one but it was hopeless. With every loser the pleasure faded that much more, and the throb began to return in my hand. By the time I was done there was no big spin. I had four winning tickets totaling seventeen dollars—which had my losses at exactly two hundred and sixty bucks.

I put some water in a pot, started it, and went back to the TV where I turned on an episode of Cops. It was a special domestic violence episode. In one of the segments, to the astonishment of the cops, a tiny muscular woman had whooped her very large husband with the stick-end of a plunger and an arresting cop was being interviewed saying: "Going after the bad guys all the time, you never know what to expect." After that a show I'd never seen called REAL-LIFE TV came on. It consisted of videos filmed by everyday people who just happened to videotape extraordinary, often horrific events. There were videos of hand-gliding accidents and snake bitings; and some home footage of a clan of winged fairies that could be clearly seen flying around an umpire's head at a little league game. The people who submitted their videos were also contestants, and at the end of the show the person judged to have filmed the most exciting footage received a
prize check for a hundred thousand dollars. Almost seemed like too much, but I certainly wouldn't have turned it down.

Finally I felt too exhausted to let my thumb keep me from sleeping. But just as soon as I conked out I was awakened by a burning smell and I remembered the water I'd put on. It was boiled off now and the pot was smoking over the flame. I got up and turned off the stove. The whole apartment was filled with steam and smoke, and it felt hot and dense and moist like a sauna. I was disoriented. What time is it? I thought. Again the rock on the table caught my eye. That rock wouldn't let me go. Its color seemed changed in the fog. It looked more grayish-blue now. I thought about how I could accept how normal it was for water to change into steam with heat, or ice with cold, but it was unbelievable for a rock to change color in a matter of hours. Same way I had trouble believing the crumbled bones in the top of my thumb would actually grow back together.

I opened up the door to let some of the steam out just as Hector was pulling up. He parked his car pointing up the street's grade, rummaged around in the back, then got out and put a wooden wedge-stop in back of the back wheels before running up the steps.

"Grandfader!" he exclaimed, arms wide. He was covered in the silty dry residue left from splashes of watery concrete. "I brought Carl's Junior."

When we were inside Hector made a comment about dragon's breath and I told him I'd turned my house into a health spa. It was good to see him. He asked about his rock and I pulled it out and we sat down and started eating the food.

"Sugarman," he said. "That shit."
"Sweet Sugarshit."
"He tells me work harder. Without Marlon I need to work more."
"You take your time Hector," I said. "Take your own sweet time and don't listen to Sugarman. He needs you. You know the work and he's too lazy to get someone else, so you don't take that."

He nodded like he'd still take as much as Sugarman'd give.

I said: "Your voodoo rock is making me think. I don't know how it got on my table, and it changed colors from pink to blue."

I looked at it as I handed it back to him and lo and behold it was pink again.
Hector smiled, took the rock and said: "I get a glass of water yesterday before I leave, and forget the rock there."

"I guess I didn't notice," I said. "But that still doesn't explain how the colors changed."

He fixed his eyes on my face for a long moment then said he’d better get going, he wanted to bring Bertrice some of the Carl's Junior before it got cold.

We said goodbye. I went to the bathroom and had a look at myself. My hair was unwashed, I had a nasty grey three day shadow, and my armpits smelled rotten. I spent five minutes getting undressed and took an uncomfortable shower, holding my cast-heavy left arm out of the waterflow. When I got out, I found the misplaced bottle of painkillers on the floor beneath the overhanging lip of the cabinet under the sink. I opened it up and popped two down, then watched a couple more hours of Court TV before spending the night sunk deep in my couch.

Sometime in the morning I woke up to Hector's voice on my answering machine. I didn't even hear the phone ring. He said: "Grandfader, if you're there pick please up the phone. Something has happened...I need your assistance."

I thought just keep talking long enough for me to find the phone and pick it up, but he hung up too quickly. He'd sounded genuinely disturbed, and this worried me. I tried to figure out a way to call back but in my woozy state I could not remember the last name of the rich people. I had enough sense to dial star sixty-nine, but of course that number was not star sixty-ninable.

I struggled to get dressed, searched for my keys, and went out to wait for a bus that would get me within walking distance of the hills. There was an old lady with groceries sitting on the bus stop bench, and she smiled at me as if to say yes you know the feeling look at these heavy bags at my feet. I took another Vicodin, swallowed it dry, and I asked the old woman to wake me if I fell asleep before the bus came. She said she would, but I was too caught up wondering about what happened at the mansion to let sleep set in anyway.

When I walked up to the site there was a firetruck and a group of about twenty onlookers. Sugarman was there, standing aside from the crowd, and he looked as
troubled as Hector sounded. The lady of the house was yelling things at the firemen who were trying to calm her down. I strained for my faculties under the influence of that last Vicodin. Finally I spotted Hector shaking his smooth brown head, sweeping his eyes back and forth across the ground. I walked over to him and did not get the usual enthusiastic greeting.

"What's going on?" I asked.

Hector lifted his eyes from the ground to me, and pointed towards the newly poured patio in the backyard. It looked like it was done well. Then I saw the problem.

The lady's cat was embedded in a portion of the patio just beneath the deck railing. All four of its legs were submerged and the concrete wrapped nearly halfway up the animal's body. But it was still alive, screaming and meowing, jaws open in agony. The isolated head was gargoyle-like, and I was so captivated by the bizarre nature of the scene that I continued to stare silently at the poor creature for what seemed like a very long time.

Finally Hector told me what happened.

They had finished pouring the concrete at the end of the day yesterday. Sugarman had wanted to start tiling today, so he had had the cement company put extra accelerator in the mix. They poured it, screeded it off, put up wet cement signs and everyone went home. Hector came to my place. Soon after, the cat had been loitering on the deck rail. When it got the itch to move, it looked down and saw what it believed in its cat brain to be a hard planar surface. It jumped down and the weight of its body in motion plunged the body of the animal deep enough into the wet mix so that it couldn't remove itself. Undoubtedly the cat had screamed for its life, but the rich couple had taken an overnight to a resort spa and left the cat in the care of the gardener, who was out getting drunk and didn't notice the disaster until early the next morning. By then the concrete—rich with accelerator—had completely firmed up. When the lady returned, the gardener—in anticipation of her wrath—left only a note indicating where the kitty could be found, along with his written resignation.

"Damn," I said. "Wow."
The firemen were trying to think of ways to free the kitty while they consoled the lady, who said several times that this particular cat was a rare one from Asia—named Tzu Tzu—that she had paid twenty thousand dollars to import.

The most obvious tool for breaking up concrete was a jackhammer, but it would have been impossible to break up the concrete around the cat without also jackhammering the cat, which was obviously no good. They discussed a circular blade asphalt cutter, but that would only have cut a square patch of concrete which the suspended cat would still be in the middle of, not to mention that risked of slicing off a potential outstretched paw hidden beneath. One of the firemen said, "it doesn't look good." Another of the firemen talked about getting a veterinarian to come and put the cat out of its misery, which further intensified the woman's ravings. Her husband—a man very much like the kind I had pictured—had stayed home from work but was keeping a good distance from her, as is Sugarman.

Finally, at the lady’s imploring, a decision was made to at least use the asphalt saw to remove a small portion of the patio containing the cat, and to call a veterinarian to give it anesthesia while this was done. What to do afterwards remained undecided. Normally, one can control the splitting of concrete by drilling holes with a rotohammer and serrating it in the desired breaking points, but this too couldn’t be done without possibly drilling the cat.

Suddenly Hector got up and went over to the woman. He put a hand on her shoulder, pulled her aside and tried to land his eyes on hers. He said something to her which no one could hear, then he stepped back and massaged his own cheeks. Amazingly, whatever he said seemed to calm the lady down.

"Okay!" she yelled, raising up her arms at the firemen. She turned to Hector and asked his name and he told her.

"Okay!" she yelled again. "Hector says he has a way to free the cat! Do you hear that everyone?"

I'm not sure if anyone actually believed this but the words alone provided some relief. Sugarman approached, asked me what I was doing there and I told him that Hector had called. He looked surprised, as if he hadn't noticed we'd become friends. He said, "This is very deep shit we're in." And I said, with some pleasure, "Your down deepest."
"That fucking cat's worth twenty thou," he said.

"It's something else," I said.

By now the Vicodin was beginning to wear off and the throb in my thumb was again getting intense. But looking back and forth between the poor trapped cat and my white clubbed thumb, I told myself I had it easy. I'd take a whole year of sharp pains anywhere on my body before I'd let it get sealed up in concrete with just my head exposed.

Hector ran down to his car and retrieved his tray of Santerian objects. He came over, grabbed me and asked me if, when the time came, I could provide him that assistance. He also walked right up to Sugarman and asked him to stay away from the operations he was about to perform.

Hector picked up two of the rocks and began rubbing them against each other in his hands. He brought the rum over to the woman and gave her some instructions, then he brought me his mother's dice and had me hold them in my pocket.

"I thought you said you didn't do this sort of thing," I said to him.

"I know some," he said. "Can not hurt."

He told me and the woman to think hard about the cat surviving, to visualize in our minds the freed living cat. It was clear that for some reason-- which only Hector knew-- this plan involved a triangulation of the three of us. Everyone else he asked to stand back.

The vet arrived and shot the cat in an exposed area of the neck and it's head fell limply to sleep against the concrete block. I warmed the red plastic dice—they felt nice—in my right hand while we waited for the firemen to saw out the concrete square. I'd had to perform this sort of operation in my days running the concrete trucks. Every so often you'd pour something wrong—a bad grade, an unbalanced mix—and have to come cut it; jackhammer it out and repour. Concrete is frustrating like that; a material vital to the modern world that is too often taken grossly for granted. Add water to dust, mix it to pudding, and wait for rock hard form. This is nothing short of magic if you think about it in simple stupid terms. It was peculiar to imagine that the skin of all the world's skyscrapers at one point took the form of a viscous, grey soup. In this case, it was unfortunate that there was no known product or potion that could melt down a block of
concrete. At this stage concrete needs a tremendous blast of violent energy in order for it to be decimated and re-rendered to dust.

The firemen removed the block and Hector had them hoist the heavy chunk up onto the hood of his car where it rested loftily, pressing his front shocks down so the tires hit the wheel casing. He had me stand to the left of the car and he placed the rich lady to the right, then he climbed up on the hood behind the block and held his hands up covering his face for a solid minute.

"ORIISHAAA!" he yelled at the top of his lungs, as if he were standing on top of a mountain. He removed his hands from his face and his eyes were wide open and more brown and alive than I'd ever seen them.

"When I say TRES you throw the dice far into the air, that way." He pointed out into the distance along the road. Then he turned to the woman.

"When I say TRES you drink the rest of my rum."

We all nodded. I felt the gaze of a hundred distant faces, frozen in wonderment at the fact that this was not being televised. Then of course I noticed there was one man zooming in with his camcorder. There always is.

"Uno...Dos......TRES!"

As the lady swigged rum with the fervor of a thirsty athlete I hucked the dice the best I could with my right. Hector bent down and placed his feet up against the front windshield for leverage, then pushed the concrete block forward off the hood of his car. The screech of the concrete moving across the hood filled my ears with a curious music unlike any I have ever heard. It was rich and otherworldly, full of sublime tones. I watched as the concrete exploded on the ground as if it had been dropped from a height fifty times higher than the hood of Hector's Tercel; and way down the street I saw that the dice had just landed. They bounced and popped down the middle of the road as if dancing, then came to a stop.

The man with the camcorder approached, still filming. My eyes fixed on the lens as it recorded my boggled expression. I followed its glass eye down until found the unconscious cat, still breathing. It moved back upwards to rest finally on Hector, who
stood stiff with his arms at his sides, embraced by the very rich woman whose name we did not yet know.
Pimpsant The Untouchable
Eugene Toussaint Darby woke up at 7:30 and rifled through his grandfather's toiletries for some Dentucreme. He uncapped the tube, and squeezed some on his finger. Then, from his torn up book bag he took out the sheet of gold stars he'd stolen from Mr. Dozier, dried his right front tooth off with some toilet paper, and glued on a shiny one.

"Yeeah!" he cried, grinning the mirror. He was ready to get himself a part in his cousin's video filming today.

A month ago, Toussaint had gone over to his cousin Brett's house and auditioned—he rapped live for him and a group of his friends. Brett encouraged Toussaint, said he thought he had some real talent, and at the end of the night, when Toussaint left, the two of them popped fists, nodded, and said to each other "later, cuz."

Toussaint knew that starring in another rapper's video was only the first step, but he was positive that his unfadable committment to becoming the world's most famous rapper would overcome just about everything. He was going to make it. "If you believe in God," his mother said to him, "God'll believe in you, and we all need God, Toussaint. Don't forget it."

Toussaint wrote a rap about it:

God be given help
  to little niggas like myself
So please God please
  lend a hand to these O.G.'s

His father, Toussaint senior, had died in a car accident shortly after Toussaint was born, so he had never known him, just knew a few things about him. He was at one time in his own aspiring music group that put out one album called Soul District. He had been a cool and handsome man, hardworking and loyal. His mother had ten copies of his album and kept one hanging up in the bathroom where everyone could remember Toussaint Senior. On the cover was a picture of the group relaxing in the comfort of a lounge. His father is wearing a suit, ordering drinks, mouth open in laughter. Toussaint often stared at the picture with a kind of awe. He knew he looked like his father. He knew
his father had delivered the mail in the MacArthur district of Oakland. He knew that 
he’d been an A’s fan, and often sported a goattee. He didn’t miss him since he’d never 
met him, but like all boys with dead dads he wondered what his dad would be like if he 
ever could hang out.

"Mmm," he said, admiring his dental goldwork and shaking his head. "Pimps a 
pimp." He shrugged at his reflection, tied doubleknots in his shoelaces, shuffled through 
the already empty house to the kitchen and grabbed two untoasted pop-tarts from a box 
left out, slamming them down with some warm Vitamin D milk.

On the bus he pulled out his binder in preparation for the writing of a letter he 
was supposed to give to the principal for disciplinary reasons. He’d been having trouble 
in his science class as a result of his inability not to dance and blurt out rhymes in the 
middle of assigned tasks, and last week he’d gotten wild when Mrs. Dadzie left the room 
briefly to get a bag of treated soil for plant experiments. He’d gotten up on one of the 
desks and rapped full out:

Ten toes equals big dough
Now if you didn’t know I got hoes all the way to Frisko
all the way to O’Farrell
and down to San Pablo
I’m taking my scratch
green backs real fat
from behind my limo window
I puff my indo
and tell my little ho to go
to
the
sto
and collect up Tees dough

He jumped off desks, did leg splits, freaked the legs of Erika and Janine, then 
spun around and snapped his head back right into Mrs. Dadzie’s skirt. She yelled at him,
telling him she was going to give him an F unless the situation improved immediately, and that he was definitely going to get an F if he didn't write a punishing three page letter explaining why he should receive anything better.

Ain't nothing, he told himself, but he had to get the letter in if he was going to get ahead with his plans and move and shake. He didn't need any more whoopings or visits from a parole officer.

"Damn!"

It was 7:45. He still had a half an hour before the bus arrived.

*Dear Mrs. Dadzie,*

*I'm writing to you because I'm in desperate need of c, I think I should get a C because I'm trying to learn signs but it seems no matter how much I pay atenshon Imp all ways distracted by something, mainly the people in my class. I really don't like them. I hate them because no matter how hard I try they think I'm straight dumb, but Im not I do know a little sines it just takes me some to figure what the sinces are. I really need that grade because of some personal reasons, I'll tell you latter if I cant think of nothing else to say. Another thing that could help me get along with the class is if I didn't use the word PIMPSANT THE UNTOUCHABLE. The class hate that nickname that I gave my self because of jealously. They hate me because they ant me, thats how I fell about the the whole class beside Brian, Jose, and Pat they always tell me. I cant really think of that much stuff that I could say to you to change my grade but beg, so please please. I know my last test was bad, but I tried I didn't even copy off no body. I really tried but I didn't know it, some I did know but some I didn't. I just need this one favor I'll reapay you some how, maybe wen I get famous I'll remember you and give you some shutouts.

So it should be all good.

*Sincerely,*

*Toussaint Darby*

He put down his pencil and rapped to himself.

*Science suck a oh geez dick*
and I don't give a shit
about this cause I'm legitimate
got special forces
kickin' science in the nuts
Man oh Man.

He got to school during morning recess and found two eighth grade girls he had in mind to ask if they wanted to be in the video: Vivica and Janelle. They were getting out of P.E. They were exactly the kind of girls Brett told him to look for. “No braces, light-skinned, just about to get their titties on, and tall.” They both had a couple of inches on Toussaint.

"Yo Yo," he said. "You girls want to be in a video? My cuz is making a video, and he needs some girls, babydolls. He needs girls today! And y'all can dance, too! Look at this!" He said, showing off the gold star on his tooth.

"Uh huh?" Vivica asked, "A video?"

"Who's your cousin?" asked Janelle.

"Look," Toussaint said. "I'll promise to get you in the video, and then ya'll pay me back as my hoes. I won't make you ho actually, but you got to act like hoes, get on my arm and listen to my ass for a whole week, and I'll get y'all girls some phones, too!"

A third girl, Ursula, heard this conversation.

"Don't be listenin' to that l'il ole lyin' sucka" she said. "That Toussaint is a fool and a liar."

"Whyn't you just shut your big black mouth, ole ugly nasty grandma lookin' two hundred pound big whopper eatin biotch! Only reason I ain't askin' you is your so ugly. Don't listen to that extra sized ho cause she don't know what she's talkin' 'bout. And he shooed her off like a fly.

Ursula pointed her finger in Toussaint’s face. “You gonna get some of me when you don’t least expect it, l’il fool. You best watch out.

But Toussaint wouldn’t even look at her. He was focused on the other two girls, who seemed more interested in him then ever now that he’d said the word “video.”
He reached down in his pocket and pulled out a wrinkled ten dollar bill he'd wrapped around a wad of toilet paper.

"You girls want phones? You want to get famous? You want cash? Then listen to Toussaint 'cause Toussaint ALWAYS means what he says."

"He a liar," said Ursula, walking away. "I'm telling y'all right now. Toussaint nothing but a liar."

But it didn’t take Vivica and Janelle much to take the chance on him if their was really video exposure involved. These girls, already in stylish ass-hugging spandex, were ready for fame and fortune. They already had extensive collections of artful gangster rap, and they acknowledged J-Lo as a role model and a hero. They gossiped over the tabloid news and were already sexually active.

Plus, Toussaint had all the details straight, and he spoke too particularly for him not to be telling the truth. Brett, his "cousin," was helping make a video for local phenom rapper Gash-P. It was being filmed at a warehouse in downtown Oakland on Harrison and everyone was getting paid! They were ordering food from Garnett's Buffet, and Gash-P was hanging out with everyone, being hell of nice and taking care of people. They had a working hot tub on the set for the shoot, and they needed some young actors to do a flashback scene about the older rappers' childhoods. This was too much for Toussaint to make up. Plus, he produced from his backpack a pre-released, privately distributed single of Gash-P's new song, "3 degrees of P" and said they could have it cause he had two others that Popo had given him. With the evidence before them, why not—the girls figured—at least go check it out.

"Alright then," Toussaint said. "I got some business to take care of for a few minutes. But y'all meet me at the fence after second period."

The girls nodded. Toussaint went off to science class where he behaved so impeccably, dutifully completing a worksheet on earthworms, that Mrs. Dadzie came over to him, patted his back and said "My my Toussaint. That's wonderful."

Toussaint smiled his wide smile. Words like music to his ears. At the end of class he gave her the letter, confident that failing was now out of the question. That was taken care of.
The girls showed up as they promised and the three of them slipped under the fence on the east side of the school. Toussaint held out an arm for each of them and they took his arms and made their way to the bus stop where they caught the 33 downtown. Toussaint paid the girls’ busfare.

“I got you. I take care of you,” he said.

When they got off the bus at Harrison and Broadway, Toussaint spun a slow turn to get his bearings.

"I got to call my cuz," he said. "There goes a payphone."

Arm in arm in arm, they crossed the street over to the payphone in front Lucky's and Toussaint handed a dollar to Janelle, said "Hey baby, Go make some change."

"Are you crazy?" Janelle said. "You really expect me to do that? For you?"

"You really 'spect to be in Gash-P's video, don't you?" He retorted.

"I just hope you isn't lyin'," Janelle said, and went inside for some change.

Toussaint waited until she was out of sight before he turned to Vivica.

"You look like gold, girl. I've had my eye on you for months. How much"?

"You really are crazy," Vivica said. "Ursula might just be right. This pimp-ho shit is ridiculous, Toussaint."

"What now?" He pinched his fingers together and held them up to her. "Don't tell me you don't like it just when old Pimpsant is about this close to helping you get famous for the rest of your life. You know Gash-P? You know who he is, don't you? You know what happens to a girl who gets in a video of his? Are you nuts? Let me just get Brett on the line and trust me, you're gonna like me a whole lot more once you see what he's got goin' on with this video."

Janelle came out of the store and handed Toussaint four quarters.

"Damn Janelle! Calls cost thirty five cents! How you gonna get thirty five cents from four quarters? Ain't you ever took no math?"

Both girls looked down at him and he knew he wasn't going to get much more out of them unless he delivered his promise, so Toussaint himself went back inside Lucky's, changed a quarter, came out, put thirty-five cents in the payphone and dialed Brett's cell phone.
He held the receiver close to his ear, and with his hand he guarded the air between his mouth and the mouthpiece.

"Yeah."

"Yo, Brett."

"Little Toussaint?"

"Yeah."

"Where you at?"

"Lucky's at the Cornor of East 18th and Lakeshore. How's the video going?"

"Yeah...Yeah. We're doin' the video."

"Well. Where you at?"

"You get any boodie?" Brett asked.

"Uh huh, I got two butts right here. Monnboodies, in fact."

"Cool. Well come on down, then, cuz."

"Yeah, I just need to know how to get there exactly."

"Were over at Dwayne's place today."

"What about the warehouse?" said Toussaint. "I thought y'all had a warehouse. A hot tub and shit. I told these ladies about the hot tub."

"Yeah, we ain't got no hot tub 'til Thursday. That's when we move the shoot to the warehouse."

"Well, is Gash-P there?"

"Yeah Yeah. Uh. Gash'll be here any minute now. Let me tell you how to get to Dwayne's. You cool with that?"

"Yeah, I guess so. Go ahead then.

Toussaint got the directions and reassured the girls that it was all good and everything was still on, they just had to walk a little further. So they resumed their arm in arm status and headed off for Dwayne's. Toussaint was happy that the gold star on his tooth wasn't coming off. A good sign. He wondered if the same thing could work with a tiny fake diamond. Everything has to sparkle when the lights hit. As they walked he mumbled verses. He appreciated that, unlike so n't give him any trouble for rapping.

'Ten toes to the pavement'
you know I'm never saving this
the scratch that I be making
on the real.
I keep that on the real.
Nigga!
I thought you feel me
What you feel is the quantum nigga!
You felt a rich little OG from the T
Oh Yeah, that's right. Niggas and hoes unite!

After they had been walking for almost ten minutes Vivica took her arm back.
"You sure you know where you going?" she asked.

Toussaint looked offended. "I guarantee!" he said. "Don't you worry 'bout nothin', girl. We almost there."

Dwight's apartment was a two story abandoned sewing factory in Chinatown. Toussaint found the sign Dwayne had told him to look for--some Chinese letters with "Nuhtz" written over it in black.

"Now, see." He said to the girls, ringing the buzzer.

"L'il T," said Brett when he came to the door. He and Toussaint bumped fists.
Brett had shaved his head recently and was wearing dark maroon-rimmed sunglasses and a white silk shirt that opened low and exposed his smooth brown well-chiseled chest.

"Lookin' good ladies!" said Brett to the girls

Brett was attractive and made the girls blush. He smelled like herb smoke and cologne. Toussaint was pleased that his ladies were impressed with his older friend. Yes, he thought, let the party begin.

The three of them followed Brett upstairs, where there was loud music playing. Probably something new from Gash-P, Toussaint thought, but he couldn't be sure because he did not recognize the words.

Back in the days I had some hoes
but they done bounced
up and down around the town
I looked around
they can't be found.

There were ten maybe fifteen people upstairs. Two of the men and two of the women were white, but there were only three women in all. Hardly anyone in the room acknowledged their arrival and Brett gave them no introduction. The three women had a lot of red lipstick on and were dressed in matching black mini-skirts with bikini tops. They whispered in each others ears when the young trio arrived. Toussaint tried to make eye contact with them; with anyone he could; tried to give a little nod, maybe break some ice. But this didn't work. How was he going to get his part? Do his lyrics? When was Popo going to present the details of the opportunity? Again Toussaint went over his intro.

I was five six seven I was counting my hoes.
Fat tall short and skinny you know anything goes.

The white guys also had shaved heads but they were wearing black and gold zebra-stripe leather jackets over their bare chests with tight spandex shorts below. They looked like twins but one of them, Toussaint noticed, had a tattoo on his forehead of a skeleton wrapped around the Cross. The black guys also had bald heads and spandex shorts, but their leather jackets were white and gold. There were two video cameras on tripods at opposite ends of the room, and some lights and umbrellas mounted just above the film apparatus. Also, there were still a few old industrial sewing machines pushed out of the way in the corners, and the main room--where they all were--had three or four doors attached to it that were closed. Toussaint wondered if Gash-P was behind one of them getting ready for the shoot.

The air was full with a mixture of smokes. One woman got up to dance and barefooted Popo, still in his bathrobe, went over to her, gyrated around her, grabbed her ass to the beat at intervals.

Vivica and Janelle kept their hands folded in front of them. They stood stiff and speechless. Was this what they had pictured? Toussaint hovered between them, his head
turning right to left nervously. He was searching—unlike usual—for words. He couldn't stand being squelched. They might like to squelch him in science class, but not here, not at the filming Gash-P's video where the whole point of everything was rap rap and more rap.

He continued practicing lines:

Well, my dick is hard
and my dick is long
I got four nuts and a back that's strong
that's why I do you right
and do you everynight
cause Pimp's in the mix
with fifteen ten-toed hoes in the HOUSE
Yeah, c'mon. Niggas and hoes unite!

This was where he expected to be able to go full out and be appreciated. He didn't care that everyone was older than him, he just wanted a proper introduction before he unleashed. He wished Brett would come through for him, come over maybe and put his hand on his shoulder and introduce him as a young genius rap maestro and dance machine.

Finally, one of the white guys came over and squatted down beside them.
"I'm Horace," he said. "I'm one of the directors. Would you kids like something to drink? How about a beer? We got cold beers."
Toussaint nudged the girls.
"Yeeah," Toussaint said, "We'll take beers, whatever you got."
Horace turned and open one of the closed doors just wide enough to slip through it, and when he did more thick billows of smoke came out. Toussaint could see that there were more people in that room—quite a few—and he badly wanted to take a peak at Gash-P.

Horace came back with three cups of beer, handed them to the kids, and they took some sips.
"You guys want to be in the video, huh?"

"Yeah. 'Course," said Toussaint.

"Well, we can probably arrange that. But I hope you kids are prepared to be here awhile. The first thing I can tell you is that with videos there's a lot more delays and waiting than there's rolling cameras. But if you can stick around, have some more drinks or whatever, it shouldn't be too long."


Horace put a hand on Vivica's shoulder. "Relax girls. Have a seat. Let Horatio know if there's anything else he can get you, okay?"

The girls were comforted by his gesture. They took off their jackets and sat down in some unoccupied folding chairs next to the couch. They nudged each other, smiled, giggled a bit.

An hour later Horace announced they were ready to shoot some more footage, and told Toussaint he should try on a few hats and jackets; have Brett help him choose the right combination.

By this point everyone seemed drunk. Vivica and Janelle moved from the folding chairs to the couch beside Horace the director.

"Do we need to find something to wear, too?" Vivica asked.

"Yes, yes girls. Absolutely, please do," he replied.

Vivica and Janelle gave each other an excited look. The beer had removed a good deal of their nervousness, and Toussaint's too. The girls started to move their hips and shoulders with the others in the room. Several of the male dancers took notice and cheered them on.

"Get it up girls! Alright!" They yelled.

The more they cheered them on, the more the girls got comfortable and enjoyed themselves, and Toussaint became convinced that all this sudden motion meant Gash-P would soon be coming out from behind one of the shut doors.

But ten more minutes passed and still no Gash-P. A couple of serious looking types came out from one of the rooms and prepared the cameras to shoot, but no Gash-P.
"Okay everybody" said Horace, "Were warming up for Gash’s childhood pimp stage. This here's Toussaint....Step up son. You loose? You ready to go?" Horace handed another beer to the boy and Toussaint took a long swig.

"Okay, take some time to get warm. And just get started whenever you feel comfortable."

Toussaint broke into some of his favorite dance moves without hesistation. Left, right, fists up, three sixty, dip, swoop, electric, tingle and shine. "Turn up the music," he said. "I can take it louder, way louder," he says. He felt dizzy, but he could do it. The music invaded his limbs and he pivoted from camera to camera in rhythm, preparing to rhyme. He moonwalked, eyes closed and with such intensity that he didn't notice when one of the dancers put his hand up Vivica's shirt, kissed her on the neck and she kissed back, or when Horace led Janelle through a mystery door to meet Gash-P, the infamous invisible rapper. The beat pounded so hard Toussaint forgot all about the fact that this was a warm up. He didn't care that there was nobody behind the camera, that the lights had in fact been dimmed and that most of the people there had taken off their set-wear. His hat slipped almost to the bottom of his forehead, and with arms outstretched, Toussaint came with the entire encyclopedia of every rap verse he'd ever written.

Aw dog, suckas keep trippin
I'll do time if I pull this trigga,
got the scratch stacked fat
in a hatchback full of goods
inside my jacket
hittin green like Tiger Woods
and eating sug dee lite
with cold monkey and sprite
I'm stackin cash I got the dilsnick butter
throw in niggahs left and right in the gutter
did I stutter
uh huh fool go ask your mother.
The music went on and on; it took him no less than twenty minutes to go through
the set one time, and when he finished he just started back at the beginning and went
through it again. Somewhere in the background he thought he heard PoPo's voice He was
saying "That's my nigga!" over and over and over. He moved his feet and mouth until he
could no longer continue, until he was out of breath and collapsed with clenched fists on
the floor.

When Toussaint awoke the music was off. He felt groggy. Slowly he got to his
feet and saw several other people crashed out on the couch. He couldn't see Vivica or
Janelle anywhere. Shit, he thought, vaguely remembering when he last saw them. He
didn't see Brett either. Two of the secret doors were wide open and the rooms behind
were empty and smelled like smoke. He didn't know quite what to do from this point,
but he decided he should probably try and find a way to get himself home and make sure
his ladies were okay.

Then, just as he headed for the exit he heard the last closed door click open. A
tall man wearing reflective aviator sunglasses and a dark green parka with a fur-lined
hood emerged. The jacket was zipped up above his neck, covering his mouth, and he
also wore the hood. Across the front of the parka in large white stitched letters was
written G-A-S-H. Toussaint looked back in astonishment from where he stood beneath
the door jam.

It was him.

Gash looked across the room and yawned. Then he noticed Toussaint standing
there looking at him, but didn't say anything to him.

"Yo main," Toussaint tried to get his attention. "You see me do any of my
rhymes?"

But Gash-P didn't answer. It was like he didn't even hear the boy. He yawned
again, then shut the door behind him and walked across the room to the same exit where
Toussaint stood. Toussaint could hardly see any of his face under the hood, sunglasses,
and zipperred parka. He tried to match the face with Gash-P videos he'd seen in the past,
but he remembered that in all those videos the rapper had worn equally thick disguises.
Gash stopped for a moment in the doorway and peered down at the boy, patted him once
on the head and said, "What’re you doing here, l'il man? Don't you got school or
something?"

That's when Toussaint realized that a whole night had passed while he had slept on the
floor, and it was light outside because it was morning.

"I got to go get me a doughnut," Gash said. "Have a good one, G." And simple as
that he moved right past Toussaint, down the stairs and out the door.

Toussaint never saw him again. He stood there for a few moments amazed, then
made his own exit out onto the street and caught the 33 back uptown to school.

On the bus he saw the city of Oakland stream by: the Henry J. Kaiser Convention
center, The Dai Wu Kung Fu Center, Casa Estrella, his house on East 15th. He shook his
head, recalling all he could about the glory of last night. The music was still in his ears
and he badly wanted to know where Vivica and Janelle had gone off to. He knew he
should have looked after them better than he had, should have kept an eye out like a
pimp's supposed to, but he also told himself that they were big girls and could take care
of themselves. For girls that weren't really real hoes, they had no problem getting nasty
with company twice their age.

Finally, the bus stopped near Frick Jr. High and he got off. He asked an old lady
for the time. Ten after nine. He hadn't even missed science class yet and he ran straight
there.

If Vivica and Janelle had found their way back to campus, they weren't in the spot
where they normally hung out between classes. A minor concern. They were probably
just as worn out as he and might be staying home to sleep.

Toussaint arrived out of breath, opened the door and moonwalked into his seat.
"Guess what!" He announced to the class. "Pimpsant has a video 'bout to come
out! So check it!"

The kids rolled their eyes. Here we go again, they all thought. Toussaint noticed
that Ursula was in class staring at him.

"I wish you’d just disappear," he said.

"Settle down please, Toussaint." said Mrs. Dadzie. "You remember what we
talked about?"

"Naw, serious. I do! But this l'il G 'bout to blow up!"
Just watch!

"Fool, you the dumbest suckah I ever saw in my life. EVER!" Ursula chimed in.

"Okay, enough people!" Mrs. Dadzie raised her voice. "Ursula! Toussaint! We do have a lesson to complete."

"Naw, Fuck it and fuck y’all. Y’all some dirtworms," said Toussaint, slapping his chest proudly. "Y’all don't believe and y’all gonna be sorry. You can't ignore a l’il G forever. Lemme tell you!

"TOUSSAINT!"

"Naw, uh huh. HELL NAW! I don't have to be tastin' some bullshit from all y'all bitches. Get off me. I told you how it is." He spread his hand out on his chest, curled his lips and got up from his seat.

This is Pimplsant the untouchable
All the rest of y'all is punchable
bitches like Ursula
fat and ugly grill
gets no dick
and eatin biscuits...

"TOUSSAINT!" Mrs Dadzie tried one last time, but it was hopeless. He kept on and on and on and eventually all Mrs. Dadzie could do was call hall security on the intercom phone. In a couple of minutes a large man came to drag Toussaint off to the office. He struggled against the disciplinary officer with all his twelve year old strength, but it was no use.

"God damn right," Ursula said as Toussaint was being hauled off. "Serves you coorect."

Through Toussaint’s eyes the many faces in the classroom got further away and smaller until he saw them all together in a frame similar to video: a gang of heads shaking side to side in synch.
But still he knew it was just a matter of time, that sooner or later each of them, even old Ursula, would have no choice but to recognize the infamous unfadability of the Pimpsant the Untouchable.