

# Equinox

Originally Published Under the Title *Tides of Lust*

Samuel R. Delany

1973

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**A hard-hitting, controversial title from one of science fiction's legendary careers. *The Scorpion* has sailed the seas in a quest for every possible pleasure. Her crew is a collection of the young, the twisted, the insatiable. A drifter comes into their midst, and is taken on a fantastic journey to the darkest, most dangerous sexual extremes—until he is finally a victim of their boundless appetites. A reprint of Delany's classic *The Tides of Lust* now bearing the author's original title.**

This is an artificial, extravagant, and pretentious book, Joe Soley. But it is honest before its artifice; and in this age of extravagant expressions, honesty is the last pretension.

Paul Caruso, you have made heroic attempts to keep me from going mad. But these pages bear the most circumscribed reverence for sanity. They concern form—which saves no one, but is icily instructive.

I offer you both, then, this book in exchange on strictures of transactual calculus. In it are infinite summary informations. Summate only if you would.

## Note Of Moral Intent:

First finished by Delany in autumn 1968, *Equinox* contained a number of (fortunately secondary) characters below the age of consent. Need we say that the sixties and even the seventies were more morally lax decades than our current one? Certainly they were times of greater license—if not looser sexual ethics. Delany's novel has sustained considerable intellectual attention since its appearance in March 1973 and has been the subject of praiseful analysis in various journals and books—one reason, clearly, for republishing it today. (For a partial bibliography, see page 171.) We are torn, then, between faithfulness to the verbal artifact we would herewith reproduce (under the writer's original title, rather than the sleazy, editorially—imposed *Tides of Lust*, which it was renamed by its initial publisher, Lancer Books in 1973, for exploitations sake alone) and the dictates of the present's greater sense of moral responsibility. To that end we have added an even hundred years to the direct mention of the age of any character in the original version clearly presented as a minor associated with licentiousness: Bethy, Benny, Marny, Pietro ... We remind you how powerful such a strategy is: a six year old in a context such as this invites unspeakable possibilities; a 106 year old we just assume the *comme moyen sensual*, much less the pedophile, finds anaphrodisiac if not—in such a context—ludicrous. We hope the disruption of the image will prevent the age of these characters (now emended throughout the text) from functioning as a node of libidinal exploitation, as all directly stated ages in the novel are now eighteen or significantly above.

## Chapter One. Riders Of The Scorpion

Mordecai played Mephistopheles—so much less impressive in Marlowe's than in Goethe's version. He delivered the lines that begin, "Why this is hell, nor am I out of it," with chilling grace, as though this admission of irrevocable damnation and despair were nothing more than an epigram, some

piece of inconsequence by Sheridan or Wilde.

—*Camp Concentration*, Thomas M. Disch

The color of bell metal:

Longer than a big man's foot; thick as a small girl's wrist. Veins made low relief like vines beneath the wrinkled hood. His fingers climbed the shaft, dropped to hair tight as wire, moved under the can—vas flaps to gouge the sac, black as an overripe avo—cado: spilled his palm (it is a big hand), climbed the shaft again.

There is little light.

What's here bars the shutters in gold. Water lisps and whispers outside. The cabin sways, rises. There is a wind out to sea, that means. That means here at port it is clear evening.

The dog on the floor claws the planks.

The captain's toes spread the footboard. His chin went back and his belly made black ridges. The long head rolled on the pillow, brass ring at his ear aflash.

The hood slipped from the punctured helmet.

The knuckles, like knots in weathered cable, flexed on him. The rhythm started with the boat's sway. Increase: his hand and the boat syncopate. The doubled pace pulled his buttocks from the blanket. The rim of his fist beat the tenderer rim (one color with his palm). His breath got loud. It halted, and halted, and halted.

Stop-action film: a white orchid from bud to bloom.

Breath regular.

Mucus drips his knuckles. Still stiff, the shaft glis—tens. Pearls on black wire.

"Kirsten?"

He swung his feet over the edge, his shoulders hunched (dull as cannon shot); his dirty shirt was sleeveless. Buttons: copper.

"Kirsten!"

His voice: maroons, purples, a nap between vel—vet and suede.

"Come down here!"

When the door cracked, he laughed.

Her hair was yellow, paler than the light. Her smock, torn at her neck, hung between her breasts. One dull aureole rose on the blue horizon. Her face moved with its laughter before she saw, "Captain, you ...?" saw, and smothered it, to have it break again. Blue eyes widened in the half dark. "What do you want?"

She stepped onto the rug. A copper anklet sloped beneath the knob of her ankle, crossed low on her callused heel. (Uneven hem brushes smudged knees.) A print sash bound her belly.

"Where is your brother?"

"In the wheelhouse, asleep."

"Where were you?"

"On deck. I was sitting in the sun."

"With the men on the docks all coming by to stare? How many with their hands in their pockets?"

"Oh .. A"

"None of them with what I got." He leaned back. His fingers tracked his stomach. "Come here. Tell me what's for supper."

"Your thoughts have gone as high as your gut, now?"

"How do you and the boy get chores done if you sleep and sun all the time?"

"But what is there to do in port?" She stepped across the rug, laughing.

He grabbed her wrist. She stumbled and he caught: "How many times?"

She pushed his chest. Her wrist turned under slippery fingers.

"Five times? Six? I'll say seven—"

"But see, you've already—"

"Once already. Six more now." He kneaded her inner thigh.

“Captain ...!” She tried to pull away.

His hand went beneath the hem.

She shrieked and bit the sound off. What spilled after was a giggle.

“How many years have I had you two, now?” His forearm shifted like bunched blacksnakes. She tried to push his hand from under her skirt. Stopped trying.

She opened her lips and caressed his arm.

“How many years? Seven. Now, once for each year you’ve worked on my boat.” He looked down at himself.

She touched where he looked: she took it, slipping the loose skin from the head. When she fingered beneath the twice-full bag, he arched his back.

“Pig. Sit on it. Little white pig ...” Three callused fingers were knuckle-deep in her. She bent; her hair swept his face. He caught it in his yellow teeth, twisted his head. Kirsten grabbed at her hair, and made an ugly sound. His teeth opened on laughter; it and her hair spilled black lips mottled with cerise.

Barking.

Claws at wood.

Black paws and long muzzle lapped the bunk. The captain kicked the dog with his bare foot (the big chain around his ankle jangles). “Down, Niger! Down, you stupid dog!”

Down; then back, nuzzling between them: dog’s tongue. One color: Kirsten’s nipple, the dog’s tongue, the captain’s palm. Niger lapped her crotch for salt.

“Down, Niger!”

The dog barked.

Then the captain looked up: frowned.

One shutter had swung open. A woman’s face pressed the glass (dock-side of the boat), tongue caught at the corner of her mouth. Her fingers tipped the sill. Sunlight behind her exploded in loose hair, dimmed her features.

Niger barked at her once more.

Her eyes shifted; she saw the captain. Her mouth opened, her palm slapped the pane, a sail of sunlight slapped the far wall: the window cleared and burned.

Niger wheeled the room, leapt on the door. It banged the hatchway wall. Claws clicked at the lad—der. The door swung slowly back.

The captain: frowning. But Kirsten’s hair, brush—

ing his neck, fell from his face like lamé, swept back from hers: she had not seen.

One knee was beside his left hip, one beside his right. She swayed, pulling at her brush; dug in the lips. His head lodged. Her hair rasped the plum glans. He gasped and grabbed her head.

Her lips struck his. His mashed open and swal—lowed hers. His tongue troweled her teeth; her teeth opened. He licked the roof of her mouth. He pressed her neck, her shoulders. Her breasts, bared now, bulged between the black bars his fingers made.

Gold brush lowered to iron wool.

Their mouths were windy with one another’s breath. He thrust, and caught her lips in his teeth. She fell, clutching him. Tried to push away. He took her buttocks, his thumb tobogganing her, moist. He opened the wrinkled bud. She tried to block his tongue with her tongue. She failed.

He rolled with her. His knuckles scraped the wall. When she was beneath him, he braced his feet on the footboard and twisted on her. His belly slapped her. She tried to hold him in with her legs, but he pulled up, to fall, and: her fingers arched his neck, mashed his rough hair, arched. He rocked faster than the boat around them.

In stop action: an ice shard melts in a copper cup.

He lay on her. Her hair was wet to brass blades on her neck. He touched them with his tongue. Then he pushed himself up.

She gargled and reached for him. He glistened above her. (She sees him glance at the porthole, does not understand why.)

Her fingers palped the gold and coral wound.

'Two!' he panted. "Turn *over*"

Her eyes were closed, her legs apart. She moved her head on the crushed blanket, hands on her stom—ach.

"Turn *over*!"

He grabbed her leg and pulled. She felt lazy, she felt hysterical. Opened her eyes as he yanked her ankle again. (Why was he staring at the porthole? The light, like blood, varnished his big lips, his flat nose, flamed on his sloping brow till rough, rough hair soaked it up.) "Owww ...!"

Her knee struck the floor. She stretched her arms over the blanket, and rocked her face on the damp, hot wool. The smell of him: She moved her lips there, her tongue. The taste of him.

The captain breathed hard. He raised his hand, high, drew back lips and shoulder and hip.

*Crack!*

Her buttocks shook. Redness bloomed and faded. She gasped, then bit her tongue. His hand swung back the other way. She gasped again.

He pulled apart her cheeks, puckered his lips, and pushed out his saliva. It trailed in the discolored cleft. When the foamy tear reached the sphincter, he leaned on her. The hood peeled. Entrance, and her shoulders came up. The heat of her surprised him. He caught a breath: then let it chuckle from him as he eased. Kirsten clutched the end of the mattress. He grasped her wrists, fell. She screamed, and her back, wiggling, slid under his chest. He hissed, "Swing it." He whis—pered: "That's right, girl." He hissed again, "Dance on that black stick, little monkey!"

Soft things slipped and broke. Something with points crumbled by him as he tunneled and plunged. Her buttocks mashed and spread under the blades of his pelvis. He bit her shoulder, kneaded the skin in his big teeth till it bruised burgundy.

He let go of her arm, felt under her belly. He thumbed the dry hairs; thumbed the wet. Four bunched fingers, in and in further. He spread them in her slop.

She made sounds in her chest.

He felt his swollen passage beyond her, wet and tender. His thumb, again, slipped under the thicken—ing tab folded in the roof.

Her sounds were between simper and growl. Her smock was a wet roll at her back's small. She heaved at him. When he withdrew, she butted up to impale. His down stroke pushed her to the bed. And again. And—

In marble: white rock crumbles from the freshet.

In the shadow his back shone. Heavy, twinned breath. Sweat ran Kirsten's side, curved at her breast bulging out.

"... three," while cooler air came between her back and his belly when he pulled—

"No! Don't take it ..!"

He stood, panting. His shirt lay on the floor. His belt dangled at each hip. The canvas pants creased down over his buttocks. "Once more ..."

"You're not tired yet?" She let herself slip to her knees beside the bed. The triangle of sheet by the bunched blanket was wet. He let his knees bend, touched her back. As his hand walked on her shoul—der she dropped her head back. He scratched her neck, ran his forefinger in the damp troughs of her ear. He cradled her head when she rolled it over his palm. (It is a big hand.) Her hair fell in ingots on his forearm. His fingers deviled them to cloudy snarls.

Through the closed shutter, bars of light reddened the bedding. The captain reached to close the other. It swung to, the catch failed, and it swung out again. He made a fist in her hair.

"You want more?"

"... no/'all breathy.

"You want it!"

"But Gunner has tired me out, all this morning—" her smile a grimace as he tugged. She let her face fall against his thigh.

"Kiss it. That little dirty-face has made you hot for more. Yes? You don't, and I'll beat you and that little brother of yours. Kiss it all over, with your tongue."

She swiveled her cheek on his hip. "But it's all ..." She slid her hand into the sweaty fold between leg and sack, "... all soft."

"You make it hard." He pushed her into it.

"And dirty!" She tried to pull away.

"It's your dirt."

She made muffled contest, but he pressed her face in. When he took his hand away, she didn't pull back. Her tongue went warm in the crevice. He grinned, and fingered her hair back. She took the limp length in her hands, opened her mouth, and tongued him to the hilt hair.

"Underneath. Go down underneath. Get it all in, girl. Before it gets too big." He moved his legs. "There's a lot of junk in the pocket. Tongue ... hungry. Yeah! Be sweet to it. That's where I like to see you. Be hungry. Be hungry and eat me. Hey, don't back away! Take it, deep." He brushed her distended cheek with bunched knuckles. "It's going, yeah, down. All the way. Get ready. Yeah," and, "Yeah ..." and, "Oh, yeah!" He held her hair. Hardness and then soft ridges over his thrust. He swiveled to mash his hair on her mouth, till he felt her gag constrict him. He let her retreat to breathe, then filled her throat again. "Yeah ..."

"Go underneath again." He took his shining stock in his left fist; his right pushed her down; pushed half of the sack in her mouth with his thumb. "Tongue it. That's good—"

He tapped her. "Watch your teeth! No nutcrack—ers. A little tickle." His left fist swung the long arc, fell at her face. "Now the other one ... fine!"

He breathed like a dog. She held his hips and rocked her face between his legs.

"In your mouth, girl. Or let me leak it on your face ...."

She swallowed him, and felt the under-tube swell down her tongue, retreat, swell again. In a geyser of black mud, a sudden eruption of white froth

(Eruption ...) and he pushed: thrust, and gout, thrust, thrust, gout.

He held his breath, and let her fall against the bed's edge. The black, bright length wrinkled, sagged. Her lips glistened. Her eyes were closed.

He sat on the bed and began to take loud breaths. She moved between his legs to lay her head on his groin. He moved one finger over her forehead, wiping wet brass from beaded alabaster. She put her palm on it, pressed it on her cheek.

"Why are you so tired," he asked, "after so little?"

She opened her eyes. "Gunner worried at me all morning, I say. Please, Captain. Let me go up and rest for a while. I'll come back, maybe after only an hour or so."

"And leave me to make love to my fists? First the left, after that the right. What then? I can't lap myself like Niger."

"You've had me every way! What else do you—"

He squeezed her breast; Kirsten closed her eyes. "Oh, yes, I know the things you think of." She looked up again. "Let me go upstairs. I'll send Gunner down."

He frowned.

"Finish with him. I'm too tired."

"He tired you out for me?" The captain tongued his lower lip. "Wake him up."

"I will. Right now." She stood.

She tried not to let him see her smile as she bent to pull her bunched shift down her hips. She shrugged into the sleeve, tried to cover her breast.

The captain fingered himself.

The torn cloth would not cover her any more.

Suddenly Kirsten got a strange expression. She reached quickly, took his face in her hands and thrust her tongue way in his mouth. He licked it. But when he reached beneath her hem she pulled away.

"I'll send Gunner!"

She turned and ran through the lines of sun.

In the minute alone he thinks about the currents that have brought them here. He thinks about light, and suddenly he remembers the woman at the pane. He turns to look.

“Captain?”

Knuckling his eyes, sleepy Gunner came in. His hair, pale as his sister’s, pawed his neck, rioted at his forehead.

“Come here.”

The boy walked over the rug, paused. The captain patted the blanket, so the boy sat. He took the back of Gunner’s neck between thumb and forefinger. Shook him.

Gunner grinned: there were twin acne spots left of his mouth. He touched the captain. “What am I gonna do with this elephant?”

The captain moved his palm on the boy’s bony back. “You’ve done half of it already.” And shook again. “Hey, little mule. Kirsten says you tried to climb her back and break into her with your Johnny stick.”

Gunner looked at his lap. The captain slipped two fingers into the buttonless fly. Gunner looked up. “I did not!” But grinned.

“What did you do?”

“I nosed her to see if I could smell anything you’d left there.” He touched the captain’s knee. Small hand: it has calluses from boat work, the nails quick—bitten. His grin fell open into a smile. “Got my face wet. And she wouldn’t let go my head.”

“Did she kiss you back between your legs?”

“She wanted to. But I hid him in my hands.” Gunner pulled apart his fly. Johnny jumped. Little brass wires snarled through the captain’s fingers. Gunner frowned. “It’s not half as long as yours.”

Maroon and purple: suede and velvet.

“You’re not half as old as I am. He’s big enough for you, boy. You still need both hands to hide him when he’s hard. Hey, take care of me. A couple or three times.”

Gunner picked the captain’s up.

The captain pushed his fingers under Gunner’s rope belt. Most loops were broken. The waist pulled down on the boy’s buttocks. The captain lay his fin—ger in the hot slip.

“You want my mouth?” Gunner dug the black fruit up. “That’s why you wake me up?”

“So.”

“Suppose I’m not thirsty.”

“You?”

Gunner bent. The head rose and blunted on his mouth. Black hand grapples gold hair, pulls the boy up, gasping. “That’s not where I want it—”

“Captain ...?”

The black hand, kneading Gunner’s buttocks, worked to the boy’s belly. White and black fingers worked on the knot. As it came loose, he pushed the boy’s head forward. He swung his leg back and kicked. The boy fell on the small rug. Knot undone, his trousers slipped to his knees.

The captain stood. He worked his thumb into the sweaty crevice siding his groin; swung like a crane. He stepped from the eight his pants made at his ankles.

Brass ring in his left ear (leather banding his right wrist), the heavy black chain on his left ankle. (That’s all.) He stood above the boy.

Gunner stared.

The captain put his foot between the boy’s legs. The groin was hot on the knuckles of his toes. Toes rose to prod the crack. He got down on his knees.

Gunner licked his fingers and wiped between his legs. “Lemme slick it up before—”

The captain knocked Gunner’s hand away. “It’s slick enough.” He pushed, swiveled forward inches more, pushed straight again.

Gunner stopped breathing.

The captain put his arms around Gunner’s chest. Once the boy barked in pain. The captain slid his hand between their bellies. “You’re stiff as a ten-penny. It doesn’t hurt that much.” His hips hunched.

Gunner caught his breath again.

But no sound. Backed and squirmed on it.

The captain's breath roared around his head like a rasp in a clay pipe: Gunner's puppy-pants.

Unable to support the double weight, their arms bent. The captain pulled him onto the floor. On his side, first; then, with Gunner, breath nearly out of him, the captain flexed.

He lay on his side, thrust in Gunner's gut, while the boy, on his back, to the hips' rocking, pulled at himself. Gunner's head pressed back on the captain's chest. His feet bunched the rug between the black knees. Raised himself. Lowered himself.

Gas growled out around him. Something small gave before the plunging, became hot paste. The captain stirred in the tight tunnel. He had a mouth full of Gunner's hair; he held the boy with one hand. Two fingers from the other in Gunner's mouth, a tongue grazing their salt and horn.

In a salt cave the thrower flames.

The captain panted. "Five ... for me, now."

Gunner's fist still swung at his groin.

The captain closed the boy's fist in his to stop it. "Hold off unless you want to go again."

Gunner, still now, asked, "You messed in Kirsten all day. You still want to squeeze more out of these?" Sitting on the captain's hips, he reached between both their legs and picked up the big sack.

The captain laughed. He pushed Gunner's cheeks. "Get up. Go on."

Making a face, the boy eased forward. Soft, it slapped the captain's thigh. Gunner turned and scratched himself. "How many more you got?"

The captain folded his arms behind his head. "Another couple." He stretched. "Work me over."

The boy blinked.

The captain raised his head. "Lick my foot. Come on, get that look off. I want to see you lick my foot. Last week I saw you lick at Niger behind the locker. You can with a dog, you can with my foot. Go on."

Gunner held the callused rim, laid his cheek on it. The captain felt the lips tickle the instep. Tongue fell from the boy's mouth; moved on the rough ball, found the trough before the toes; bladed between the big toe and the next, moved over the thick nail. Gunner took three toes in his mouth. The captain wriggled them, laughed. "Niger left his pile on the foredeck. I stepped in it before I came down here—don't pull back. Clean it. Look at you. Look what that does to you. Look good for me, boy." His knee bent, and the boy's lips whis—pered on his ankle, wrapped the chain, stuck tongue in the links. Gunner's fingers spread on his belly, moved jerkily to his tight yellow hair. The head, gray as a pale grape, pushed from its ivory cap.

"Work, boy!" The captain pulled his foot back, kicked Gunner's face. He laughed.

Gunner's knees struck the rug. He opened his mouth on the dark thigh. The captain caught the boy's hair, yanked him down.

Claws on the passage steps—

—Niger sprang through the door, vaulted on his hind legs, pawed the captain's knee.

"Black devil! Down!" Niger backed up, then dropped his black muzzle beside Gunner's blond head in the dark fork. The captain's lips parted. His back rose from the rug. On shoulders and heels he pushed into Gunner's face. The boy put one arm around the dog's neck. He looked up once, mouth, cheek and chin wet.

The captain rocked back and grabbed the hollow of his knees. Gunner's face pushed; stroke, probe. Niger's tongue rolled the captain's sack over to hang on his belly.

The captain bellowed, swung his legs down. His heels hit the floor. Niger and Gunner scam—pered.

On his feet the captain lurched to the bunk, turned, and sat. His knees were wide. Saliva made his thighs dark mirrors. He gripped the shining tower to beat. Up to the paler ring. "Six coming ..." the captain panted. "First one here gets it."

Niger and Gunner raced the floor. Niger leapt on the captain's right knee, dug his snout beneath the loose bag. Gunner humped the left harder than the dog, fell to it.

The captain beat the boy's lips a half-dozen strokes. Gunner held the edge of the bed and leaned back. He tongued under the foreflesh. It rammed over his tongue, bruised palates, hard and soft,

prod—ded in the softer throat. “Take it. Eat that charred meat all up, you white ... Yeah ....” He pressed the boy’s head down, and down, ground upon the face while Niger nipped and nuzzled. “Here it ... here ....” he grunted at the ceiling. Heat swelled the shaft, stretched the boy’s mouth.

The black crater, quiet the hour, erupts. Oceans boil. The captain sagged forward over Gunner’s back. “Six ....”

Gunner twisted under the captain’s belly. “Get off my head.”

“Six, you little white squirrel!”

Niger had pulled away, was lying on the rug. He worried something between his paws.

The captain sat up Gunner hung over his knees. His face was wet. “What about seven?” Gunner asked.

“Give it a rest.”

Gunner picked up the limp. “It’s tired, now, you think?”

The captain roughed the boy’s hair. “You’d lap after it whatever.” He frowned at the dog. “What’s Niger got?”

Gunner looked over his shoulder. “Something he must have picked up when he went out.”

“Go get it.”

Gunner went to the dog. He pulled and played it away. The jaws gave up; Niger started to lick at Gunner. “He’s getting me all hard again.” He pushed Niger’s head down. “It’s a wallet.” He took it to the captain and sat down on the bed. While the captain paged through the leather folder, Gunner tugged up his pants and tried to get the rope back through the functioning loops. Once he leaned over the captain’s arm. “Pictures?”

The captain was looking at the portal.

“Hey?” Gunner said. “What about seven?”

The captain pushed the boy’s hand from his thigh.

Gunner put his hand between his own legs. He leaned against the captain’s arm.

There was a color Polaroid of a woman on one side of the wallet, one of a man on the other. Her hair was loose in a wind that had caused her the slightest squint. His was white, or very pale. The faces suggested age, or experience. But they were handsome, and strong. Perhaps it was the contrast to the pale hair—perhaps shadow and position—but the man’s eyes looked black.

Gunner pushed his nose under the dark arm and nuzzled the hair. The captain stood. “I’m going on deck.” He reached for his pants. “Come on, Niger.” He shmgged/into his shirt. He kicked at the dog, and his chain rang. Niger barked, then followed the cap—tain to the/door.

He stopped once, frowned at the portal; then he saw Gunner. “On deck when you’re done.”

Gunner sat on the bed, cross-legged. He ran his hand over the damp sheet. Let himself fall, to lay his cheek, roll his face and take the salty folds in his teeth. Elbow shaking, one hand worked in arcs. The other/kneaded his belly. His lips kissed unvoiced exhortations. Closed lids and the loose hair shook with his fist.

The cabin door closed.

### *The Scorpion’s Log:*

I don’t know when I was born exact. Now I am cap—tain of the *Scorpion*, a seventy-two foot diesel I have had six years—there was another Scorpion before that, went down on the Guatemalan coast. But I had money and friends in that port. I run gold, small arms, Chink labor—they moaned and puked all over the forepeak hole, the engine room and the lazarette, fifty at a time, on this boat that is crowded with me, two children and a dog—and I have enough nets and fishing gear to run as a snapper boat on the North American coast.

What I like most [The green, account-sized book is worn to the cardboard at the corners. The entries are scant and consist mainly of numbers except this thickish, raddled section toward the middle. It is in the locker under the bunk, leaning against the wall.] is to read. That is my first enjoyment after the boat. At each port I try to get as many paperback books and magazines as possible. Spanish and English. I can read the French ones too, but slower. German I can only read enough for newspapers,



speak enough for trade. But I have to tell something about what I am writing now first.

We have been adrift two weeks. I tire of the chil—dren. They are nasty with me and each other. Gunner sleeps all day which is just as good. Kirsten reads as much as I do. I have all these pages in my log I don't fill in anyway. This to pass time, then.

It is liking to read makes me write. I do not like sea stories. I only read them in port. On warm nights I take the lamp on the back deck and read the science fiction stories the Americans write so well. They write about space.

When I read them, I can look up into night and feel how it must feel to write about traveling between the stars because of how I feel between ports. You read these stories, however, in this way, with this attention. The pictures form on the page, or out where the night slops, or when you close your eyes. Because it is something you have never seen, you must bring all your memories of touch, of taste, or what you have seen to make them. But you must be ready to let them break up and come back together—er different. It is very different from how to read a detective story or a novel.

An interesting experience. One night reading a magazine with a blue cover from one of the U.S. uni—versities I found a story by a woman whose name I knew because I had read a science fiction novel and some stories by her. The first paragraph had all sorts of words and colors like science fiction, so I got my mind all ready with this attention.

The story didn't mean anything to me!

I didn't know what it was about. But everything was clear and mysterious, bright and mixed up. Three pages to the end, I realized it was a story about a woman teaching school who gets one of her students to bed with her. I read it again. The story was clear. Only the first paragraph was like science fiction, and it was for the feeling, I think. My atten—tion, you see, turned everything different.

I want to write about me so that it happens when you read it like the first way I read that story. I can't tell all my life. I am too lazy, for one. For two—well, one will do.

Its common fabric is charred, in some of the holes the edge still glows. Or the burning threads cover what is behind. But I want to write about what is at these. There are only half a dozen, and I am twenty—eight, maybe twenty-nine.

There was an earthquake while I was almost a baby. I was in the dark, while everything around me swung and rattled. Somebody broke the door. I saw a man and a woman. The mountain behind them roared and tried to shake the fire out of its hair. Bright rock fell down the crags and made steam.

They ran for me and I screamed. One picked me up. The other pulled me away when the first one fell.

There is another picture in my mind from that night. On the beach the man is holding me while the woman is down by the water where the people are shouting trying to get a boat. Then the man takes me down, because the woman calls him. Gray scabs of ash are wrinkling over the water. The waves come in and leave one black line along the sand, roll out, come in and leave another.

Now. The first of these memories sits in my mind like a light that I cannot look at much. Like the sun. More like the sun on the water of the sea. The second is only a memory among hundreds of memories I can remember. I can't give you the differences in the light, what I felt, and the way. Should I just stop maybe?

The two figures saving me from the eruption in the village where I was born are the first two. They have changed me. Not by what they said or taught—though that too—but because of this light they sud—denly have. Or maybe it is something I put. The clos—est thing I can talk about it is the feeling I had when I read that story, you understand? To understand what I am talking about, I guess you have to read science fiction.

The first two were those saved me from the shack where I was a baby.

The third is Herr Bildungs. I was nine then. We played on the beach. He was with the engineering people who came for the oil. Herr Bildungs was the first to tell me my father was a black soldier from the U.S. and my mother was a Negro who had come down from Haiti. He found it out from the people in the town: my father was gone and my mother was dead. Besides the teacher at the school who taught me to read Spanish, no one had ever told me any—thing before Herr Bildungs.

The day we were first on the beach I asked, "Who are you?"

He laughed, and said, "I am Faustus, the magi—cian/" He let me work for him. And, he *was* a magi—cian. In his house he had books and magazines with pictures of all over the world. He had a microscope he would let me look in as a reward when I finished my work. He had lenses, rolls of graph paper, com—passes and inking pens, and a drawing board that tilted when you fixed the nut. I made him tell me what it all was. After I cleaned for him and ran his errands for a year, he taught me how to use some of them. He made me learn English. The other engi—neers who came to talk with him all spoke English. He had a chart of the elements and a map of the sky he said was almost useless to us because it was a map of the northern sky and we were just under the Tropic of Capricorn. He made me learn the names of all the countries of Europe. Many in Asia. He had been in lots of them. He read me stories in Spanish and English. Once I tried to make him teach me German.

Herr Bildungs liked teaching, and every time I wanted to learn, he would leave what he was doing and go on with me for hours—I lost interest before he did. But this time he only spent two evenings to help me with the sounds you have to make like a rasp on the back of your tongue. I had to coax and pull every word from him. I gave up.

There were too many other things he liked to talk about, the three-chambered hearts of birds, the evo—lution between the bird and the lizard. Later, when I took my boat to the east and came to ports where German is still the trade tongue, I had to try all over again. It is still my least good language.

He said once, walking from his house in the vil—lage to the sea, "Do you want to know the most valuable piece of information there is? Always remember the objects you are working with. When you make a bridge, remember you are putting steel on stone and dirt. When you build a raft, remember you are floating wood in water. Someday you will write poems to a little girl: marks with ink on paper. When you want to turn them into songs and sing them, remember you are squeezing wet bags of air over the cartilages in your throat. When you are making love, you are moving flesh against flesh. That is the basis of all magic. It is very simple and very complicated." Later he asked me, "Do you know any more magicians besides me?"

"Two," I said. He was surprised. I told him about the man and woman in the doorway.

But I haven't told what makes Herr Bildungs one of those special kinds. The third night I worked for him, nearly two years before what I just told you talking on the beach, he was working one night and I came to ask something. I surprised him, he turned and dropped the lens and it missed the rug and broke on the tiles.

There it is.

The two of us staring at the bits of glass, the metal ring. He was mad, too. He called me a little black devil and said I was clumsy and tried to hit me, and that I couldn't work any more if I didn't learn to knock first and know manners. Too many people had hit and cursed me already for it to make much difference but I was scared.

He changed his mind. But can you see with that attention by kerosene light a white man, a black boy, a broken lens?

I took trips with Herr Bildungs in my two-and-a—half years with him to Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Caracas. Once we flew to Houston, Texas, for a weekend when he went to all sorts of meetings. That's when I decided I would have to make my English much better.

It was a good idea. Six months and Herr Bildungs went back to Germany. I started working on boats. The third one I was on stalled in New Orleans. The Captain disappeared. I liked the city, and in a week I had been everywhere from Dekator Street to Tulane. It was a city of many magicians.

Four years, mostly there and the rest working the coast with New Orleans to return to, maybe made almost an American out of me. You see?

And maybe gave me an advantage.

Therese in New Orleans, big as a barrel of choco—late, who had red hair and wore dresses she was always near falling out, and white socks over ankles with lots of burn scars on them, and shoes split down the back. She modeled at art classes in the university, brought me books from there, and all the time sat in a bar I found out (first surprise) she owned and (sec—ond surprise) gave me a job on a boat I

didn't know she owned as well as the bar. She talked with me a lot and (third surprise) spoke Spanish. And became one, one afternoon sitting in front of her establishment on a sagging board between two pork tubs.

At her feet was a puddle like glass run with slick rainbow. She was squinting at the sky. I was looking at her reflection run with colored oil and it began to rain, just like that. The reflection blistered. Just before it went completely, she looked down and the expression I saw (while I saw it I was wondering what was really on her face) was changed by the shaking water to something between scared and knowing as she watched herself breaking up.

There.

She was laughing and squinting with the rain down her cheeks when we looked up and saw each other. "Come in and have a drink," she cried. We went inside and I thought she didn't know.

A year later, the day before I left New Orleans for good, I told Therese about that with the rain. With a bottle of bad brandy on the roof where I was sleep—ing that trip in, she was sitting like a ton of shadow on the edge of the roof and I was stretched on the mattress and just talking on and I told her and said, "You know what I mean?" like when you don't think there'll be an answer. But she stopped me and said, Yes, she did.

I asked her if she really did.

She said she did.

I told her about the others.

She said, a little smiling, she was sad she wasn't the only one. We finished the brandy. Her boat she owned was the first *Scorpion*. Therese went off to Gulfport next morning and I took the boat.

You want to know the next now. I took the boat to Spain and to France. You know it was easy? I thought it would be hard, and I wanted to do some—thing hard and to see some of what Herr Bildungs had showed me. But it was easy, and I sailed in the Mediterranean a long time. You could haul tankers if you could speak languages and make friends. There's always been more people liked me where I went than I liked. Which is pretty good. Over there too. It was the first white man I killed. I had killed two niggers before and the white man was in

I shouldn't talk about these though. I don't know who'll read this, and if it is somebody else, I don't want trouble. I'm going to tear this page out and start again. But it was cold and the ice kept clickin the side of the boat, and he saw I was going to kill him, and that was when it was. I knocked him into the winch and kicked the safety, and the chains jumped and caught some cloth on his shirt that pulled him into the chains and wrapped him like a rag around the spool—arm, shoulder, neck. His eyes came out and blood ran out his hair. He knew I was going to kill him, but he didn't know I was going to do it that way. Then I put the safety back on and went back to my boat and he's the only one of those I ever killed. Yet. Births. Deaths. [The page ends here and has been torn from the log, then folded and stuck in its proper place as though the writer changed his mind.] Marriages; it says in this news—paper on the back page. I should tell you about that since I'm telling you about where I'm from and all.

In Guatemala, the time when the boat went down, I got two wives in one week. But that was a joke with these friends who had money for the new boat. But I got babies off both of them, I found out when I came back, and later, when I was working good on the new boat I took a wife named Leora. Leora worked on this boat with me hard as I did a year, and the Father that married us hid me four times from the authorities—I was running things, then. She got two girls and a boy from me already and maybe I'll go back. Some day. But I went to jail for eighteen months. When I got out, I thought it was good to go as far as I could. So I took my boat to Europe again. I've been through at Port Said.

And at Panama.

I stopped at Venice and Singapore.

I've been down Baja California and in Osaka. But maybe the best way to describe what I am trying isn't to describe it clear. You read a story and sud—denly there's a part that becomes just words because you know nobody ever did it like that, or said it that way but you have to pretend just to find out what happened. What I am describing is like that, too. Everything flattens out and isn't real. Attention, again.

You know the first two? They were a woman and her half-wit brother that lived in that town. When I was with Herr Bildungs, I got with the woman who was about forty then and she had a baby from me which was my first. I was fourteen and Herr Bildungs thought it was funny though he beat me when he found out first. Her brother the half-wit use to suck me off behind the schoolhouse at night. I told Herr Bildungs about the woman but nothing about the brother, because the first day on the beach Herr Bildungs did the same thing, though he wouldn't ever do it again. In New Orleans there are a lot of fat women, and I like them. Therese liked me a lot too.

But I have more babies than deaths. There are men who are my friends who can't say that. I wonder how many of the children are alive. One of

Leora's is dead, I know. There was a lot of people sick then.

Once past Said it is even easier to work east in a boat without all the papers. Those boats there are not good. People don't know what to do with them when they have them. The last, then, for me was in Bombay, maybe seven years ago. She ran a big house I went to a lot because it was really cheap. But expensive for there. Her name was Geana

[This is the end of the page. The next several are torn away. They are neither folded in the front, in the back, nor in place. Their absence suggests revelations which dwarf the episode of the winch, since that page only bares the injuries of hesitation. These pages are nowhere on the boat. The narrative takes up again with another fragment:]

how all these figures in my mind run together and become one like wax in the head of the volcano that shone off the first two. I think it is time to stop this, anyway, because now that I look back I don't see anything here that tells what I wanted to say in a way that cannot be misunderstood. And there are some things I shouldn't have written about, so I will take those pages out of the log. Probably the next will be worse, anyway. It is getting into Autumn. I am going to take the children farther south, where we can get away from the stupid cold in this country Maybe one or two stops at the coast. I might even go for Leora.

Will she like the children?

## Chapter Two. Labyrinths

That man about whom you have written me, Georgius Sabellicus, who has ventured to call himself the prince of necromancers, is a vagabond, an empty babbler and a knave worthy to be whipped that he might no longer profess publicly abominable matters which are opposed to the holy church. For what are the titles he assumes, other than the signs of a most stupid and senseless mind, which proves that he is a fool and no philosopher? Thus he has adopted the following title: Magister Georgius Sabellicus Faustus, Jr., fountain of necromancers, astrologer, *magus secundus*, chiro—mancer, aeromancer, pyromancer, second in hydromancy. Behold the foolish temerity of the man; what madness is necessary to call oneself the fountain of necromancy?

—Abbot Trithemius of Sponheim to the mathematician and court astrologer, Johan Virdung, August 20, 1507

"Fuck! I don't see her ..."

Colored boats strung the wharf like semiprecious stones among brighter gems the waves made in late September light. The captain stood at the *Scorpion's* rail.

"Niger, where in shit did you get this? Come on, you black bastard, now. Show me."

The dog leaped from the deck to the plank, and on.

"Captain, what about supper?"

He looked back to see Kirsten at the rail. "Will it keep?"

"Yes. But—"

"Come on, then."

Kirsten pulled off her apron, flung it over the locker, and ran down the board. She reached the dock as Gunner gained deck:

"Hey, wait!" He ran past his sister and grabbed the captain's wrist.

"Hey, sticky fingers ...!" The captain pulled his hand away, wiped it on Gunner's head. The boy tried to duck.

Kirsten asked her brother, "Did you get seven?"

The captain cuffed the gold girl. "Don't worry about seven." He looked down the wharf where sunset's brass blades cut water; evening, like smoke, rolled between the buildings. "Before midnight, I'll drop another. Be God damn sure of it."

Niger's claws clicked on the broken paving.

On a piling next to their slip sat a young man in old jeans. Cracked work shoes, a shirt too warm for the evening; his sleeves were bunched on his fore—arms. The captain hailed him:

"Have you seen a ... a yellow-headed woman around my boat?"

"Sure did," with a heavy drawl. He stood up, smiling, when the captain came over.

"Which way did she go?"

The man scratched his plaid stomach. "Down that way." He thumbed along the dock. His hands were work-rough. "Pretty thing, too." His face and fore—arms were burned. Hair and eyes were light. "She was leaning up against the side and looking in. First running off, then coming back to look again. Say, Cap—" his hand dropped to thumbhook his pock—et—"do you know this port well?"

"Docked here this morning."

"Oh." The man scraped his broad-shoe toes on the asphalt before the captain's great bare ones. "I was just wondering. You got these ... women hanging all over your ship. You wouldn't know how a guy goes about pickin' up some pussy in this town, would you? They gotta keep it somewhere."

The captain grinned. "I guess they got to."

"I caught a ride up from Cugarsville yesterday. Spent last night in the fucking doorway over there, and, shit—" He plucked at his denim crotch, "I don't usually have no trouble, but—" and looked up and down the docks "—you got that little blonde-headed girl, and the other one who was lookin' in your win—dow." He glanced at Kirsten, near the water. "I thought you might know where to go."

"Like I said ..." and wouldn't say more.

The man wrinkled his face. "You ain't from around here, are you? You West Indian or some—thing? That earring and the way you talk."

"Been through the West Indies," the captain said.

"Now, hey! A whole bunch of nigger boys fish out this dock. Some of them real nice. Two already said I could work for them. But I'd like to get on a boat going someplace. I know boats fair. You don't got no work for me on your boat, Captain?"

"Maybe."

The man cocked his head in surprise.

"Only maybe, though. What's your name?"

"Robin." He grinned. "Robby is what they call

^t.

me." He plucked at his pants again: large hands on knobby wrists, on long, thin arms: but the muscles are sharply shaped. "I just come up from this damn small town. It held on to my ass twenty-four years. But not no more. Twenty-four years, and I decided there wasn't noplac that wasn't better than where I was. Nothing but odd-job work. Our boats just fish the harbor. Some fieldwork. And what all." His frown came back. "Only, I guess it's a little easier to get laid in a town where the girls know what you can do." A weak grin; some of his teeth are broken.

"Sit out in the sun and keep it warm, boy." The captain grins back. "They'll smell it when they come by."

Robby's smile did not quite surface. He said, "I guess that's about all I can do."

"Which way did the woman go?"

"Down that street there."

The captain turned back to the dog.

The children ran up to him as he started across the street. "The lady—" Kirsten said as they reached him—"is pretty."

Gunner had shown her the wallet.

And Robby called, "Hey, thanks for the job offer ...I mean, if the maybe works out."

The dog lolloped before them.

The Hall of Mirrors windows were hung with ma—roon curtains. Niger floundered about the door.

The captain quieted him when they caught up. Kirsten pushed the handle. Gunner peered around her shoulder, followed her. The dog gained center floor, barked. The captain stepped in.

"What do you want? What are you doing here? Who are you?"

The captain stopped, barefoot, in the sawdust. Gunner and Kirsten blinked by his hip:

Big like a barrel. Arms, shoulders, chest and belly, snarled with amber. Round head shaved smooth. Wide belt (iron studs) worn low enough to show where red belly-hair thickened toward pubic. His crusty pants were tucked unevenly in the tops of his boots. One hand fondled the stock of the rifle on the bar. On the mirror a calendar marked it Saturday the twenty-first.

"I captain the *Scorpion*. It's in your dock now. I'm looking for ... someone—you?"

"Bull, I'm holding the place down till the owner gets back."

Niger barked.

"I like your dog, nigger." Then Bull grinned. "I'm police in this town." Leaving his gun, he walked with a listing stride to the captain, stuck out his hand—"You got business with Nazi? He's out pickin' up his new girl."—thick with callous, gloved with red hair, nail is wrecked with gnawing.

"I just want to know something." The captain shook.

"About what?" Bull passed his fist on to Gunner's hair, lifted Kirsten's chin with a foreknuckle. "Fine kids."

The captain looked at the barechested lawman care—fully. Then he said, "You can have them for an hour, if you can tell me what I want to know." (Sometimes, everything flattens, becomes unreal, but ...)

Bull looked up, frowned. Then the frown broke on yellow teeth. "How old are they?"

"The boy's 113. The girl's 115."

"You just sell them to pleasure strangers?"

"You bought a lot of it, ain't you, mister?" which was Gunner.

Bull frowned again. Then, still careful, he nodded.

The captain said, "I got Gunner on the streets of an Indian port just below Bombay: 106, and pimping among the sailors for Kirsten here. I bought both chil—dren from the woman who owned them. They'd been kidnapped from a northern ship. What they got from me is better than what they would have had."

Bull let his eyes drop to the girl. He stuck his fin—ger under the neck of her smock, and brushed the upper slope of her breast with the red hair on his knuckle. "How would you like to sit on my face, lit—tle mama? Give your cunt some good tongue-work." Kirsten giggled.

Bull placed his finger on Gunner's nose. "My spigot's got a couple of good pumps underneath. It's a fat dick, an' you suck it, it'll pump you full." He pressed the boy's nose away. "How do you take to the idea of me licking out your sister's pussy?"

Gunner grinned, and scratched his pants with his thumb.

Bull moved a boot on the floor, hefted his crotch. His fingers closed, were stopped by something big. "What do you want to know, Captain?" His hands went back to his pockets as he looked up. "Let's sit down and talk."

They sat at a table near the back wall.

"Do you know either of these people?" the cap—tain asked, taking out the wallet. Bull reached across the table and took the leather folder. He fingered the pictures, grunted. "I do." He looked up.

"Who's the woman?"

"The wallet belongs to the man."

The captain raised an eyebrow. "What's his name?"

"Jonathan Proctor."

"What can you tell me about him?"

"He used to come in here. A couple of times he brought the woman. But not recently. Hey," he looked up. "Hey, Nazi, this nigger here came in while you were out. He wants to know about Proctor."

The dog worked from under the table, barked three times. Gunner punched at his head, and Niger went back under.

Nazi: a hairy, big-knuckled bruiser. Give him a quarter of a century from across the room. Up close, add another five years. The hair is black. (The girl with him was dark, slim; she wore black.) He wore a leather jacket, unzipped, no shirt. One black boot.

The other foot was bare. Like the captain, on his ankle, he wore a chain. Smell: grease, hard sweat. Old sweat. Hair, hands, and foot: pretty dirty. He hooked a broad thumb with its broken nail (crescent of black) over the twin brass rings of his buckles. "What's he want to know?" He looked down over Bull's arm.

"Where is he?" the captain asked. "I want to see ... him."

Nazi dug out his nose with his forefinger. "He's some sort of artist. Got a studio upstairs over a ware—house a couple of blocks away. He lives there. You just go up and knock. If he's busy, he'll kick you out. He's ..." Now Nazi sat on the edge of the table, and his hand went to the girl's hip; he shook his head, and scimitars of black fell down his face, "... sort of funny."

The captain surprised Bull by taking the wallet back. "Which direction is his studio?"

"Huh?" Nazi lifted his head from the velvet hip beside him. "About three blocks that way." He looked at what was on his finger, put it in his mouth to the second knuckle and sucked.

The captain pushed the chair back. The dog pushed by Gunner's leg, made the door. The captain looked back, called, "Come on, Niger," and left.

The two men frowned at each other. Bull's eyes went to the children. "... Mmm ..." He looked back at Nazi. Then he let the grin break out. "I guess you came in time. I seen you lookin' at them little blond bastards."

"Yeah?" Nazi.

The woman looked down at him, then at Kirsten. She did something with her tongue behind her cheek.

Bull looked up at the woman Nazi had brought with him; said to Nazi, not looking at him, "I'd like to eat some of that classy Colson Hill tush. About right now." He winked. She looked away.

Nazi said, "I been sticking my dick in it all after—noon. Been real spiced up for you, Bull." His hand, on Kirsten's shoulder, slid behind her neck. The little girl looked back from the door.

Bull looked at her face for apprehension.

Nazi didn't. His other hand rubbed on her thigh. "Let me get my face in that. How many times has that black motherfucker had his dick in that today?"

Kirsten put her hand on Nazi's chest.

Bull, prodding the other woman's small breasts

*Equinox /*

with his hard fingers asked, inanely, "What's your name?" %

"Kim," she said, oddly, but no less provocatively because the sensuousness was obviously affected.

"Well, Kim—" Bull put both hands on his thighs—"I'm going to eat your cunt."

Kim did not laugh.

Gunner watched from the corner of the table.

Bull licked his lower lip. Kim rubbed his head. Bull stood, picked her up. She started as he sat down on the table, pushed her back—she grabbed the edge by Gunner's hands—Bull yanked the waist of her panties with both hands.

"Hey ... !" as they tore.

He dropped his head in her.

Nazi took Gunner's shoulder. "What you gonna do if I suck your sister's box?"

“Lemme suck you!”

Nazi’s lips tightened on a grin, “Yeah,” that turned, with the word, to laughing. “You’d look good down there on my pecker. Get down on the floor, boy. That’s right. Now come over to me. Yeah, on your knees.” (Sometimes, everything flattens out ... Attention.)

Gunner put his arms around Nazi’s legs. Nuzzled the bar in the gamey cloth. His tongue there. He knew the taste of urine.

Nazi pulled his fly down halfway with his thumb. “Fish it out, cocksucker. No, don’t use your hands.”

Gunner, rocked by staggering movement, looked up. Kirsten’s legs hung wide from the table edge. Nazi lowered his face, and at the same time grabbed Gunner’s hair. The thrust caught him deep in the throat, and he was blind on the groin.

He heard Kirsten gasp, gasp again.

Later, he felt other hands on his back. Bull. Gasp sounds, spit on a dick: wedged in Gunner’s cheeks. Hot palms on his hips. Thick inches opened him. Bull’s chest slapped his back. Hair rasped him. Breath made a hot storm in his ear. Bull rocked on him, surged in him. One hand came up to Gunner’s face to gouge Nazi’s red sac from his pants. Slipped to the shaft, put two fingers in Gunner’s mouth beside the cock. His stroke in the boy slowed and strengthened.

Kirsten’s foot, swinging above them, twice struck Gunner’s chin.

Kim stood over the blonde girl. She caressed the yellow hair. Kirsten’s tongue parted dark silk, delved (below, Nazi’s tongue sank in, and her breath was harsh): Kim’s left leg quivered. Her eyes were not open. Her tongue pushed between her lips, pulled back suddenly, pushed slowly out again. She dropped her head, lifted Kirsten’s face in her hand. The rings of their mouths filled with doubled-back tongues pushing—then Kim’s, thrust hard. Her knees came down till her thighs brushed, then moved to press, Kirsten’s.

Bull reached between them to work his fingers in the wet. The girls clung, sharing knees and lips. Breasts flattened on breasts, bellies flattened. Nazi and Bull pried in mingled black and blonde with tongues and fingers.

### *Bull’s Tale:*

I used to live in the town next to this one, for a long time. Cugarsville? (He settles closer to Gunner in the dark and wonders if the boy is asleep, but talks any—way.) Back when I was about eighteen or so I got this bitch knocked up. We got married, see. And she’s been dropping kids—I guess most of them are mine every year since; although we don’t hardly live together no more. She’s a mean old whore is what she is. The middle girl, Bethy, she’s probably the sweetest one. Pretty. That’s when I got so I could go back and spend a couple of days with the old lady without trying to break her head before I left. Bethy, we’d go for walks in the woods, and tell each other stories. And wrestle too. She liked that. Shit, that lit—the bitch could throw cunt around fast as her mama. I’d get me liquored up, and go scratch on the back window. She’d slip out. 109. And I could always get two fingers into any of my little girls’ pussies any—time. When she was climbing out the window, I’d have my pants open, and waving it around, you know? She’d squeal, and I’d say, “You just come on here and take care of your daddy’s big ole’ pecker.” She’d love me so much I couldn’t stand it. Sometimes we’d go up in some old barn and stay at each other all day. Suckin’. Fuckin’. And suckin’ some more. She got knocked up, too, wouldn’t you know. And then the other little girl of mine—Marny I slipped in that little bitch the wrong time of the month. And she was just 108. The two of them, blowin’ up with their pappy’s accidents. Now I thought that was fine. But mama didn’t like it too much. She was about to drop another one herself. Then this waitress who worked down in the diner near the Shell Station started going around saying I was daddy to the one she was lugging. Now that *was* shit: I’d been sticking her regular, but so had six other guys. And I was at that party where, maybe, ten of us who was working on the road crew got into her back of the garage. But she just wanted to make trouble for me, and take advantage of the rumor going round that Bull was instant babies. So I moved a town over. And I met that guy your boss is after.

Things been pretty good since. He was the first person in this town I really talked to. And after a



couple of weeks, when I'd got work—in the police office, not out on the road—I asked him, “Hey, did you tell anybody to give me that job?” He said no. “What have you been doing for me?” I asked. “You been talkin’ to the people up on Colson Hill?” And he said, “No. Just listening to you.”

“You been telling me things too, though,” I told him. He said, “It has to do with the way I listen.” He knows a lot of people, in this town, in other places. They even come to see him. He listens to a lot of people, I guess. And it changes things. I been lawman here for almost three years. And it’s been a good sight more peaceful town. I asked him if he thought I ought to take the job—got it by being deputy first. “Why not?” he said. I said, “Well, someone like me, you know ...” He said, “How’s being instant babies gonna hurt your being law?” And you know some—thing, we don’t hardly have any women criminals in this whole town no more.

[He picks the gun up. The barrel taps the floor; he rears back on the chair, the dark stock flattening his thigh.]

Bethy threw another little bitch. Shit, she must be 106 or 107 years old now herself, though I ain’t been back much. I sure would like to get back there and take a look at her. You think a little girl 106 or 107 could take my dick? Little girl gettin’ knocked up by her pappy ain’t all that bad. Or her grandpappy I like it sweet and smooth and young. Or real rough, I I one. Ain’t too far from here. And sometimes I just / get to thinkin’, about that sweet little pussy waitin’ over there in the next town for me, someplace, you know?

### Chapter Three. Faust In Italy

Today, Wednesday after St. Vitus, 1528, one who calls him—self Dr. Jorg Faustus of Heidelberg has been told to spend his penny elsewhere, and has promised not to resent or mock such summons of the authorities.

—Record of expulsion from the minutes of the Town Council of Ingelstadt

The captain walked beside the brick wall of the bar. At the alley, he turned, as if a thought had taken him. Five steps in, he thumbed apart the buttons of his pants, and turned to the wall.

His water ran the cinderblock foundation, pud—dled. He moved the stream back and forth, breaking it on the bars of the cellar window. He heard his stream inside on the cellar floor.

His puddle darkened the earth. Buttoning, he turned to go, when he saw: two hands, barred with ligaments, cabled with veins and scaly with dirt, grasp the wet pipes.

The captain frowned, stepped back. Someone inside was licking the dripping bars.

Niger barked from the head of the alley. The cap—tain’s face showed both confusion and recognition. As he reached the street Niger ran up and nosed his palm. Absently, he roughed the black fur.

“Hey, Captain!” He looked up.

The sunburned drifter loped into the street. “Hey,” again. Robby’s hands came out of his pockets. “Any action in that place with all the curtains on the win—dows?” He gestured toward The Hall of Mirrors.

The captain shrugged.

“Nothin’, huh?” Robby’s elbow swung out from his side as he began walking with the captain. “Where did the kids go? *Pretty* little girl!” The swinging elbow hit the captain’s arm. “You ever get any of that? She had that sweet look hungry pussy gets when it’s walking around on the street.” Niger, reaching the corner first, barked again.

“How you doing?” the captain asked. “Find any—thing yet?”

“Shit,” Robby drawled. “I ain’t even been close enough to smell none.” He shoved his fists forward and squinted at the sky. Then his head came back. He spat. “I’m just walking around here, feelin’ through the holes in my pockets, playing with my prick and looking for a place to put it. Sure as shit ain’t

nothing else to do.” He nodded at his own pro—fundity. “You going back to your boat?”

“Going to see about that woman.”

“Yeah?”

“The one you saw around the boat.”

Robby shook his head. “You niggers have all the fuckin’ luck.”

The captain let laughter. And laughing, he clapped Robby’s shoulder, then turned the corner, while the dog leaped, half a block away.

—*Cartoon: Disney*—

The wooden steps rattled under the beast’s claws. Niger burst the door. The man wheeled on the stool and grabbed the edge of the drawing board. His forehead scored with surprise. His boots hit the floor (he started to stand); then, as the dog leaped back—ward, and back again, the craggy face cracked on a grin. “Down, boy! Down—” And looked up because a barefoot buck was standing in his door.

The man’s grin fell away. Astonishment lay under. The dog circled, then sat by the captain, forepaw on the black foot. The tongue lolled and shook over the black gums. The captain raised his hands and settled his thumbs under his belt. The shapes in his forearms changed size. “You’re Jonathan Proctor.”

Proctor nodded. Gray hair, short. Gray brows marked his face with a frown. “Who are you?” Slender. Hands very wide. The left hung by hooked fingers from the board’s edge. The nails were thick. White hair pawed the back of his collar, clawed from his chest over the edges of his shirt.

“I’m captain for the Scorpion.” And looked at the:

Painted panels of Masonite, some twelve feet high:

A gutted horse sat in flaming money. Two naked figures hid in its carcass, toying at each other’s geni—tals.

A castrated Negro on a train’s cowcatcher moved forward through dispersing figures: one, the great flower of a woman’s face; another, a man with a bro—ken sword.

A musculature mannequin was painted as a black, with real, woolly hair pasted on the skull; in his chest an open wound had been gouged, and a union flag draped through his arm.

On a shelf sat a glove-mannequin hand, black and painted with a trompe l’oeil night: stars, moon, and the pale clouds before it.

The captain took the wallet from his pocket. “Your picture is in this wallet. What can you tell me about the woman?” He tossed it toward the drawing board.

Proctor caught it. As he opened it, his brows pulled together. He looked up. “Thank you.”

“My dog found it on the docks and brought it on the boat. The woman dropped it.”

“Catherine?”

“Is that her name?”

Proctor nodded. Then he said: “Won’t you sit down. Why don’t you have some coffee with me.”

The captain nodded.

“There’s money in this wallet,” Proctor said, look—ing up.

The captain shrugged.

Proctor fingered through the bills. “You should have some reward for returning it to—”

The captain’s gesture erased the suggestion. “You tell me about the woman.” The captain sat on a crate, letting his feet go wide—

“What do you want to know?”

—balanced his wrists on his knees, and leaned forward: “How many times you had your tongue in her pussy? How many times you had your dick in her ass?”

Proctor put his arm on the drawing board and laughed. “Fifty for each?” Then, “None?” Then, “What do you want?”

The captain said, more softly: “Who are you, Jonathan Proctor? What do you have that I want?”

The artist leaned forward. “There’s a rumor, Captain, that the day the devil comes seven times between noon and midnight, we will begin an age of moral chaos such as is only hinted at in the tale of the expulsion from the garden. There!”

"Who made that up?"

"I did." Proctor shrugged. "I can tell stories as well as paint pictures. You want something from me? I'm simply telling you what I can offer. You come up here like a man who wants to eat pussy and stick ass. I haven't been a pimp for a while."

The captain grinned.

"Not to say ..." Proctor drew his fist up his thigh ... I have no talent there." Suddenly he looked over his shoulder and called: "Benny!"

A lizard scurried along the bars of a bird cage, stared at them with a red eye.

From a doorway, hung with paisley drape, came a sleepy boy, 115 or 116.

Proctor said: "Bring us some coffee."

Black hair, olive dark (the high cheeks of a Puerto Rican), eyes curious through fatigue: a long body carved by physical labor. He went over to the stove and began to make coffee. His hands were clumsily affectionate with the pots.

"Benny spends much time here. He helps me with my work. I grind my own colors, stretch and prime my own canvas. Benny does a lot of that. He prepares stones for sculpture, polishes finished works for me, sharpens chisels."

The boy brought the captain his cup. Something large swung in the left pant leg.

"Your boy here is hung like a horse."

Proctor laughed and Benny got embarrassed.

"It's a good handful to play with, hey, boy?" the captain said. As Benny turned, the captain smacked his butt. The boy glanced back, did not know what to do, so moved to his employer. He gave Proctor his cup, then dropped cross-legged to the floor by the artist's knee. Proctor ran his hand across the boy's hair. Benny let his head fall forward.

"A good boy," Proctor said. "He does what I tell him."

"Suck dick?"

The captain was aware that Proctor was trying to keep an expression off his face. The captain nodded toward the boy. "Hey, Benny, how long is your master's?"

Benny looked wary, but his eyes fired between his master's legs .... Proctor brought his knees together.

"Bigger'n mine," Benny said. Then, as Proctor let his legs open again, the boy reached between the denim thighs. Proctor looked at the beamed ceiling. His hand went back to the boy's head.

Wait.

The hand working. (Sometimes ...)

"Suck it."

Benny shrugged, turned on his knees between Proctor's boots. Proctor stood up, looking at the captain. He put his hands in his pockets. Benny opened the fly halfway. Proctor's separating fists ran the zipper the rest down.

The cock came out like a gray-maned bronc, and disappeared in Benny's face.

The captain drank half his coffee. Walked over. Pulled out Proctor's testicles. The shaft slicked in and out of Benny's mouth. The captain kneaded his own crotch. He touched Proctor's buttocks.

Benny's brown fingers twined the captain's black ones. Without letting Proctor's cock slip, Benny pulled at the captain's fly: hand in.

And the captain had pulled the artist's pants down over the buttocks. Proctor's belt came apart. Black fingers pried. "I'm going to fuck you, Proctor."

Benny came off long enough to say, "Go on, Cap. He likes black cock. A whole bunch of nigger fisher—men come up here on weekends, get drunk, and fuck him while I go down on him."

"Drunk niggers let you alone to suck?"

Benny ran his face around the captain's haft. "After he gets it four or five times, I get an awful lot. Come on, fuck him, Captain."

The captain's black head prodded.

"That's ..." Proctor whispered, "... it."

And in. Pumping, the captain, arms locked across Proctor's chest, looked down at Benny's distended face. "The girl ..." the captain whispered. "Tell me about the girl ...."

Benny tickled Proctor's balls with one hand, reached through with the other to heft the black bag that swung below the impaled branch.

"Catherine," whispered Proctor, "hot little ... bitch—Oh, fuck me, fuck the shit out of my ass, nig—ger!—she lives protected by priests, now. Ah—mis—tress to an archaic museum here at our cathedral. Suck it, Benny! She's ... ah ... a recluse now; among yesterdays. I want to see her spread on an altar, wor—ried by cocks of every size and color, running with come and urine.

"Ah ..." the captain's yhisper. "Yes, that's what you want. Ah ... Ah ... You must—" He put his bare foot between Proctor's legs and moiled Benny's unsheathed cock that the boy beat while his master toiled in his mouth. "... come with me!"

Proctor grunted and swung his hips at Benny's face. Benny held the black foot against himself. Proctor's breath stormed by the captain's ear.

A snow storm on a pitchy night. Detonate a flash—The captain's face fell, lips down, lay on the artist's shoulder.

Push the detonator, but no light. Shake the cam—era, in the cold. Still: no light—

Proctor arched, with low grunts. The captain's foot slipped in Benny's lap.

The captain raised his head, pulled out. He said, Seven ..." Proctor, putting his belt back through the front loops, frowns.

—*The End*—

Black candles burned about the studio. The candle—holder on the sill was a banal skull. On the corner of the table an interesting bronze dragon coiled and reared around its flickering wax.

Proctor sat on the deerskin throw and leaned on the wall, forearms flattened on the points of his knees. His shirt was balled in the corner. The pelt tickled the edges of his boots.

Benny and Niger played on the floor while the captain instructed.

Proctor had stopped laughing, and now smiled. "You didn't come when you fucked me," he said.

The captain gave a grunt, glanced back. He kicked at the two figures on the floor. "Hey, there. Give each other a rest."

Niger yipped. Benny pulled his mouth from the raw shaft. The black foreskin slipped forward to the bulge.

"That's right." The captain buttoned his fly and walked over to the steps. "Didn't want to bother you. I didn't think you could tell." He shrugged again.

Proctor turned up his hands and returned a mock smile. "I've always wondered what the devil's secret was."

"I'm the devil now?"

"You'll do."

"I'm tired out today," the captain said.

Proctor made a motion with his chin.

The captain looked back.

Benny and Niger were curled together. The long muzzle lay on the boy's hip. Benny's fist loosened before his eyes; his breath gentled.

"You've tired them out. I think you must be the devil."

The captain grinned. Then he said, "I've come six times today. Is that why you think so?"

"But you've faked seven. *That's* the important one."

The captain laughed and sat on the lower step. "Tell me about Catherine." He leaned back and put his elbow on the pelt to look up at the artist. "You say I must spill my next shot glass full before mid—night?" He looked around the room.

A square clock had been painted, in grisaille, with four human orifices, two male and two female, at noon, three, six and nine. The long hand was a penis, the short, a hirsute sack: they swung round the day.

"It was from an old Coca-Cola advertisement clock/" Proctor explained. "A healthy buck like you should be able to recuperate in the few hours left."

"Catherine," the captain repeated. "Prime me out with tales of her, unless you yourself are too tired—"

"I never tire. And seldom sleep."

"But your mind is on other things, yes?"

"I am simply pondering the fact that man and the devil share equally in the rewards to be gleaned from their enduring relationship."

The captain waited the explanation.

"The obviation of the knowledge that both are going to die. Man has devised three systems for effecting the oblivion necessary for sanity. First, the whole bourgeois preoccupation—such a very good word, 'preoccupy'—with work and the objects of its reward. Second, the religious erection—ahem—of a moral, ethical, and ritual matrix that must absorb man's consciousness to be efficacious. And third is the erotic life in which *we* have chosen to submerge ourselves. I say *we*; more accurately, you. The artist is perhaps the only one free to indulge in three—reli—gious, erotic, and ergonic—simply to fulfill his call—ing. He reports to the practitioners of each what is going on within the circles of the others. That is why society supports him, I suppose. And they are all, always, so fascinated to learn.

"Tell me about Catherine."

"An ordinary woman, really. An old friend. Somewhere in the nexus—ergonic, religious, erot—ic—there is the proof of human consciousness. We have done a tiny bit to free the darkeys in this coun—try. But the devil is still very much our slave."

"Do you believe in the devil?" the captain asked.

"No. But then, I don't believe in black slavery, either."

To the captain's frown, Proctor nodded.

The captain asked, "Who are you, Proctor?" Candlelight on the black cheekbones, in the skin of the heavy lips; and the lips parted on a whisper: "Why are you here?"

"What can I tell you?"

"Much as you will." The captain pressed his lips out so for a moment they thickened like a black pig's snout. Then, apart again, they gave up low laughter.

Over it, Proctor began: "Have you ever heard of me? My name, my work? I have something of a rep—utation, and I firmly believe a man must first be that. But you, yes, you just come to return a wallet an acquaintance of mine dropped by chance. Like Bull might; like Nazi."

The black face flickered: "Tell me about the places you've been that have tilted to dump you here." Velvet ... Suede ...

"Let me see. Let me wake Benny and get some more coffee. No. Never mind. The boy should sleep. I'll get it myself."

(After minutes, Proctor returns to the deerskin; sits, sipping at the steaming cup.)

"Listen. Yes, I will tell you, in a bit. Let me get comfortable. Ah, now ... Well! Something of an aca—demic prodigy, I finished on scholarship from a good but small college, at eighteen; went on to graduate third in my class from medical school; but at the prospect of interning, I realized I was not meant to practice. It came with pain and a feeling of failure. That was the first time I doubted my public self. I retreated back into the university. The medical degree was my *mark* of failure—I was terrified of corpses, and even more of the live patients who filled the City Hospital's emergency ward. Still, a foreign object in academe, my medical diploma awed the humanities professors. I was twenty-three when I took my Ph.D. in historical anthropology. (We did not really have the structuralists to contend with then.) The double doctorate is the most lucra—tive of combinations. I have never used it. With the grant that followed, I flung myself upon Europe within days of graduation, determined to be the most dissolute of tourists. Young Dr. John hitchhiked where he could have trained, ferried where he could have flown, itinerary dictated thoroughly by whim; I ate and slept deck passage on steamers all over the Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean. The reports that have come back to me of that time from those who knew me then are that I was personable, even engaging, lively, intense, and very dirty. I could have been called, if the word has meaning, innocent at eighteen. By twenty-three I had engaged in only the most desultory amorous experiences. But by twenty—five there was nothing I had not done. You see me

now? No act I have committed since is not some variation or repetition of something done before I finished my first quarter century. It began, I remem—ber, with liquor and the old woman who lived on the top floor of the house where I took an apartment near school. (And then, hadn't I thought it ended the next morning with the 116 year-old girl, her grand—daughter, who lived downstairs, and who had been an initiate since she was half that age?) On the conti—nent, it blossomed. In the night alleys of the capitols of Europe I sold myself to old men and bought the favors of young women. I met the Count, and for him, shortly, supervised the entourage he traveled with, a harem of adolescent delinquents from the gutters of Madrid, Rome, Copenhagen, and Marseilles. He used to say I should have been named 'Petronius.' Everywhere we visited we brought sensuous, chaotic laughter, the hysteric mer—riment of the depraved. I hunted new girls to appease his boys, who demanded such payment for servicing the Count himself. I hunted new boys to replace the ones lost through the general tempera—ment of such young men, or to the police (all were thieves: half had passed time in correctional institu—tions), or the ones who had fallen out of favor with our master.

"He abandoned us in Zurich.

"I do not know why or for where. I had been with him for five months. That morning I looked into his room; dawn was just bruising the mist in the pale valley beyond the curtains. The revelry from last night's party had reduced to the sobbing of one peasant girl of the neighborhood who had taken cof—fee with the Count and two of our rougher company the day before.

"The Count, his clothing, his jewelry, his paint—ings, were gone. In truth, I felt neither shock nor sur—prise. I had always been paid amply: I myself left within the hour. The others? Where they went, I do not know. One of the girls, and three of the boys, I had even developed slight infatuations for, though I suppose I held my master in contempt. Still, I left. I recall I paused before Tossi, the great Moroccan, sprawled drunk across the chair arm, his workman's pants at mid-shin, hands loose across a cock he boasted always stiff, even when he slept. I squatted between his knees and nuzzled him. I often gave him the same service Benny gives me—" (He ges—tured where the naked boy slept with the dog.) "—and Olaf or Pietro, the big blond Italian, would do for Tossi what you and the fishermen did for me. But Tossi grunted and pushed me away. Had he wakened I would have taken him with me. But he didn't. The probable fate of the others? I'm sure the police apprehended them later. The money and the prestige of the Count held the law off us. Without him we were vulnerable. I knew that. So I left my favorite, drunken and doomed, without regret. Such departures are strange—and very easy.

"You have asked me about the woman? Here she makes her first entrance into my wanderings. Let me introduce her by explaining that I moved down through Italy, keeping to smaller towns. A week from Zurich found me living with a gravedigger and his son. Where the mother had gone, or, in truth, if there was actually blood between man and boy, I never knew for sure. The father, whose acquaintance I made in a narrow street lit by half a moon at mid—night, had raised the child to his own tastes. They disinterred dead women, carried them to their shack—a print of the Virgin was tacked over the fire, and the roof leaked after any more than an hour's steady rain—where, with dirty fingers, and stained teeth, father and son would bruise and tear the cold mouth, breasts, buttocks, and box. Though liking to lick, lip, and tongue the cool and putrid corpses, they preferred to give up their juice in something warm, wet and responding, while they groveled, growled and bit. Often they would perform this ser—

vice for one another (reluctantly claimed the father), one on his knees, hugging the hips of the other, who lowered over the figure on the table flickering under the candles. But their real pleasure was to indulge the yellowing, lardy lumps together while somebody else—male or female, it was no matter—crouched for them. Often I saw their clotted hands meet, while man and boy exchanged congealed kisses, tonguing a l>it of fat between them.

"I met Guido, the gravedigger, as I say, in a dark street. His black eyes followed mine, pulled me .iround. After I had taken him in a doorway, he «isked me if I liked to do the same for boys, say, one of 114. As we walked, he let that young Pietro was his son and helper. When he revealed to me where the stains on his fourth-hand army coat and woolen pants had come from, I grew intrigued. By the time we reached the cemetery and their hut, Guido had tested my reaction with a dozen false tales of what might be expected of me—sometimes exaggerating well beyond anything I ever witnessed later, some—times

not quite reaching it. Finally, we stepped through the shack door, and young Pietro—blue eyes in a rat's face pocked with acne—released his teeth from the throat bared on the table, and blinked (some of his teeth were broken: his father's, all large and intact; indeed handsome and dark at forty, Guido's hair was completely black). They invited me to assist.

"I stayed with them a month. They worked hard «it their day labors. At dawn the night's pleasure object was reconcealed in the earth. But during funerals, leaning on their spades, out of earshot of the mourners, they would joke and nudge one another like two rowdies stealing glimpses through the door of a ladies' gymnasium. They were abom—inably paid. Three times, that hard month, with much joking, Guido, after he and Pietro had satisfied themselves, took the cleaver from the mantle and retained part of a thigh for roasting.

"I ate with them.

"I passed my days in town. The reason why I did not stay with them more than a month? I made the acquaintance of Catherine. Across the street (she sat, i continental banality, in a café), from her dress and carriage, I assumed her ten years or more my senior, or I don't believe I would have approached her (I merely went to ask some point of information or direction). But she turned, I stayed to talk; and she was twenty-five. She knew much more of the strange world I had chosen for myself than I. (And now, when near another quarter century has passed, and my hair is white, one might easily think she has not so aged from then.) We met with an exchange of information, which is the only way such meetings could be effected in Europe of that day. It developed into a confidant relationship over several afternoons' pastry and demitasse. On our third meeting she invited me to her home. And I learned she was Catherine, Duchessa di Monsalvaggio. The fact that I was a bright young American, not a year out of school and therefore still within the European status of student, helped excuse our friendship in the eyes of il Duce, a wealthy businessman, and his senile and provincial parents. He had brought the title to the marriage; she, from Salt Lake City, the money. Oh yes, the duke had as well brought her a stepson, within days of Pietro's age. Certainly more prepos—

sessing than Pietro, and closer to me in education, he still struck me as insufferably dull. And against his brilliant and witty stepmother, he made a poor showing. But he was occupied with his tutor most of the week.

"As I began to meet the middle classes of the town, tolerant of my poor clothes for the novelty of my alien intellect, I began to pick up the inevitable é u mors that run about such persons as the Duchessa (atherine. Contradictions are their essence. She was .1 deeply wise woman—her mentality was exhausted In merely conversational wit, verbal veneer. She was the best of wives to il Duce and on three occasions had saved his newly grown fortunes—their mar—na ge was only show, and she had forbidden her hus—band to touch her since a miscarriage some years past; now she took satisfaction with only the lowest men, most of them strangers that the duke himself in t welcomed to the house; then, anywhere from next month-to-morning, said stranger would be « \ polled from the town with direst threats. I began to discover the truth of all these during an afternoon

Iun the duke suggested over coffee in the south [ard ens that I and the Duchessa go riding. He would n.»p. We went to bridle the horses. The stable man as asleep, as it was the Italian siesta—a custom that liberine prided herself on not observing. As she

é . harnessing her mare, the horse reared. She fell I »ark. I caught her shoulders and felt her wriggle igainst me, as she tried to catch balance. She felt my

I >onse: her breath quickened. I kissed her ear.

"I pushed my tongue in her ear. Her breathing i«»l»ped. I laughed; and her hand reached mine. é hen, with her brown hair falling all over me, I lay with her in the hay beneath the mare who pawed above us and whinnied at our lovemaking. I held her face between my hands between my legs; she sucked. I had her front, finished her back; she panted and clutched the straw.

"Later we lay there, talking lazily, and the talk became personal: she told me of her 'indiscretions,' and I recounted some of my travels—I edited them; nevertheless, I made her titter with excitement when I described Tossi and the peasant girl at the last party at Zurich, or what Olaf had forced the Count to do when the young Swedish sailor was drunk one morning; the older man had protested then, but

confided his pleasure to me later. She vowed she would have done the same as he. Then, on caprice, I told her of my present situation. When I recounted how I passed my nights, she was enthralled. Remembering my hosts' claim that they cared not the sex of who sucked, I challenged her curiosity with an invitation. The Duchessa's tale about the general and the three soldiers had convinced me numbers would not disturb her nor observers distract her.

"That evening the Duchessa announced to the Duke she would go with me into town; and the Duke yawned as he had done so many times before and said how nice it was of me to entertain Her Grace during the evening; but he, alas, was addicted to his after-supper nap. They excused themselves and I went to wait for Catherine in the conservatory.

"In a quarter of an hour, she came down in a brown traveling cloak. Minutes later we hurried along the narrow street, passing that same door where I first had Guido. Soon we reached the grave—yard.

"Pietro opened the door, saw I was with someone, shut it to a crack, and demanded what I wanted as though I were a stranger. I begged him to let us in, explaining that it was all right. A moment later, Guido squeezed out. For minutes of inane conversation I tried to explain my companion's presence by innuendo: the gravedigger stubbornly refused to acknowledge he knew me. At last I bluntly announced that Catherine wanted to take part in his sport. I reached between his legs and seized him in his wool pants: 'How would you like to have this fine lady down beneath the table sucking that great misuse of yours while you gnaw the delicacies you've shoveled up. Here, I heard you joking with the boy about the pretty thing so untimely taken by its fall from her horse.'

"Guido finally appeared to understand.

"He laughed, nodded, pushed open the door.

"Catherine caught her breath. '... But I know the girl!'

"I confess, I was shocked.

"It's the young wife of our cousin's groom; she fell riding and hit her head.'

"Guido looked concerned all over again.

"Does that bother you?" I asked.

"Catherine shook her head, perhaps too quickly. 'No ...' The hood fell from her loose hair.

"In the corner, Pietro, shirtless, twisted his quite erect (spectable cock between the buttons of his pants, as though it were a handkerchief, pawing his dirty feet on one another. From marks on the corpse's belly, I guessed that Guido had let his son start already, seeing I had arrived late. Now Guido led the lady to the table with one hand, while pulling his shirt from his belt with the other. He thumbed apart his wooden fly buttons, gazed on the body a moment, then bent to the neck.

"Nothing, however, could induce Pietro to join the older laborer, now that this strange lady had joined. The Duchessa coaxed him. His father called him with descriptions of the delights awaiting the two of them. I even went to entertain him. He pushed my hand away when I reached; pushed my face away when I bent.

"What had made the boy grunt, moan, and gasp before, he now repulsed.

"We abandoned him shortly; and the Duchessa was a sway of brown hair against Guido's flexed thigh, pale fingers on dark wool. I watched the gravedigger and my lady-live toil below and above my lady-dead. Finally Catherine stood to watch. Guido tried to push her back down, but she became amorous, kissing his arms and back: where her lips left, her tongue remained. Guido's teeth tore the cold mouth.

"Kiss me that way,' Catherine whispered. 'Me, *me!* Ah, now! What do you want of the corpse?' She tried to slip between Guido and his gelid mistress. He shoved her. But she only tried harder. I could see, by his jerky movement, anger building, though he tried to contain himself. To appease him, I dropped on my knees to pleasure him as my habit was. But my lady-live seized him from my mouth. 'In me ... In me ...!' she pleaded. I was kneeling on her cloak. She wore beneath it the most translucent of shifts, which she had now bunched to her belly. She worried his brown shaft in her chestnut hair, tried to insert it in her wet slot. He twisted to the side long enough for her to gain half its length. Inflamed by part measure she thrust herself in his way in earnest. Guido held her face from his sight by the flat of his hand while he gnawed the breast beneath. 'No! no ... you must give your lips and teeth to—'



"I saw, past their legs, Pietro move to the fire—place. For a moment the fire behind darkened him to a demon. He snatched the gleaming cleaver from the mantel, and hurled himself at the Duchessa and his father. He yanked Catherine's hair back, brought the cleaver down—

"I cried out and leaped to pull him off. He got a second blow.

"All three were on the floor.

"I pulled Pietro back by the shoulders. There was blood on Catherine's forehead—but though her eyes were closed, she was breathing. I realized, even as Pietro struck a third time, then flung the weapon blattering to the wall, he'd hit with the flat of the blade!

"Now, Papa! Now she'll be still, like the other (mes, like the beautiful other ones, Papa!"

"Guido had already gone down on her. Pietro / naved her shoulder and pushed his fingers into her cunt. 'Oh, you get your big dick in there, Papa! fuck her, fuck her and then let me fuck her!' Father and son, faces pressed together, bit her belly. When I / nido rose, Pietro clawed into her like a nervous weasel. She bled. I rose to stop him, but Guido halted me.

"While she was still as the corpse on the table, she / attracted them. They invited me to take her. I did. Their excitement excited me. As well, I realized that

While I covered her lacerated body, it was harder for them to wound her further—though, as I toiled in her, they nipped at her feet and ankles, or shoved their fingers in alongside my prick. Between us, we entered her nine, ten times. But though she kept them stiff, neither Guido nor Pietro could empty himself into her. Only I filled her cavity. Then father and son got their heads between her legs and I drew their final juices. Several times I heard Guido restrain the boy: 'No, no, go in her gently. We have all night, and the beauty on the table still to go ... /

"We rested a while.

"Once I opened my eyes to see Guido, in the fire—light, kneeling to lick the blood from the face of his sleeping son. Toward dawn, I felt Guido rousing me with a boot, and Pietro kicking at me with his bare foot. 'Come to the table .. /

"Later, when Guido was buttoning his fly, and Pietro had gone to the wall to pee, I helped the Duchessa up. She was barely able to walk. Guido held the door silently for us. The cool air revived her a little as we walked along the road. It was growing light.

"Are you ...?' I ventured inanely.

"She looked at me with bruised and scabbed face. 'Go away .. / she said. 'Go away from this town/

"But—'

"Her expression was suddenly recognizable through the injury. I started at it and tried not to show my start.

"I said, 'You shouldn't have—'

"She stopped me: 'My husband is looking for me. I shall take him to the cemetery and he will have those two monsters arrested. They will be tried for their abominations and hung/

"But—'

"My husband is looking for me, Jonathan/ she said. 'Do you hear the horses ...?'

"There were horses.

"Those can't be the Duke's ...'

"Don't you think I told him where I was going? If I was not back before dawn, he was to send men out to look for me. Go away. Or I shall tell them your part in this and you will be arrested too.'

"I turned and fled into the bushes at the side of the road as the hooves clattered on the turning. There was no time to warn Guido and Pietro. I hid in the woods all day. Finally I got up courage to return to the cemetery in the late afternoon. The shack was a smoking scab at the graveyard's edge. Distraught and angry townsmen clumped together, muttering about 'the beast and his half-witted bastard/ and their audacity to abduct the Duchessa herself. How fortunate, they declared, that she had escaped with her honor, yet was able to expose their atrocities to her husband who had arrived to save her, in time. / rsio, she was upset, and the doctors said she must stay indoors several weeks; no one was to see her.

"I left the town; shortly afterward, the country.

"As I drifted east, I pondered on all this. Soon I was in countries where life meant much less than in

Europe. The particularities by which coming and killing could link up surpassed all I had heretofore experienced. But still I pondered Catherine's actions. During those periods which all of us who live this particular life must endure, when I lose all taste for women, she exemplifies that fantasy the bourgeois misogynist has predicated to justify his own inadequacy. But at other times, when concourse with my own sex revolts me, I see her more generously, and I realize that the actions of all of us were webbed by circumstance, bound by whatever forces move a Duke and Duchess, a gravedigger and his son, a wanderer in an alien land.

"She was generous enough to let me escape an easy hanging.

"I returned little enough by letting her escape my censure.

"Toward the end of two years' wanderings I stayed a double month in India, most of it in the house of Geana Liana, a woman not twenty-one, but in whose palatial establishment, inherited from a doting 'uncle/ acts were committed hourly by Indians and Europeans alike, night and day, that would make the deeds of the gravedigger, were they lights in the sky, fade—to take an image from Sappho—as the moon blinds out the near stars. Those talents I had begun to develop with the Count were brought to fruition there: I ministered deeds, envisioned more arduous ones, participated in many; often I helped the participants recuperate.

"Geana herself, as I drank Turkish coffee and ate candied fruit on the balcony and she painted at my portrait, asked, 'Jon? What do you want to do?' Eyes winged with kohl, she smiled behind her veil. 'You are a doctor who cannot heal anyone. You say you have studied the ways of different cultures, yet you are amazed at everything you see. Do you paint?'

"∞ draw a little—I had actually had a job as a medical illustrator for one term.

"Tomorrow I will loan you paints and brushes. And you will paint a mural on the wall of the West Chamber with the white jade columns.'

"I painted the wall. Three grisailles, later glazed: two men, a man and a woman, and two women made their loves on swirled sheets. Beneath the trip—tych was a panel as long as the three together, of ties, underwear, loafers, high-heel shoes, slips, brassieres. She found it amusing."

The captain's teeth were yellow in the candlelight. "I know Geana Liana's house near Bombay. I bought two blond children from her seven years ago."

"Yes, she sells children."

"And I know the paintings. She keeps them well cleaned."

"She does?"

The captain nodded.

"Suetonius describes the wall mural of the Capri pleasure palace of the Emperor Tiberius. It was reputedly destroyed when the palace fell. Later, it was rumored to have survived in the Vatican collection of forbidden art. But there was a mural in her hall that much better suited the description than the *one* in Rome .... You say she honors *my* paintings?"

The captain nodded. "You say she was not twenty-one when you knew her. When I bought Kirsten and Gunner from her, she was over forty. And your paintings were honored."

Proctor nodded, smiling.

"So I became a painter. And also a writer. When I struck out for home, I had all my adventures in a trunk full of notebooks. I wrote a novel. For a decade .liter its publication, it was moderately popular. The book, which I published at twenty-six, recounted the wanderings of a young man in search of himself .ê ross our extravagant world. I reached this country with my sheaf of manuscripts, and had no trouble selling it. All of what I've told you is in it. But how transformed! The Count is an effete old man who sits sadly in cafes, ogling pretty girls. Olaf and Tossi are there—his black and blond bodyguards, as I describe them. And the peasant girl crying in the empty rooms of the Zurich hotel where the Count's last party was held before his disappearance has become someone kissed in the shadow by a strange, dark man who would not say his name. Guido and Pietro—the upright gravedigger and his son who befriended the hero? Catherine and her Duke? Oh, they are there: the benevolent aristocrats who aid him because they sense some spark of vision to be nurtured. Why does the Duchessa send him away, after a mysterious night walking among the graves? She feels attracted to him, but loves the Duke too deeply to

hurt him with jealousy. Even Geana Liana—oh, I allowed hints of exotic intrigues to move about her as she helps the hero to his artistic burgeonings—in my story he paints her portrait, I believe: but the hints are misted with the Eastern Unknown.

Oh, I lied and lied in that book!

“It was popular with both critics and readers. As I said, for a decade after its publication I enjoyed a certain literary celebrity. People awaited my next novel. Thank God, there was none! I know now that Geana was right and that I am a painter. I know that these chimeras I render guard a truth, the proof of which is—and it is terribly sad that in the twentieth century, hedging into the twenty-first, this is still so valid a test—so few people will buy them.”

He glanced at one of the smaller paintings: on a Confederate flag, spread across a table, were two bronze plates. A white man’s testicles and penis lay on one; a black man’s on the other.

“Money from the book’s continued sales has kept me frugally happy since.” Once more Proctor closed his eyes and leaned his head against the wall. “So you have seen Geana recently—”

“Tell me more about Catherine.”

“Yes ...” Proctor whispered. “Yes. I love her, you know ...”

“But why is she here? When did she leave Italy to return to this country, this town, where the barkeep—ers keep such strange creatures in their cellars?”

Proctor’s eyebrows went up. “Ah ... that is the ultimate flattery. She came, after the Duke had died, because I was here. Even—she told me—the old cemetery in that little town was closed.”

“What details ...?”

“They are private, and not for this book. Because they entail love—you frown, because I can love the woman I described to you? Yes, I suppose she is evil. But this must be an evil story. And in that this part of the tale concerns the form of love, it has little place in the rest of the narrative. It is only natural that she should have been as fascinated by me as I by her. Lean close to me, Captain, so I can whisper this part secretly to you, so that the spirits that hover and pry and try to overhear will catch nothing of this section. You ask about the poor thing Nazi keeps in his base—ment. That mad hunchback was once her lover, as was I. Now lean closer ...”

White and black, the two heads came close to one another. The story progresses in a low voice. The candle flame deviled the images about the walls.

## Chapter Four. Homunculi

Oh, this is admirable! Here I ha’ stolen one of Doctor Faustus’ conjuring books, and i’ faith I mean to search some circles for my own use. Now will I make all the maidens in our parish dance at my pleasure, stark naked before me; and so by that means I shall see more than e’er I felt or saw before.

—Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*

Gunner pulled the blanket from his shoulder, be—cause it had moved enough to wake him. And cal—lused fingers ploughed his hair, locked behind his neck. “Suck it ...” in a bear’s growl, roughed with sleep.

His face came up against harsh cloth that stank, crisp hair, and a cock slippery with mucus. Grunts; legs locked him. He grabbed the buttocks that lifted into his face.

Someone nuzzled between his legs; his legs opened.

“Right, boy! Suck it!”

Grappled ass; pulled him over. He lay on a hairy belly, his own dick in the bald man’s face. Fingers probed his. His palms identified their acts in the dark. Somebody worked Bull’s pants down farther: Gunner heard the rush of cloth on skin. Hairy legs rose about his ears. He let the cock slip and nosed balls. Bull pushed him further. Dry hair cut at his tongue. Then tongue tip found the soft home. His face wedged in hot muscle. Bull squirmed on Gunner’s flexing face. Hands again: he came up, again, to nose a

boy's crotch. Dick, thick as Bull's, but inches shorter: Benny held Gunner's face, hunched and arched, hunched and arched. Gunner, freed, is distracted a moment by a breast brushing his cheek. Grasped at (she, gasping beside him in the dark), opened his mouth to, but it left. He went down for ass again, found it full of cock. He licked the pulsing entrance, balls in both hands. Bull: arched at the fucking thrust, pulled Gunner by the hair to finger his iron in the boy's throat. Benny (arrived with the tall, white-haired Proctor, Proctor who rose and fell now, his slimy great crank plung—ing through Gunner's fist into his sister's drooling crack), moved away in the dark. And Gunner was yanked around, and someone grabbed his hands, tongued, prodded, licked; then, pulled the boy down, his lips opening under: tongue and prod, and suck. Another body wriggled on top of them. Crushed in the interleave, Gunner felt a cock thrust in his face and gathered himself about it, holding it by the wet hairs. The body on top floundered; the rigid muscles hardened. Then, in the give, Gunner slipped out. He crawled across bodies. His hand hit a shoulder he knew. He moved his hand up the hot, wet neck to rough hair.

The captain halted long enough to raise his face. Thick lips opened over Gunner's. The captain filled the boy's mouth with his tongue. And raised further to unstick Kim, who moaned till something moved to fill her. Gunner felt his master's hand press his face down the sweating belly. The familiar cock plugged his throat, flavored with unfamiliar juice. A chuckle shook the belly above him. Gunner worked his mouth around the shaft. One cock was snatched from his face, another thrust in: it swelled, heated, and bellied his cheeks with bitter syrup. The cap—tain's fingertips were like pebbles on the back of his skull. And the captain's laughter was like (suede ...? maroon ...?)

Gunner pulled away, managed to kneel, whisper—ing, "Hey, Captain? What ...? Why ...?"

The captain put Gunner's hand into his crotch. The dick was half hard. "You little bastards got it all this afternoon. It goes up; nothing comes out."

"But ...?"

He pushed the boy away. Gunner, puzzled, moved toward the line of light that should be the door, unsteady on the mattresses. Once a woman reached up to play the cords of his inner thigh. He lingered long enough to stiffen but pulled away at the kiss.

By the door he found his pants, slipped his legs in, tied his belt and stepped into the hall.

A breeze blew from the alley. Gunner walked to the doorway, stood with his toes over the broken top step. A breeze dried and cooled his chest.

Nazi stood by the drainpipe, taking his dick out I to piss. He saw the boy. (Does he grin or does he ) smile?) "Hey." He beckoned Gunner, took his shoul—/ der. Nazi swiveled his boot toe, then he put his bare foot on Gunner's (the chain is cold against Gunner's ankle; the gritty sole is hot). Gunner reached for Nazi's cock, his small fingers slipping between the big, dirty knuckles. Nazi's mouth broke a wide grin. He kneaded the boy's neck. On the hard, shiny arm a dragon writhed about a blue swastika. Nazi smelled.

Gunner heard water; a hot splash on his belly. He looked down to the arc glittering: Nazi guided it to Gunner's groin, leg, sparkling and darkening the canvas. A rain on their doubled foot. The hand on Gunner's shoulder became a weight. Gunner gave, and his wet knees knocked Nazi's shins. Nazi's urine beat belly, chest, chin. He caught the boy's hair, yanked. Gunner's face flooded and he lost the view of the spurting cock. His eyes went tight before the burning. His head was pushed back, so his mouth opened. The taste of hot ocean foamed between his cheeks. Nazi laughed.

Fist's rim butted his face: then something bitter, butting, as the ocean dribbled away. He held Nazi's pockets, and pushed his face into the wet denim. Nazi shoved his cock in Gunner's gaping ... gagged on the first three thrusts; then hungrily caught the hips' rhythmic sag. Hair ground his blind face, its rush timed to the drawling—

"—suck it up ... drink it up ... cocksucker ... mother—fucker ... ass eater ... little shit face—" Hands clamped Gunner's ears and pulled him in, pulled him in again. "—suck that dick—yeah, yeah—eat the shit off it—make me juice you up, boy—God damn cocksuck—ing, dick-eating, piss-headed, cunt-faced—*Ahhhhh!*"

Nazi let himself lean back on the wall. Gunner rocked on the soaked lap, leaning against the legs—the left one quivered, quivered again—listen—ing to the gasps. Gunner felt a hand on his head.

Thought it was Nazi; opened his eyes to see it was too large, and black. He looked up expecting his master. Instead, a strange, big-bellied black (spades cannot smile in this story) grinned: "You been fuckin' that young un's face pretty hard, 'ey?"

"Sure have."

"Shit. What did you do? Piss all over him?"

"Yeah!"

Hard fingers went over Gunner's face. "Sure would like to watch that wet-head suck on my cock. He up for turn-out?"

"Sure." Nazi reached for the fisherman's crotch. The black moved his legs apart. Nazi's fingers defined a dick like a joint of pipe in grimy khaki. "Hey, chew on that, cocksucker. This nigger wants some head."

Thrusts his hips forward, and a falsetto laugh tumbles down into a rasping growl as Gunner opens his mouth on the shape. It thickens between his teeth. The smell of sweat and days.

The grunt broke off: "Take that black mother out and feed it to the son of a bitch."

Nazi fingered apart the brass buttons, pulled out the great meat, dead black. He forced Gunner's mouth with two fingers (they tasted of pee) and guided the dick down.

"How do you like the way my boy sucks, nig—ger?"

"Play with my balls, man."

Nazi pulled out the sac. Gunner put his arms around the thighs.

"Hey, nigger, how much pussy you had on that black fucker this week?"

"I don' keep no count. Ten, fifteen."

"How does my boy suck beside them bitches?"

"That's right, motherfucker, mash my balls around in his face."

The tight skin unwrinkled under the warmth of Gunner's chin.

"You ever fuck a sheep, nigger?"

"Yeah."

"You ever fuck a goat?"

"Yeah."

"Nigger, you ever fuck a pig?"

"Yeah."

"

"How does my boy there on his knees between yours feel on that hog sticker?"

"Squeeze my fuckin' balls, Nazi. Yeah, you're doing fine there, cocksucker. I'm gonna shoot his head off. Oh, yeah, a little harder—not you, Nazi, stupid bastard—yeah. Like that, like ..."

Scum filled the back of Gunner's mouth, welled to the front. The man gasped, bit the gasp off, but more of it hissed out, anyway. Gunner pushed his face far forward as he could, his throat constricting. Nazi's fingertips touched his lips.

The nigger said: "That boy sucks like he's still thirsty."

Nazi: "He drinks anything you want to give him."

Gunner's face was sweating. As he came back a wind blew from the alley end.

Nazi: I'd sure like to watch you give him some more to drink. He ain't had very much. Don't know where he picked up that thirst. I guess it's working on all that dick."

The fisherman pulled his dick free. It hung wet under Gunner's cheek. The nigger said: "... I'd sure like to see you down there with him, white man. I mean, down where you could get a good look. I mean a good, close look at me pissin' in his face." Two voices fell to pieces on laughter.

Nazi grabbed the back of Gunner's neck. With the side of his hand he wiped away the drool and urine running the boy's chin. He squeezed his own dick; it glistened through his fingers. He kneeled behind the boy, pushed the rope belt down Gunner's buttocks; he put a finger in the boy's ass. It went easily; he put another one in. Opened his fingers; started his cock's head in the opening. Pulled his hand away, jabbed forward. His stained fingers went to the boy's chest to pinch a nipple.

The nigger pissed.

Nazi took the dark length to aim it. Yellow broke like glass in his face. é

“That’s right, sucker,” (Nazi growling at Gunner’s ear) “open your mouth, boy.”

Nazi’s hips beat Gunner’s butt. The boy felt fire in him. Nazi’s hand rubbed his wet face, his belly. Gunner squirmed back on the beating lap. Once Nazi took a mouthful of the black’s urine; when Gunner turned to see, spat in his face. Gunner’s mind melted in the hot play.

Nazi opened his lips on the cheek, touched it with his tongue. The cords of the glistening neck tight—ened when Nazi bit his shoulder. A red drop trickled across Gunner’s collarbone, to blur on his wet chest.

Gunner’s hand reached for the black cock, fell back. The fisherman leaned forward into his mouth, f le panted, and behind him the growl threaded his curses, looser than the laughter above.

“Hey, man. Look at that—”

“Yeah, *look!* Cocksucker lovin’ that dick, yeah! Ain’t he a hot little shit!”

“Give it to him, Nazi! I’d sure like to get my dick into some of that.”

“Nigger, step back! Lemme dick this white boy’s face again—”

“Look at his cheeks go on that black meat.”

“Long time, *long* time since I had a white boy’s face to piss in.”

“See this here dick in my hand? Man, he get one hole free and I’m gonna put it in him.”

“Save it for Proctor ....”

“Shit. That white boy gonna have some black dick tonight.”

“He sure gonna get some of this one here.”

“You keep playin’ with it, nigger, and you won’t do nothin’ but get yo’ han’ wet.”

“I got enough to bang this kid and any pussy Proctor wants.”

“Proctor wants us now. You heard what Benny said—”

“Look out, nigger. Nazi’s about to spill it. Look at the boy fight that dick ....”

Confused with new voices, Gunner held the cock deep, deeper. Nazi growled between thrusts, “Cocksucker,” and thrust, “I’m gonna give ... now!” and shook, “... *Ahhhh* ...” and thrust again. “Yeah, yeah, shit, yeah ...”

The hot chest peeled from Gunner’s back. The cock in him flooded, had fallen, had flopped from his buttocks.

“All right ...” Nazi caught his breath. “Now. which one of you black bastards wants a chance at my boy here? How about you, Jomo? Fine meat, but don’t spoil it jerkin’ it like that. Come on, nigger. Get out of his face. You made it once already. You just playin’ now. Hey, suck on Jomo. Yeah, there you go. *Mmmm*. You like that, Jomo? Bet your black ass you do. Yeah, nigger, you better grin. Niggers can’t smile in this book. Hey there, you motherfuckers have been putting down some shit. You gonna let that ass go empty? I got it all slicked up for you. Hey, Sambo, where’s your little boy Nig? Or Dove? They fuck almost as good as you. Get down there to it. Go that ass, Sambo! Feels a lot better than my wet hand, huh? Look, once you God damn coons finish, get on inside to Proctor. He’s waitin’ for you. Shit, will you look at Jomo! Okay, boy. Get on inside. Your turn, Jeb—Christ, nigger, you smell like you been dickin’ a hog in a pig wallow. Motherfucker ... I didn’t know you were that big; come on, get it down his face. He ran take it. *Alllll* the way. Eat up that meat. Look a—here, cocksucker, you can lick my hand all you want as long as you get that dick down. These black boys got some come to come. Hey, what you hanging «éround here for, nigger? You had yours already. Get on inside. Proctor’s waiting.”

“Now,” Kim whispered, “you must dress me. You’ll like that, Bull. You’ll like dressing me.”

One big, dirty hand cupped her breast from behind. The other moved on her flank. His breath was moist in her ear; his hand was knuckling I »el ween her legs, rough nubs prodding her, piercing her. She rubbed his hairy arm; put her palm on his bony, shaved skull, moved her fingers on his fleshy neck

“Now, Bull,” she said. “Let’s go now.” 11 e grunted as she pulled from him. Following her, he felt a door sill under his bare foot, once stubbed his toe on a step. They climbed in heat and dust. Walls: a narrow stair. And still the steps sagged.

The small slap of her feet was gone from ahead of him. In the gap, confusion: an unfrosted bulb’s

light, above her head, came on. She dropped her arm from the string. Shoulders, chin, and stomach shone. Behind her, against the attic wall, beside boxes, old pipes, tools and other attic accoutrement, was a painting.

A full-length portrait of her: It had been put there within the day, the only object without dust.

“Now ...”

He rubbed his lip with his thumb knuckle. “Did Proctor ...?”

“Shhhh ....” and nodded. She looked from the painting to the window. They could see lights from the houses of Colson Hill.

Bull made a long, wordless sound, rubbed blunt fingers along his fat cock. Growled: “Get this pecker up your high-class Colson Hill pussy ... pussy ... pussy ...,” a fist around it, moving.

Her blood-colored nails touched her thighs, her stomach, the underswell of her breast. “My boot,” she said. “You must dress me as I am in the picture.”

He looked around. By the brick chimney that made a column in the room were the piled attire.

She moved her foot forward on the floorboards. “My boot.”

He bent and picked up the kneeboot. He stood, looked at her, looked at it. He held the metal-boned heel against his matted crotch. He moved his red flesh on the patent glister, walking across the floor. He stopped in front of her. Watched her. She blinked.

Her face was: a small scar, not a quarter of an inch, below her mouth. Other than that, her face was. She shook her hair back off her shoulder. Blinked. Breathed in, suddenly, loosing the wrinkle from the skin under her arm. He bent his head. Dropped to his knees. The backs of his thighs on his calves sand—wiched hair and sweatije slipped his fingers beneath her instep, lifted her foot. With his other hand: touched the red nail on her second toe with his forefinger.

She cleared her throat. He looked up, only as high as her crotch though. The ligament down from her groin shifted. She cleared her throat again.

He looked up at her looking down. The bulb above darkened her face exploded in the edge of her hair.

“Dirty animal .../”

He fell on her foot, nipping, licking, sucking her smaller toes, barking. He curled on the floor, scrap—ing hip and arm, to press the ball of her foot against his groin. She kicked him, twice. In the crotch; and when he gasped, in the face.

“My boot ...”

On his knees, he pulled the leather around her toes, bending to let his tongue run her skin. The inside smelled of sweat, tasted of sweat.

He fixed the flaps closed, pulled the laces—

“Tighter!”

—tighter till lumped muscle glistened under the hair on his shoulders. Down, to lick the pale shin disappearing between the closing lapels. Straddling her foot, rubbing his red cock on the rough thongs, the smooth leather, he tried to pry his tongue beneath the boot’s rim, just above her knee. Now he looked up, twice. Once furtively. Then he hurled his face into her bush. She let him lick, even ran her palm over his great, shaved head. Then she pushed him away.

He collapsed to the floor. He clutched her boot, gnawing the leather covering of her heel, the side of her sole. She kicked his face, the fifth time hard enough to make him draw back, holding his eye.

“My ...” She drew breath between the words, let it, and drew breath again, “... glove.”

Bull rocked to his feet, panting. He went to the brick chimney. He looked at the painting behind her, stopped and began to search the pile. He pulled free the leather glove, walked back to her, rubbing it against the hair above his cock’s base.

She held out her hand.

He opened his lips and dropped them to her knuckles, dropped his tongue to trough between them.

Her hand whipped his mouth: *Crack, crack!*

So he put the glove on, bunching the leather about each finger, and working it back, then lowered his head again to lick the bone shapes in her wrist, her arm, as he pulled up the cuff. It stopped at the middle

of her upper arm—he had twisted to touch the rougher skin of her elbow with his tongue so he put his mouth on her breast, holding the nipple hard. He pushed his hand between her legs.

All she did was reach down and grasp his cock with her gloved finger twisted, twisted harder. Pulled. He growled, and she caught his balls and squeezed. He went “Ughh ...” and staggered back.

She was panting.

Her reticulated nipple with its puffed aureole glis—tened.

“Go on.” The light in the saliva on her breast went ( m and off with her breathing.

He looked at the painting again, then went back for the leather bra—low, black, with cut-outs to let the nipples through. While he put it on and tried to kiss her neck, she beat his face and, when he finally fell, kicked his face. He had two cuts on his face; and a bruise on one shoulder.

He went back for the skirt. On his knees, he tried to buckle the heavy, hobbled belt. He began to nip her buttocks, stick his tongue into the wet crease, floating lower to cover his nose in her smell. She turned sharply, brought her knee against his face. He fell back. “Filthy, stupid beast ...” whispered, “... bring me your collar.”

He brought the buckled strip of brass-studded leather. In the middle, a brass loop fastened to a plate fixed to the band. For the leash.

He gave it to her. And she smiled, turning it clockwise. Turning it.

He breathed hard, slowly moving his hand over his hard-on. “Pussy ...” he whispered. “Pussy ... mama ... pussy ...” He reached for the little hair that was showing below the skirt. She pushed his hand away, still examining the strap.

Suddenly he pushed forward, grabbed her around the shoulders, grunting. She beat at his chest, slapped the collar across his face: he mumbled, “Fuck-a-pussy ... fuck-a-mama ....” over bruised lips. He sank his red pole into her foaming slash. (But slashes don’t foam. Sometimes ... sometimes? No. Sometimes everything ....) She scratched his face, bit, spat at him. He brought her down, hard on the floor, so she cried out. Her leather grip raked his face, flailed his shoulders. Her thigh boots (He has only put one on her; she is wearing two now; and one glove.) flopped about his hips. He fell, hunching and hunching. She snarled and the sound opened to a roar; as he bit on her chest, he felt the strap go around his neck.

“Dirty, smelly pig ....” The buckle tinkles; the strap tightens across his windpipe. The buckle clicked closed. “Be quick, you filthy, stupid ...” she whispers, at last. “We must be—” His cock caused her to cramp as her hand flailed. She hit the bottom of the painting. It crashes on its face. “—be ready for Proctor!” The sudden sound made Bull come.

Perhaps in the painting she is only wearing one boot. And one glove. It is lying on its face. I cannot see.

Proctor slapped Benny’s brown buttocks. “Pull your pecker out of that pussy. I need you.”

Benny, groggy, pushed himself from Kirsten, rose unsteadily to his feet, bent to pull his pants up. It stuck out, all shiny. With heavy hands, he twisted at himself as he followed his master.

The captain kneeled beside the girl. “Get up.”

Groggy as Benny, she put her arms around the captain’s leg. The captain put his arm under her shoulder to support her.

A black fisherman stepped over the near couple, stooped down and touched her right breast. “Hey,” at the captain, “how about lettin’ big Sambo at that cunt for a while, Captain? Sure would like some.”

The captain was about to push the fisherman away, but Kirsten had already reached into his fly, shucked loose the foreskin from the wet head, “Oh, yeah!” kneeling and pushing out his hips: “Do it to me, honey. I want to get you back on my boat with my boys. I know the kind of pussy you are. You need a prick in each hole.”

The captain stood. “Go on, finish it, nigger.”

“Oh, but I want both of ...” and she looked quietly at the captain walking away. Sambo pulled her head around. She let him slip his cock into her mouth.



### *Sambo's Tale:*

Hey, take a rest, girl. Come on sit out here on the steps with me a while. What are you gonna do, crawl back in there after them? It'll wait for you. Lean against me for a while, if you can sit up.

Now you know who Proctor really should have got up here? My two boys. I work down on the boats, and I trained 'em what to do with the meat between their legs. A pair of rape artists. You take these waterfront bitches on your boat a few months, and wouldn't you know they're gonna drop some little bastard after a while. I got left with two, about twenty years back. One of them I'm pretty sure is mine. But I had this blonde bitch swellin' up and eatin' my food for a while, sure as shit she's gonna pop out with a little chocolate baby. Come out blond-headed and blue-eyed as you are! Never will know who his pappy was. I kept him though. That's Dove. Nig is the other one, but they grew up on my boat. I guess that's brothers. Bitches run off 'fore the boys got up a whole year.

Wild little pair of motherfuckers.

When they was about old as you I found their mamas. The black one was workin' for a woman up on Colson Hill. The white one, she just takin' to hangin' around the docks again. Her iÃ man had just kicked her off one of the snapper boats down the other end of the Horseshoe. We all got together on my boat, with a *lot* of liquor. The old ladies are goin' on about what fine boys Nig and Dove turned out. [Sambo narrows his lids over ivory-colored balls.] Back then, lemme see, Nig was about this big—[Sambo measures out a length from the tip of his middle finger to the middle of his palm]—Dove was maybe a half an inch longer, though Nig caught up. First I sic'ed that little black boy on the white bitch, while I sit in the corner with my cock up Dove's ass. And the black bitch was down between our knees, just a suckin' his red pecker. When Nig got up to go get a drink, I caught hold of his black ass, he come staggering by. 'Fore I had it half in, Dove's mama had her blonde head wrapped around that chocolate bar. Soon as I let Dove go he had that black bitch on the floor just tearin' up some pussy. "Hey there," I kept whispering in Nig's ear, "how you like watchin' your brother givin' it to your mama, hey, boy?" Black bastard squirmed so hard he got my load three times. Later, me and Dove took turns workin' on Dove's mama while she moaned and kicked her legs around his ears. And Nig was eatin' out his mama's old black pussy like Hershey chocolate. After a while I went over to help Nig, and left Dove's pink ass fallin' on his mama's box like a bouncy ball. Nig and I hauled that black bitch all over the cabin and the deck: me in one end and the boy in the other. Or [He snaps his fingers.] the other way around.

After I'd kicked the bitches off the boat, and we'd gone to sleep, I remember I was havin' this real fine dream, and sort of reachin' down to scratch it, only there was Dove. He'd got my pants open and was just a workin' away on the old pecker. Nig was all curled up naked against my back and didn't even wake up. Dove had wrapped his legs around one of mine and rubbin' off like a pink-assed puppy. I said, "Hey, what the hell are you ..." Then I just lay back and stuck my finger in his ear while he did it. A cou—ple of seconds after I come his little butt locked and then he brought his hand from between his legs, all strong and sticky; lickin' his fingers.

"Hey," I said.

He looked up at me, his tongue workin' down between his knuckles.

"Come on up here." I pulled him up so he leaned on my chest, still lickin'. "What's the matter with you, boy?"

He looked surprised. "Weren't it good?"

"Sure it was good," I said. "But your daddy know when he wakes up and finds you suckin' away on his pecker that something's wrong. I ain't that drunk."

He finished, then he just put his head down and began to cry.

"Hey, boy ..." I put my arms around him, while he made a couple of hiccuping tries to stop. Then finally he just let it come, all that crying. He began to pee, too, all over my belly. I just rubbed his back I stuck my finger in his ass, 'cause he liked that. Kids brung up like Nig and Dove can't never hold their water when they're young. I just let him cry and pee himself out. Took about the same time. His dick was hard when he finished, too. "You feel better now?"

He nodded; and he was rubbin' himself off. Finally he began to whisper, "Fuck me, papa ... oh, stick it up my ass, daddy! Go on, fuck me ...." I reamed him with my fingers a little more. Then I rolled him over and slid in without even no spit.

We got goin' so hard Nig woke up long enough to get over and push his peter into his brother's mouth. Dove took it from him; I worked his little pink bot—tom *hard*.

Nig went to sleep again after one shot. But Dove kept me going till the sun was coming in long and red through the portal. Finally I wrapped around him, with the boat rockin', and licked the sweat out of his ear; "You gonna tell me now what you was cryin' for?"

He just wriggled. I waited for him to tell me. But there was that shift in his breathing, you know? Gone to sleep. I just put my head down, a half—hard—still eight inches in him. And went to sleep.

Proud of them little bastards. They're good boys. Glad I stuck their mammies. Glad I kept 'em when they fell out. You feelin' better now? Yeah, you look better. Your backside okay? Come on, we go see what Proctor wants us for.

Gimme your hand, girl.

## Chapter Five. The Stones Of St. Mark

I leave you free to choose whatever lie you think worthiest to be the truth

—*My Faust*, Paul Valéry

Nig and Dove?

Big-handed, heavy-footed boys, twenty now. I lard shoulders; one blue-eyed, one brown. One with yellow hair, long and dirty; one with black, rough and tight as iron shavings. One bit his nails and smiled a lot. The other didn't and laughed. Both: workman's greens. Behind the crotch of one hung ten veined inches, nearly thick as a beer can, rod and wet under the wrinkled hood. The other had so much coal colored meat it made the red look small.

Barefoot in the dusty dark, they wandered near the waterfront.

Nig stopped his brother with an elbow, nodded toward a doorway. Dove frowned; they exchanged looks, went over.

Dove: "Hey, you all right?"

Robby lifted his head and blinked away the last of a dream about ... and blinked again.

Nig: "What you doin' there?"

Robby looked between them: big bones, scrawny bellies. He shook his head and grinned. "Guess I went to sleep while I was sittin' down." He got his feet under him, looked about the dark street.

The boys were grinning.

"Say," he went on, "you guys know where to get some pussy? I been here a whole day, but I ain't hardly seen none."

"Shit." The black boy grinned more broadly. "You gotta beat it off with a stick in this town."

"If you can't get none right away," the white boy said, "there's a dozen little nigger boys runnin' around the boats who'll suck your dick for a nick—el."

"I don't got no nickel," Robby said. "Besides, I don't go for that shit."

The black boy was still grinning. "All the pussy running around this town, I don't have to spend no more'n twenty-five cents ever' year or so. I get it two, three, four times a day."

Robby shook his head again. "I guess I jusi^on't—have that nigger luck."

"Look," the white one told him, "you better not sleep in the doorway. You gonna have a run-in with a man named Bull. You won't see him comin'. Everybody knows him so he don't wear a uniform."

"Big bald-headed mother."

"You don't see him, but then he got his gun in your neck, and there you're all locked up."

"You go under the docks," the black one said. "That's where you can get some sleep." He put his

hands in his pockets. "Say, what's your name, if you're gonna be hangin' around for a few days?"

"Robby," Robby said, and stuck up his hand.

"I'm Dove." They shook. "This is Nig."

Nig took his hands out of his pockets, shook. Then he squatted by the door, black toes splayed in his pool of shadow.

"You fellows work the boats?"

Nig nodded and Dove said, "Sometimes."

"I guess there ain't too much more to do in this town." Robby hugged his knees. His eyes roamed the street. "Sometimes I wish there was something else. I mean, I'd like to get some work that just wasn't the easiest thing to find right off. I'd maybe even like to go to school. I know guys who go to school and they got good jobs. What I think I'd really like would be something where I could move around. That would be better than school, you know?"

Nig scratched the faded part of his pants groin, bagged with the weight inside. "We got ourselves a good job, Dove and me. Make more money than on the boats."

"What you do?"

Dove squatted now and threw back his hair. "Rape artists."

Robby frowned. "What the hell is that?"

"What the hell it sound like?" Nig said.

"We work together," Dove said. "I take the black pussy. Nig takes all the white comin' by. You a good enough stud, you can pick up on it."

"Who pays?" Robby asked.

"Sometimes women; mostly men. People up on Colson Hill give us a lot of work."

Nig, still scratching, drawled, "We put in a lot of practice time."

Robby shook his head once more. "Naw. It just doesn't sound right. I stuck my share of pussy. I like action, sure. But there ain't no need to go after it with a lead pipe. There's enough to go around so you don't have to fight it down."

Dove: "You ain't found none around here, yet."

Nig: "I like it any way I can get it."

Dove: "It's a good job."

"Well," Robby said. "It just ain't for me."

Dove stood up. Nig, laughing soft and warm, rubbed Dove's left foot with his knuckles: "But it sort of made you harden up a little, huh?" Now he stood too.

Dove: "Hope you get some the way you're lookin' it."

They were walking down the street.

Nig: "And get under the dock before Bull catches you out here."

Robby, calling after: "Yeah, okay."

He rested his arms across his knees, watching the two walk away. Rape artists. He frowned, and reached down to arrange himself. When he looked up they were beyond the street light.

—A Cartoon: UPA—

One had ten.

One had more.

"Man, I got to get into some white pussy tonight." He leaned on Dove's shoulder; scratched. "You gotta give me some white pussy tonight or you ain't shit."

"Fuck off, nigger. You sound like that fool back there. What you gonna find on the street this hour? Don't you think about anything else?"

"Naw. What you thinkin'?"

"Your big black dick up some tight white cunt." And Nig cracked up, prancing.

*Equinox* /ÉÍÉ

"Hey," Dove said, "how'd you like the one we got this afternoon?"

"Which one?"

"The first one."

"Oh, *man!* How old you think she was?"

"I dunno. A hundred-thirteen. She had some big titties. For 113. Could throw that ass around."

Nig came back and put his arm on Dove's shoulder. "Watchin' her suck on your peter while I was givin' it to her, it got me so hot I think it made me come the third time. But that little nigger bitch sure knew how to give a couple of guys a good time, huh?" He rubbed Dove's back. "We don't get no more pussy, an' you gonna get fucked again." He squeezed Dove's left cheek. "Dove, I think you like my dick in your hole. I think you was thinkin' about my black dick up your tight white asshole."

Dove scratched his shoulder. "Maybe."

Where Nig's muscles were tight, Dove's were gen—erous, heavy on, arms and calves. "Never said I didn't."

"But you go after pussy, and you like it ...."

"You done put my pecker in enough of it."

"All them hot-ass little nigger bitches."

Dove grins.

"Boy, why'n't you go for white pussy? I think that's about the only thing really wrong with you!"

"Why don't you go for black?"

"How many of them black babies you seen dance at the end of my stick this week? Twelve, fourteen?"

"A fuckin' cage of monkeys!" Dove gnawed the wreck of his thumbnail. "But you don't go after it the same. Anyway, white pussy's only good for one thing."

Nig leered and scratched deep in his pocket. "What?"

"Some coon like you with a prick longer'n mine."

"Aw, man—"

"Yeah ..." Dove lifted his crotch.

The bottom of Nig's pocket was torn. "You sure go after it once I spilled my nuts in it." He squeezed his cock; warmth bloomed at his belly's base. "Eatin' up that pussy."

"You know what I'm eatin', nigger."

Disparagingly: "Yeah ..." And then, "I don't see why you don't just go down on me."

Dove shook his head. "Ain't the same."

"Aw, come on—"

"Naw. Look, you black son of a bitch: you wouldn't hardly be able to get it up with them nig—ger bitches if you didn't have my pink pecker to look at, givin' it in their faces, stickin' it in their ass. You sure sucked on it enough when you was a kid—"

"That was—"

"And you're too dumb tōget white pussy^fof yourself. You ain't never objected to me goin in after—ward when you finished with it to lick out your leav—in's." Dove stuck his hand in Nig's pocket, squeezed.

"Ahhhhhh—!" Nig closed his eyes, worked his fingers further in Dove's buttocks"

"... gonna fuck you, boy. Yeah, now."

Dove opened his buckle, pushed his pants down his thighs.

Nig popped a fly button.

Dove spat on his fingers. "Hey, watch out." He took the cock and rubbed it.

"Come on, Dove! Lemme put it ... in, yeah. Yeah, like that. I'll go ... easy—"

"Ahhh—" and

"Yeah! Fuck yo'—ass, white boy. Oh—yeah, like—a soft—sweet, slop—y puss—"

"Fuck me, Nig. Yeah ..."

"Ohhh—" and

"Ohhhhh—" and

"Ohh—" and

"Ohhhh, Yeah! Fuck it, you bastard! Yeah, you black motherfucker! Ohh, right in there." Dove rubbed the heels of his hands on the hand gripping his chest. "Lick my neck. Bite it—oh, Yeah! Fuck

me—fuck me—fuck me, nigger—shit Oh—yeah!” Dove’s legs tightened in the loop of his pants.

Nig’s breath rasped, halted, rasped again. He let his tongue laze, and his lips lie, on Dove’s back. When the rhythm dangled him over the coming chasm he hissed. Dove threw back his head. “Yeah, fuck me, Dove,” Nig lipped without voice on Dove’s ear, tasting salt and things more bitter. “Yeah, you like that, pig sticker! Don’t you; yes you, like it, baby!

“Fuck me, yeah and, fuck me. Twitch your pretty ass. Swing your sweet white ass on my pecker, brother!”

Dove squeezed his cockhead. Jerked.

Nig shot. Dove felt the last thrust lock; the locked loins shook. Tongue and a torrent of air.

Dove came all over his hand.

Nig hung from Dove’s back.

Dove lifted his hands: glistening gray strands, drooping. He caught one on his tongue.

Nig pulled out.

Dove almost drew blood from the two fingers in his mouth.

Nig squatted in the doorway. He rubbed Dove’s foot. Once put his head against Dove’s thigh.

Dove leaned back on the jamb and licked his hand more. Then he dropped it. Later he felt lips close over his forefingers: lip and tongue, moving on the flesh between, the hard heel, the rough palm. Still later, after he had closed his pants, he still stood, stroking the sweaty neck, the crisp hair on Nig’s bony, long head.

—*The End*—The girl said, Oh ...” with no voice at all. /

Proctor watched embarrassment beat behind her face like a hot bird whose wings brushed her cheeks, pulled away, then beat again. He said, “Now try to get hold of yourself.”

“But I ... I didn’t *know* ./” She looked down, and her thin fingers pulled to the table’s edge. She crushed her shoulders together under the red blopse. When she saw the middle button still undone, her fingers flew to fasten it.

Proctor put his bare feet wide in the sawdust, pushed the forelegs of his chair up. “What’s your name?”

“... Peggy-Ann,” she breathed. Her face reddened again. The name trembled in her mouth like a con—fession.

“Who told you about what goes on here at the Hall of Mirrors?” Laughter above them.

A crash. A woman screamed.

Another scream ended in laughter.

Her eyes veered wild among the empty tables, slid across the deserted bar, and passed over the window curtains.

He thought: she expects the sound itself to break ceiling or walls, take form, and attack her.

Niger lifted his head by the foot of the steps and watched her, panting.

Her eyes caught the dog’s. She closed her mouth and tried to push back into the chair.

“Who told you?” Proctor repeated. But gently. His hand strayed in the white hair of his stomach to scratch under his buckle.

Her eyes came to his, and after silent seconds, fal—tered into the building. She began to shake her head.

“Catherine?”

Her head stopped.

“I thought so. Doesn’t matter.” He stretched out his hands and laid them on the table. “She’s tired of our lives now. Certainly by now she’s gone on to ... well, I’m sure her doings would seem bizarre even to us. Still I notice she has no compunction about steering you back into the tangles of what she, HO doubt, considers a swamp.” He noticed that when he touched the table Peggy-Ann’s fingers n’treated into her lap, meshed in a pale knot. “I’m ilso sure she didn’t misrepresent us. Can you tell me why you thought you would enjoy it here?”

She shook her head again. “Oh, I’m so sor ...” [Tiat word failed. She tried three more; could make no sound; could only beg with her eyes.

He let the chair legs tap down. "We'll let it go by—.. lying you just wanted to see for yourself. I dare say you've done quite a bit of 'experimenting' in your ... time. You're very attractive. Are you twenty wt?"

She hazarded a nod.

Older?"

With a small jerking motion, she shook: *no*.

"I dare say you're also bright. Catherine never had time for stupid women. Or stupid men either."

"I ... I didn't know her well."

"Then your intellect must have impressed her *very* much, if she recommended us so quickly?"

"I feel so ... silly ..." in a voice that communicated only terror.

"No. Not silly. You have quite a lot of time left to wander this globe. You must find out who you are. So. You've discovered, now, you are the sort of per—son who can enjoy such things as pass in these rooms only in fantasies—eh?"

Her eyes jerked back up to his.

He laughed. "There, with your pretty green eyes and your red hair all awry—"

Her hands started for her hair, stopped when Proctor laughed again.

"Really—you couldn't expect to keep your plea—sure in the fantasies secret, could you? You revealed that simply by coming here. Ah? And because it is a secret no longer, you sit there with your cheeks mov—ing through alternate shades of plum, while I rear back in my chair and laugh." He leaned his elbows on the scarred table top. "I *do* laugh." His voice was very sober and gentle. "Can you laugh with me? Because I'm not laughing at you." He waited until her eyes could stay with his. "Is it such a terrible thing to content yourself with only visiting places like this in sleazy books or in ... what do they call them—underground comics? If their reports are uninformed, blurred, or inaccurate, you're intelligent enough to doctor them back to your individual spec—

ifications, edit out those particular bits which to you are personally distasteful, thanks to either your or the author's prejudices. Don't you think I have this fantastic preoccupation as well as you? I'm an artist: imagination is a weakness we share. If you could merely arrive, tear off your clothes, throw yourself between the knees of whatever buck hauled out his—" He stopped, because she was looking down at her hands. "You tried. Quite admirably, I might add."

"It was so dark in there, I couldn't even see who it was who—"

"But you were afraid they could see you? They could, you know. You were the last one in. There was a light on in the hall. When you stepped through the open door, there was a moment when your eager, expectant face was in full view of all those already—I'm sorry. I'm being cruel. But my simple point is: even so, it doesn't matter. We, above all people, have learned how to keep secrets. When you leave here, no one outside will know. Your skirt is neat; you've sustained no terribly large bruises; your hair? That can be counted to the sea breeze out—side—"

"Ohhh ..." on an indrawn breath. "My ... do you have a ..." She reached for his arm: stopped before she touched him, stared at her hand, jerked it back, "... comb. Oh I can't ... anymore, I'm afraid to ... You must have a—comb? I ..." She let her head fall for—ward. Her shoulders shook twice. The dark red hair, which wasn't very messy at all, swung forward.

When she looked up, bright tracks descending her cheeks, she blinked. "I'm afraid to ..." (Head shak—ing.) "... touch anybody, now!"

Proctor reared his chair back again and locked his hands over his stomach. "Go home, Peggy-Ann. Go home. It will all be over in a sleep and a shower and the nice, smiling man who will come tomorrow—if not tomorrow, next month, next year."

She stood, reaching to steady herself on the table, but even drew back there. "I'm ... not going home, you know. When I went out I was on my way to ... church."

Proctor raised an eyebrow.

"Father Michael, he's my advisor, there. We study together. That's where I met ... Catherine. She studies with him too."

"Her new priest?"

"He's not an ordinary ... I mean, he's been all over the country. He's very interested in the problems of today. He—"

"Catherine has even less tolerance for stupid priests than she has for stupid women." He narrowed his eyes. "Her one totally accomplished talent is the corruption of both. I've known her a while."

"I ... was supposed to go and talk to Father Michael tonight. But I didn't want to." Eyes down, up quickly. "Sometimes I think considering the world in classically theological strictures is a waste of ..." She looked around the room. "I shouldn't say things like that here. It's meaningless." After another moment. "One night when we were having coffee together, she told me I should come to the Hall of Mirrors some evening when I felt ... disillusioned with theology."

"She didn't give you a chance, did she? The urges are practically the same. If you're not in the mood for one, you can be pretty sure the other won't sit too well."

"I think I should go ..." faltering before him. "... and see Father Michael, now."

"Perhaps you can convince him to try the Mirrors—I'm sorry; again. Really, I don't disapprove of you." He let his meshed fingers part over his navel.

"I ..." breathing now, "don't think you do."

She almost ... no, it was still a sad expression. She backed between the tables and the bar; at the door her hands went to her hair again. "You don't have

É..."

Proctor turned up his hands and shook his head.

"Oh," and may have even smiled, may even have begun another word.

Niger barked.

She pushed quickly out the door.

Niger barked again, ran forward. His forepaws hit the frosted glass.

"Hey, boy!" Proctor stood. The chair overturned.

Niger barked in silhouette.

"Come back here, boy!" Proctor started between the tables.

From the top of the stairs, the captain's voice: Quiet, Niger! Come on up here!"

Another bark. Niger wheeled back, dodged the table legs, and lolloped up the stairs.

Proctor walked after him.

"What was wrong with the little redheaded one who ran out of here like that? She all right?" called from the dark.

Proctor stopped on the bottom step. "I don't think she quite knew what she was getting into."

"Too bad, Doctor. Thought she might catch number seven."

Proctor looked at his hand on the banister, pondered the age of his flesh. "So did I." He looked up again. "Any closer, Captain?"

Laughter of suede, laughter of velvet. A dog bark—ing.

On the balls of his feet, Proctor padded up. There was less and less sawdust on each step. He squinted.

Niger raised his head. "Hey, Dove—"

Dove opened his eyes.

"Now what's that hippin' it down the street over there by the—"

"—church ... !" Dove pulled on his belt.

Niger stood. His hand moved under the broken pants buttons.

Dove watched. "Hey, nigger, do them little titties and all that red hair she got hanging down her head get to you?"

"Motherfucker—" The dark wrist went in.

Dove looked back across the street. Bone hard fingers held flesh, blood-hard through his pants; his hand burned. "Yeah—"

"Dove ... oh, baby, go over there and get it for me." Niger's free hand gouged Dove's shoulder.

Dove made a long sound back in his throat. "Niger, you wait. Dove's gonna see what he can do about that."

“Mmmmm, pussy on a stick ...”

Dove pulled from Nig’s hand and loped into the street. “Hey! Wait up, honey!”

She heard him, saw him, frowned. He moved for—ward. She felt her shoulder jerk involuntarily and the expression she didn’t want twist through her face. She looked away and kept walking. If he did follow her, she wouldn’t hear him because he was barefoot; then heard him, much too close ... He put his hand on her shoulder. “Hey, you sure are a pretty thing! How about us going into that back alley and me eatin’ out your pussy ...”

She hunched away, opened her mouth, numbly astonished, closed it, pulled again. His hand was on the shoulder of her blouse, but when she pulled, his wrist touched her bare neck. Flesh on flesh started an explosion of revulsion that rippled her body, shook her face, snarled her features. She shook her head, hard.

“I’d sure love to get down there and eat it out. Come on. Come on and sit on daddy’s face. What you so scared of a little pussy-eatin’ for?”

She started to—

But he made as if he were going to hit her.

Her shoulder struck the wall. She looked down, because he had grabbed the lap of her skirt. She felt his knuckles through the cloth. He was grinning, and bunching more cloth in his fingers. “Now what you got to be scared of? You’re gonna feel fine with my tongue a-workin’ it up.” Dove pushed his tongue out between his lips, wiggled it. The wall bruised the back of her head. He peered closer while she felt fear freeze her face, so the beginnings of screaming could only flicker around her lips. Then the elastic of her underpants tightened on her hip as his hand went under.

“Hey, that’s a big hand full of pussy.”

He winced, and his fingers gouged. She hit him hard as she could. She clamped her teeth and sucked in air. (I’ve got to get away!) She tried to see past him, left, right.

“I’m gonna take you over in the alley. Then we’re gonna do it.”

He jerked her head forward when she tried to hit again; her hand glanced his shoulder; his fingers clamped her neck. The other hand twisted between her legs; she staggered forward. He pulled her across the street. The shadow from the building edge covered them, and she tripped. Her underpants tore. But he caught her waist. He pushed her against a door. The knob struck her hip. And she was gagging on the outrage and the absurdity. With darkness, she couldn’t even move. She shivered, and her body wouldn’t do any of the things she wanted. Trying, now, only to avoid pain, realized she had been thinking, Maybe he won’t hurt me anymore if I cooperate, though she already hurt between her legs where he had pinched her. He was pulling her panties down. And with his hands on her belly he moved down against her.

“Feed papa all that pretty pussy.”

That, mumbled into her. She reached down and caught hold of his hair, not to get him away, but to keep from falling. She felt numb—and felt his face slipping in her numbness. He was squeezing her buttocks. She thought: *Why* am I thinking; if I don’t move maybe he won’t—

“Hey, there, pretty baby. How about some of that pussy for me? Dove, boy, you got it all set?”

She skinned her hand on dried paint and tried to kick the one on his knees. Because the second one was coming at her. He was black and his pants were open.

The white one pulled back his head. “Come on, Nig. Swing that black motherfucker around here.”

She felt herself start to collapse. (She cannot fight. Watch her beautiful fear. I will not let her fight.) The black one caught her by the shoulders and slammed her on the door. “Open your mouth, bitch! Lemme get some tongue.”

She cried and tried to keep her teeth together. Only the sobs pried them open from behind, and his tongue from the front; suddenly she hissed because of what the second one did with four fingers between her legs. When she moved her arms he hurt them with his hands that could go all the way around.

Her thighs shook against Dove’s cheek. He turned away, and Nig’s cock hit his face. (Nig’s legs leaned across his back.) He ducked and reached up to feel the hot, rough sack with its wiry hair, bitter with her. Sweat, and the stench of (his own) shit; to touch it with the tip of his tongue. With his hand he



guided the wide head. Dove grunted when she began to squirm hard against what he was pushing in her. He bit her thigh when she tried to yank aside, so he could push it in another inch. Now Nig jammed too.

“Suck on my balls while I dick this pussy, boy,” growled from above. Dove nosed the balls, minis—tered with tongue and fingers to the plunging junc—tion. He held their legs till Nig’s thighs clamped his head. Which meant get out of the way He came up, tired.

Her arms hung on Nig’s neck. Dove leaned on the wall and watched Nig convulse in her. Once he stuck his hand between their slapping bellies, fin—gered the slippery thickness, put two fingers into her, then, with his wet hand, kneaded the hairy bag. They growled and groaned toward ending.

After the first time Nig came, Dove went outside the alley and sat down on the curb. Nig always had it three or four times, anyway.

Dove sat looking at the dark face of the church. The shadowed carvings disappeared into the black—on-black silhouette as he looked up the twin spires. He scratched between his toes. He grinned at the sounds from the darkness behind.

A line of light cut the façade.

The door opened and a tall man stepped out of the church porch. He came down two steps, looked left, right. He saw Dove, motioned.

Frowning, Dove stood up and crossed the street to the bottom of the church steps.

Above the Roman collar, a craggy face. Grayish hair. His hands were immense. He towered above the blond youngster.

“What is it, Father?”

The priest came down another step. “You been sitting there long, boy?”

Dove shrugged. “Naw.”

“I’m waiting for a young lady Redhead? About your age? You haven’t seen her go by?”

“No, Father. When was she supposed to be here?”

The priest shrugged up his tweed sleeve and looked at his watch. “Almost an hour ago. Maybe lit—tle more. Peggy-Ann and I were supposed to do some work together this evening.”

Dove grinned. “Was she pretty, Father?”

The priest smiled.

“Then maybe I’ll just sit out here and wait for her to come by.”

The priest reached out and clapped Dove’s shoul—der. Now he turned back up. Halfway, he stopped to finger himself, pulled down his zipper, and emptied his bladder on the steps. Dove narrowed his eyes at the cable of flesh. It was not as long as his. Urine made waterfalls down the steps, made a hot puddle about Dove’s callused feet. Dove flattened his toes. Suddenly he got an odd look. A lot of it was grin. Something vicious tempered it. “Hey, Father?”

The priest’s water trickled away. He shook him—self, shoved himself in.

“Hey, Father, you ever get to stick that big hook of yours in that redheaded pig’s pussy?”

The priest frowned.

“You know; the cunt you’re waiting for.” Dove gestured toward the priest’s crotch. “You got a fuck—er like a little whale shark. Don’t you ever stick her, Father? You go down in that strawberry sundae a—lickin’ and a-suckin’, like me?”

Dove recognized the priest’s look as rage the same moment the father kicked. Dove twisted away, to crouch at the gutter edge, grinning.

The metal teeth on the priest’s fly gaped and (lashed. His fists clenched, raised beside his head. Then he stalked up the church steps.

Dove’s laughter chattered high like broken glass. Ripples moved from his feet.

Back in the alley he squatted beside them. Nig had her on the pavement. The buttocks rose and rose and rose. Dove touched them. They were sweaty, and they quivered at the bottom and top of each stroke. He pushed his finger in the crack. Played with the balls; let the shaft rub the nub of his middle finger. Nig groaned. Dove opened his fly and played with himself. Nig reached back, caught Dove’s cock. “Bitch,” he growled, “give this white boy some head. Hey, swing that pussy around!”

Dove kneeled by her face.

She tried to twist her head. Nig pushed it back. Put his knuckles against her jaw.

Dove slid back and forth in her limp mouth.

"Oh, baby, suck him good! Suck, baby!"

She didn't. But Dove could feel Nig's beat shaking her. Nig's breath coarsened. His rhythm doubled. Dove felt her tongue move once on the side of his cock. He pressed in to the hair; and came.

Nig stood up over her, massaging his bright, black penis. "Go on." He gestured toward her. "You better get it before it all runs out."

Dove scurried around between her legs.

She moaned and turned her head.

Nig watched his brother's yellow head waggle in the fork.

Once, when Dove got too violent, she gave a small scream.

Nig put his foot on her mouth. Her jaw moved under his instep, and once she tried to pull his ankle away.

"Yeah, that's it. Eat my shit." Nig grinned. "Eat it."

Now Dove lay across her, his buttocks tightening, tightening, his face on her neck.

When Dove pushed back onto his knees, Nig shoved her side with his foot. He buttoned one fly button. "It takes you a while, boy. But you get the idea." Dove stood up, his face glistening. He stepped from one foot to the other with a happy, nervous movement. "Come on, Dove!"

"Sure you don't want to tear off another piece?" Nig grinned and scratched his crotch. "Wipe your mouth, boy! Come on, get out your fish knife!"

Reaching into his pocket, the one without the hole, Dove grinned back.

When Robby turned the corner, she was still crawl—ing. When he reached her, she had stopped, curled up in the gutter, head and one arm on the sidewalk. And there was a lot of blood behind her.

Under her open blouse her bra was pulled down around her stomach. One foot was bare. Astonish—ment grew as he neared, repulsion and fascination battling to replace it. The fascination astonished him as well. He kneeled by her, his knee soaking through in the puddle where she lay.

Three of the yellow bruises were going blackish. He picked up the hair from her face, limp and puffy. It suddenly scored with lines of pain as she surfaced to consciousness.

He whispered, "Hey, are you ...?" and stopped, astounded at the absurdity of that, too. He caught her shoulder, to get his arm around her. His heart was beating loud and slow, and the night felt very cold. Except where she lay in the cradle of his arm.

Her hand swung up at his face. Reflexively, thinking somehow she might hurt herself, he caught it. Her hand twisted about on its very small wrist. Her lips snarled back. She made a high, screeching sound that finally broke, and broke again, till she shook with rasping sobs. And she kept hitting at his chest and head. He tried to duck and at the same time not drop her. She hit him above the eye, so he raised his head—her move—

ments were all despair and no strength—and saw the church door open.

A tall priest (white collar, tweed jacket), stepped out—

She clawed at Robby's face. He grunted and pushed her hand away, terribly relieved by the advent of someone official.

"What the ... Peggy-Ann! Boy, what are you doing to—" The father came quickly down the steps into the street-lamp glare.

Robby saw his expression and wondered.

"Get away from that girl!"

Realization struck him the same time as the priest's foot. It hit his shoulder, glanced his ear.

Robby fell back, scraping the heels of his palms on the wet cement. He scrambled, trying to hold the side of his head.

The priest stood over the girl.

The fear broke apart all that was left of Robby's astonishment, scattered it. He rolled to his knees, rocked to his feet, and ran. He heard the priest call something after him. And kept running. Tripped once, rolled over, and came up crying. And ran again. \*

*PROCTOR'S ADDRESS:*

There, leave your pleasuring a moment. I have something to tell you. Yes, yes, I know elegance and symmetry would have me wait until we are all assembled. But one of the side effects of a life dedi—cated to sensuality is a lack of punctuality—though not dependability, once we learn to decode behav—ioral signs: there simply is no way I can guarantee an assemblage of all the demons I should like to raise. I am merely human. Sambo, your sons would certain—ly enhance our number. Nazi, if you would loose that creature in the basement, what an ornament he would make us! No matter. I doubt I shall say any—thing our more experienced members have not already discerned for themselves. If I do outline a familiar template, then by all means go back to rut—ting on the fouled mattresses—as the lustier compa—ny, I notice by the grunts and sounds of sweaty bod—ies slapping that comes through the shadows, have already begun to do. I only beg you not to make so much noise that those who are bored with indul—gence, tired, or (one hopes there are few so unfamil—iar with the process as to be) honestly curious, can—not hear. If it is to be said at all, it must be said now. Ah! I see you, our least experienced member, have left off rubbing and twisting a bit. You will do for audience, even though you will be the least effica—cious in the resolution of my scheme, for you must admit, you are only a trifle braver than that silly girl you came in with and whom I had to calm down and send away an hour ago. But even you, I must warn: I lie frequently, for I am a man whose interest in the truth is only its aesthetic fascination in a land—scape of lies. At any rate, let me continue. /

In the public imagination, Faust and Mephis—topheles become confused. Frankenstein a/nd the Monster blend by much the same process. Ignoring the literary import, which merely indicates flie gen—eral reading stupidity of the general reading public, let us follow the psychological implications which take us another way entirely. The correspondence between man and his creations on the one hand, and those between an abstract ethical matrix and man himself: both relations are defined by the same moral mechanic. The world that we (excluding you; you have not been here long enough to be trusted) live in is essentially the real one. Pleasure is good; pain is bad. The rest is a matter of one's subjective valuation focused through one's objective powers of extension and empathy. We should have enough sociological resonance with the world you know to create existential tensions. There are more of us than most of you think. Correction: there are more of us than most people who will read this will think. That is a truth: and that this book contains one is what makes it dangerous. What in the eighteenth century was a metaphorical (and metaphysical) conceit is today merely rarefied irony. One does not write to be understood. One does not write to entertain. The artist's greatest value is, like the criminal's, that he is concerned with symmetry first and values only sub—ordinately. Instruction and entertainment are corol—laries that the artistic process invariably generates. Faust is the master of effects: as a magician (and a charlatan) he will be conscious enough of his audi—ence for that. But he has studied the magical effect in an endeavor to learn of magic itself. If he is success—ful, you will never know he has succeeded. But, *lecteur et frère*, you are not audience enough. So Faust seeks to gather to him a greater public; one who, by definition, will participate. You have been consorting with them these past hours. They generate in the tensions of the diction that describes them.

The more perceptive among you by now have intuited (if only by the lack of space devoted to her) that Catherine is the passionate concern here. Our first encounter focused on a recognition of death. At this writing, she is the only character whose fate I do not know. Bull, Nazi, Nig, Kim, Sambo, Dove, Benny, Gunner, Kirsten, you nameless beast in the cellar, and you too, we must hunt her, for she is terribly powerful. Captain, it is your addition to our entourage that steels me to face her. You bring an implication of mythic chaos with which to tempt her. *She* must be destroyed. She has spied on the devil, and now employs what she has learned to indulge freedoms that absolutely threaten us. Her scarcity in this narrative is the first sign of her power. You have no doubt deduced the standing competition between us. I have presented only an encounter during which, I think you will agree, she lost and I was a generous winner. There are very few of those. That there is no example I personally can bear to present where victory went otherwise, even to service that vaunted symmetry which I hold inviable:—*there* is the major indicator of her strength: That, as an obses—sion, she can so mar my intended effect of grace, gusto, and compression, simply by not showing up! It is her aesthetic and ethical elusiveness that make her the

subject of the hunt. She is no *figurine gratuite* marked up to pay for the resonances of this tale. Her import is all I have not told you, am unable to tell you. Blame on her the distortions you have already noted in what I have tried to display. If you have any outrage left for that, then perhaps you will feel a little of what I feel for her. Yes, my view is distorted, but do not think it is small, or without compassion. Were it, believe me, it would generate no such obsession. She has spied on the devil. But so have you. So have we all, and indulged the irony of recognition, which, on a greater scale, is her only crime. Oh, she enjoys the theatre (perhaps gluts herself upon it), museums, has an entire life of the mind I have only implied. She reads of the destruction of young women in novels such as these and takes pleasure in it. She finds it amusing when innocent young men are executed for the unspeakable. But I need not go into her facility in the management of property, politics, or the division of money. Many of us have lain with her, not all against our will as did the poor monster mad in the cellar; most of us, not surprisingly, have fared better than he. Notice I have spared you the evocation of compassion for him as spur to our revenge. But, Captain, if you are compassionate ...

Enough. I have evoked your mythic virility with which to challenge her. But I see our number has grown considerably, even while I maunder her. Then come. Bull, here are the keys. To the cellar, to unleash the beast. Nazi, you know the haunts of Nig and Dove. Up, up, all of you. Before I lay a stick to you. Come, we are ready to hunt her!

Kirsten ran her finger around her left nipple as she stepped into the hall and lazily thought about her brother. She hung back from the hulking black ahead of her. His juices still drooled her thighs and made them slip.

She caught sight of the long-armed, curly-headed boy; moved beside him. "Gunner ..." she whispered, and he turned, grinning at her like a gold cat. She took his hand, and suddenly he put his mouth on hers. She sucked in his tongue, and they stopped walking. She leaned against the wall and saw the others passing behind his shoulder, so closed her eyes. She touched his chest, let her hand slip to his trousers.

He was bunching up her skirt. He liked it, because his tongue moved harder in her mouth. She pulled him back against the wall.

"Hey," he whispered, "any white man's come in there?"

She nodded, giggling. "But it's way at the back."

Gunner took out his hand, licked, and a moment later dropped to his knees. Tongue and nose nuzzled deep in her. She held back the hem of her smock to watch him pry. She reached down to touch his scabbing shoulder, but he winced and knocked her hand away. So she closed her eyes and let thoughts drift with the thrust and warmth rising from the hard bud on the fore roof.

He stood again, panting and wet to the eyes. She took his upswung cock and pulled her to him, lifted one leg, and guided, while he lay against her and butted at the opening. They both gasped when it slid. She held him about his shoulders, thrusting back to his thrusts, stroking his hair, while, with opposed rhythms, he tongued and plunged and tongued.

Her mind curled through the sensational labyrinths till somebody touched her lightly and whispered, "Hurry, girl! Hurry! Proctor is waiting."

## Chapter Six. Alchemica

I knew a man named Faustus of Kundling, a little town near my home. When he studied at Cracow, he had learned magic, which was formerly keenly studied there and where public lectures were delivered about this art. Later he wandered about in many places and spoke about secret things. When he wanted to create a sensation in Venice, he announced that he was going to fly into the heavens. The Devil then lifted him up in the air, but let him fall to earth again, so that he nearly gave up the ghost again.

—Johannas Manlius, 1565 *Locorum Communium Colectunea*

They gathered on the soaked earth behind the Hall, crushed into the narrow alley. "We're ready,"

Proctor called. "Keep together, and your voices down. Hey, there—"

Gunner had caught at the artist's hand.

"What?"

Tugging at Proctor's wrist, Gunner demanded, "What's down there?" He pointed to the window in the foundation.

Proctor sat down on the steps; laughing, he clapped Gunner's hips. "Why do you want to know?"

"Who is it?" the boy insisted.

Now Proctor rubbed his hands. "He was once a great scientist, but he fell in love with her whom we hunt. Do you know what he did for her?"

Gunner shook his head.

"He brewed her strange drugs that shatter the mind and the vision: a hallucinogen that the body cannot break down, it explodes the consciousness for an hour or more, till it is passed with the urine, intact. Always a hunchback he became so lost in the pits of their joint depravity that he is only a fouled vision of his former self, and lives in nauseous squalor, devouring his own or any filth that falls to him, a pathetic but vicious thing, less than an animal."

"Let him out!" Gunner whispered.

"I have given Bull the keys." Proctor stuck two fingers into his shirt pocket, pulled out a small vial. He thumbed up the top and rolled a ruby capsule onto his palm. "Open your mouth."

Gunner did. Proctor pushed his palm over the boy's mouth. Gunner swallowed. "What was that?"

"Five hundred micrograms of the drug whose abuse reduced that poor fool to the creature he is." He put another of the capsules into his own mouth, then poured some more into his palm. "A couple, Captain? You'll get off in an hour. Here, Kim. Three for you, Sambo. A buck your size needs an extra dose." The black reached for the capsules. The others crowded behind him, tried to push ahead.

"Jon!" Benny pushed through the crowd. "Hey, Jon! Nazi!"

"What is it, boy?" Proctor halted his largesse.

"In the bar," Benny said. "Somebody wants to see Bull! He says it's important. It's police business."

The bald lawman was just about to take the pill.

He stopped.

"Who is it?"

"Father Michael."

"Now what could—shit!" He handed the pill to Benny and pushed from the crowd, frowned back at Proctor, before disappearing into the doorway.

Proctor grunted disgustedly and stood up. "Her priest, the one she and the little redhead study with. Sometimes I think a great great grandmother of hers must have invented religion. After swallowing one of these little red pills, she pissed in some chalice, and the poor man who drank from it was never the same." He turned to the others. "Here! I have a dozen more. Who's hungry for visions of the beasts that lurk behind the night!" The others crowded forward.

Bull picked up the rifle from the bar, turned around, and let the stock thump the floor. He laid the barrel up along the black denim. The tip was cold through the hair matting his belly. He moved his boot, clearing sawdust. "You want to tell me what this is all about, Father?"

The priest, from the chair he had taken off the bar, looked up at Bull. In the shadow, his eyes returned to the leather band on the fleshy neck. "I called you at the jail. They told me you weren't in. They suggested I try here at the Mirrors." Bull turned his head slightly; the priest saw one of the brass studs flash on the collar. "Since it's so near the church, I thought I'd come over."

"What is it, Father?"

"Young Peggy-Ann ... I have a study group for young women; for the ladies of this town interested in the spiritual problems of our age. And as they relate to other ages. So that they may find their proper and fitting place as women in this one. Now, the group is only two. But Peggy-Ann was late this evening. And I thought—"

"What happened?"

"She was molested! She was viciously molested, practically outside the church door!"

Bull scraped at his crotch and shifted his weight. "Is she all right?"

"Well she's ... she was hysterical ... no! No, of course she was not all right! The blood was running down her leg! She had huge bruises on her arms and breasts. She'd been cut and beaten besides. She was too terrified to defend herself. She can't even walk. She's too shocked, too hysterical to speak coherently Catherine, the other woman in my group, is caring for her now at the church. Peggy-Ann has no family. They were killed in the fire on Colson Hill last Spring. You must excuse me, but I'm terribly upset by the whole business!"

"Sure. I understand. Did she give you any idea who did it?"

"But ... but that's why I'm upset! I saw who it was! I came out to look for her; and he was holding her in his arms!"

"One of the fishermen? Them boys get some liquor in them and they just forget all manner of what's decent—"

"No. No, I don't think so. He wasn't anybody I'd ever seen from these parts. I've spent enough time at the docks so I know most of our boys by sight. No, it was probably a drifter. He didn't have the look of one of our town's boys. A skinny character, light hair."

"Do you think he's liable to still be around? Did he see you?"

"Yes."

"Then I bet he was scared off." Bull shifted his weight. "You know, Father, probably the best thing you can do—" he worked his fist on the barrel "—is take as good care of the little girl as you can, and just forget—"

"I don't think you understand!" The priest stood up. "She was ... was savagely hurt, mentally as well as physically!"

"Well," Bull said. "If you want me to go out looking for the bastard ... I will."

The priest began to speak, then shook his head—not in negation, but frustration. "This girl, since the death of her parents, has been like a daughter to me. You once mentioned your family to me. I understand that a man must have his reasons for not living with his chosen spouse, but I know you have daughters; surely you can understand the distraction of my feelings. I have nursed the growth of this girl in mind and body for a year. I merely ask you to consider what you would feel like if your little girls were so abused. You must come search for this creature with me. You ..." In the dimness, the priest could not decipher the policeman's expression.

After a moment Bull said, "We'll go looking for him." He stood up from the bar. "Just a second, Father—I'll be back." He jerked up the rifle and strode out the back door.

"The stupid bitch ran out of here and got herself messed up by some blame fool drifter after she left," Bull announced, leaning from the door, a hand on either jamb. "Fool priest wants me to go hunting for the bastard. He's probably skedaddled by now anyway if he done really shagged on the bitch that bad. I guess I won't be able to go with you. Your Catherine woman is at the church. Least ways I'll be able to keep the Father out of your hair while we're hunting up the poor son of a bitch."

Bull was about to leave when the Captain stopped him with a hand around his wrist. "It wasn't the drifter."

Bull frowned. "How you know?"

"I talked to him this morning on the docks. That boy don't rape."

Bull gave a cynical expression. Suddenly he turned. His fist hit Sambo's shoulder. "Nigger, if your two bastards turn out to be at the bottom of this one too—"

"Hey, Bull ..." the black fisherman began.

"God damn, this is the fourth or fifth time now. Shit! Look, you black bastard, you tell them salt and pepper shakers of yours they owe Bull some work for this one. I got me some little women over in the next town I want them to rough up for me. A couple of little girls, their old lady, and this bitch waitress. I been wettin' my pants long enough dreamin' about it. And, shit, nigger, tell 'em to watch out!"

"Christ, Bull! All them women is a lot of work!"

Bull nodded. "If they want to get away with this one, they better come around smilin' with their peckers up. Lemme go take care of this stupid cock-sucker and see if I can scare him out of town before

he really gets in trouble.” Shaking his head, he shrugged to Proctor, then turned in the doorway.

The horsing around of two black women in the back of the crowd suddenly turned to screaming, and the others tried to separate them.

“Now,” Proctor insisted. “She’s at the church, alone! We’ve got to go now! Break up, and we’ll meet on the steps and batter down the door with our lusts.”

As the unruly group began to move forward, the captain fell in beside the white-haired man. “Do you think you can keep them all together?”

Proctor looked up at the black face. “I know I can’t. Some will slip off by accident, some by design. Oh, these demons will haunt the good folk throughout this town—” He paused to yell instructions: “You go down by way of the docks. You three move off to the Hill. We don’t want to attract attention.” He turned back to the captain. “But enough will be there to ornament the debacle handsomely, Captain. And I have you, you black devil! I have you! I’ll squeeze the juices from your black fruit into that sphinx’s monstrous hole yet—oh, she’ll be able to take you, Captain! You’ll defile the equalized altars of day and night, and this world will come tumbling around us! We have hours till midnight, and your fires are mounting again. I can tell the way your eyes flash in the moon.” And the captain’s long, low laughter cut the shrill cries of the scattering figures who disappeared off through the streets.

“You high, nigger?”

“Oh, man, I’m *so* high! You high?”

“Flyin’, boy. That stuff is fine!” Jomo, Sambo, and Jeb lurched and bumbled through the dock’s junk.

“Man, I got to take a wicked piss.”

“We gonna have to get up there with Proctor soon/”

“Well, this black snake of mine is gonna get pretty riled if I don’t let him spit. Nigger, I’m gonna pee on your foot—”

“Shit—”

“Hey, look at that sleepy white man curled down there. Ain’t he a-snorin’ away, on his back, with his mouth open.”

“You ain’t gonna—?”

“If there’s one thing that makes me happier than a white boy drinkin’ my piss, it’s a white man.”

They gathered below the dock.

“You two grab him when he starts to fight.”

“I’ve got him for you—”

“In the face—” Robby swallowed wet and bitter, came up gagging and blind to be struck down by feet and hard hands. They were laughing.

“Hold him there—yeah, keep his head back. Look at him take that stuff right down!”

“He don’t look like he likes that at *all*—”

“You *better* swallow, boy, or you gonna drown in nigger piss!”

Fingers in his mouth—one hand over his nose, one pulling down over his chin—kept his teeth apart.

“Stick it right on in. Right on down.”

Robby got one hand loose and struck at the canvas-covered legs. Iron behind the cloth. He thought he was falling, slapped, the ground to balance. A bare foot pinned his hand, bruising it.

“Hey, look at this cocksucker—”

He couldn’t get breath.

“You better swallow, or you gonna *die*—”

He couldn’t swallow for gagging. His tongue blunted on the flesh that flooded him. One of them wiped his hands over his face—so hard it hurt—and he could see: a big buckle and splattered cloth, very near. Then the ridged black belly, small head far away. But grinning. The nigger swung his hand—still grinning—and Robby’s ear clanged with the smack. One eye went blazing blind. But jarred into him. He got one gasp without taking in water.

The knuckles came back the other way. With the pain, urine flushed his eyes. He reeled under their hands and his hand was still clamped on the ground.

He swallowed.

When they dropped him he went down clutching at their ankles. His face rolled over a foot. As he knuckled his eyes, toes struck his cheek. He curled on his side. Glancing up, he saw a fist slide up a dick. "Motherfucker—" the fisherman drawled, puckered his lips to a prune. He kicked again. Robby gaped with pain.

The fisherman spat.

Robby swallowed out of surprise: froth, and thicker than froth. He rolled his head aside, while their laughter unraveled.

"Come on, nigger! This is the third white face you been in tonight."

"We better get on back to Proctor, before he gets where he's goin'."

"Did me good to see him drink it down!"

"Shit, you'd a' thought that son of a bitch didn't like it none, hey?"

"He sure gonna feel funny in a little while when that stuff hits!"

They laughed, and the laughter moved up the bank.

Robby scrubbed his palm on his mouth. He got to his knees. His jaw hurt. He pulled his wet shirt from his chest, let it flop back. He pulled the thigh of his pants out with his fingertips. He stood, frowning. His left foot was awash in his shoe.

He walked up the bank from under the dock. He slipped once, and barked a curse. His voice died quivering. He gained the concrete, looked along the boats; looked down at himself. Looked across the street. One corner of his mouth kept twitching. He lurched across the street, ducked into the alley as two men appeared from behind a further boat. He turned to watch them in the moon's light.

"You know, Father, probably, like I said, he got out of town as soon as he ran away from the girl" That was an immense, shirtless creature, shaven skull, mat-chested, whose boots thumped the wharf boards and whose voice sounded like a rasp doing something to rock. And he was swinging a rifle against his hip.

"But, Sheriff, we can't take any chance! We just can't allow a beast like that to roam our streets, attacking women. If you had seen what that monster had done to the poor, poor child." That was the priest! "If you had seen!"

"You just point him out to me, and I'll blow his fuckin' head off—excuse me, Father. But I'm just saying I don't think it's very likely you will."

"If he isn't down here by the docks, Sheriff, I think we can probably assume you're right. They'll catch him in one of the towns along the coast here. I just hope they get him before he kills some other innocent creature."

Horror struck through Robby like long crystals forming. He pulled back against the wall as they passed the alley entrance. And almost gagged again.

"When we work our way down to the end of the docks, then I'm afraid you'll have to turn me loose. I promised I'd do some work for Proctor before the night was up. He needs me."

They passed beyond his vision.

Robby ran down the narrow street. His shirt was a cold tongue lapping his chest. His pant leg went flap, flap. He tried to run close to the wall. Small streets kept emptying him onto bigger ones. He would turn off them again, ducking down behind wooden fences—

Two, ahead of him in workmen's greens: white and black; he recognized them in the lamp light, and froze. They were laughing, and the white one was elbowing the black one over some stupendous joke. They stopped, looked around.

Robby wasn't breathing, sure that they had seen him, not knowing why he should fear if they had, but fearing it more than anything.

Then there was an unfamiliar voice.

A figure vaulted over the fence. Robby ground his flank on the wall.

"Where the hell you two guys been? I've been huntin' all over."

"Tearin' up a little cunt down in front of St. Mark's," Nig said.

"Redheaded whore. Shit, she had some mouthfill-in' pussy," Dove said.



A black-haired man, a leather jacket open on a naked chest. And a chain around his neck with a black swastika, silver rimmed: "Bull said he *thought* it was you two. Look, you better come with me."

"What for, Nazi?"

"Why'n't you come with us, Nazi? We still out huntin'."

"Proctor needs you."

Oh." Then, "Maybe we better go."

The three hurried away.

Robby felt the bonds with which he gripped what he knew as real begin to loosen. "Bull," and he had remembered their description of the lawman. They were searching for him: And the man with the gun who searched for him thought him innocent! He thrilled with unresolvable terror. Turning left, turning right, he ran the labyrinthine alleys, turning again, and turning, now recognizing houses he had passed before, now passing strange porches, fences, windows.

At the café, he ducked into the alley, keeping near the wall. Something caught his ankle. He staggered. As he turned to see, it jerked him again; he fell, scraping his palms on brick.

A hand, from between the bars, had grasped his leg, was hauling him back. He grabbed the window edge to push himself away. A second hand came out and caught his wrist.

He kicked, jerked, with his throat constricted so that the sound trying to push out was a gurgle.

"Let me ... Let me out," rasped from the window. "They forgot to let me out! Proctor needs me!"

He kicked his leg free, tore scabby fingers from his wrist; then he was running. Slapped at a wall to keep from banging into it, and ran again.

The small street dumped him out on the square.

I [e came up short, thirty feet before the dark stones. I here was no wind. Shadowed carvings took his eyes upward to the steeple, to lose his vision on crazed, moon-lined clouds, uncurling. There was no wind at all in the street.

Something moved on the church steps.

I le looked.

Uncurling, the black shape rose to its feet; barked.

The dog cantered down the steps, paused at the É ì »é torn, barked again.

Kobby ran.

The paws clicked after him; whatever was solid in

I h m melted and flowed, lost edges and became termi On a strange street, he turned, grabbed the side

•i.i doorway to keep from falling. It stood on the corner. Its eye was red glass. Its

II mgue was foamy meat, shaking over barbs.

The tail whipped the night.

I [e closed his eyes, shook his head. Looked back. Ì é ill stared. Then it took three steps.

I lis stomach and thighs jerked him to a crouch. Mi . palms stung.

The dog (it is a big dog) trotted into the street. It I' teed its mouth for a swallow he could hear. The tongue shook out again, shook, shook.

I [e thought about walking away, just turning imi—

The dog barked, sagged back to spring, rushed é ì ward.

I [e fell in the doorway, rolled over and clambered Up the gritty steps.

I here was another door at the top. He dove Hi rough; curled up and rolled.

Claws scrabbled on the steps.

His teeth were clenched too tight to scream. Shoulder, arm and hip were bruised. He waited and didn't breathe. He realized he was waiting. And realized there was only silence to wait through.

Opened his eyes.

Beams ran the ceiling. Shadows pulsed on the white plaster between.

He turned his head.

A dragon of tarnished bronze writhed about the candle stub that guttered and flapped its light through the room.

A tiny screeching over metal:

He jerked around to stare at the birdcage. It wasn't a bird inside.

All his muscles contracted. The back of his hand dragged more grit.

Claws ticked the floor.

He jerked up.

The dog waited.

His body shrank from the beast. The only thing his mind could touch were new facets of fear.

It is a big dog.

On the wall the carcass of a horse fell apart.

Crouching in the livid cage, he, distorted, pawed between her legs. She, grotesque, flopped his gross cock from thigh to thigh. It stayed limp. Flames sputtered about the protecting ribs. Skull and fore-hooves pawed and wagged before the infernal sea where six feet dangled.

The dog sprang.

Robby screamed. Nothing hit.

The black cock and balls rolled off its brass plate, slipped from the table, and flopped to the floor.

Where it fell, blood inched the wood. He snatched his hand away. Jerked again because teeth clicked.

Dog breath lanced his ear. He fell on his belly and began to cry. His cheek slipped on puddled blood.

The dog barked.

As he flailed out, the light went insane. Three candles fell from the windowsill. He pulled back, expecting the floor to fire.

Two went out.

He got to his feet. The blood patch burned, flames half an inch above the bright surface as though it were kerosene. He looked at his right hand, which was in pain. Two drops of hot wax dulled on his skin.

The creature in the cage scraped its claws on the bars. He slapped at the puddle. Fire splashed. The whole floor was pocked with amethysts.

His hand stung.

He scraped at the spots, to pry up the wax scales with his thumbnail.

His hand fell off.

His wrist spurted fire. He whirled, waving fire. Fire hit the cage bars. The creature inside shrieked. The bars sagged, dribbled away. The thing leaped, clawing and shrieking, on pale green wings. It walked across the floor on its hind legs, foreclaws scraping at the ceiling beams. Its wings masked out the door behind it. The forelegs thumped down.

The dog ran to grovel between them.

It yawned hugely on flame-colored gums, reared again. Clawed toes splayed in ashes. Amethysts glittered between its talons. The wings made a wind that tugged his hair. The candles about the room roared.

And the tarnished dragon was crawling from around the mash of wax to the table's edge.

The floor was cluttered with emeralds and cut spinel besides.

On knees and one hand, he crawled the points. Then his hand mashed something soft. He reared back from the crushed flesh. The dog had gotten to its feet again, chin and underbelly flickering in the floor's litter.

The little dragon leapt to the dog's back and clung. The great beast that had stepped from the broken cage went, "Ahhhhh—" and the heat hit his chin, whirled inside his eye sockets.

The dog was barking. Its second head—beaked and feathered—cawed. The tongue of the third—flat and scaled—slithered and whipped on the bony gum.

The little dragon had slipped to the floor. It hissed and beat translucent wings.

The woman in the carcass was battling to get free. The ribs closed and opened, closed and opened as she crawled in the livid offal. Her arms glistened to the elbows. Her hair fell forward like yarn. She fell; sprawled on the floor; crawled forward dragging coiled horse-gut.

His severed hand scuttled through flame toward the three-headed dog that barked at her. The fingers

reached up, fell, reached again and grasped at the chimera's scrotum. The dripping wrist cleared the floor, hauled itself along the sheathed cock. Thumb and forefinger worked the black bristles till the shaft bulged at its half-length. The tip rubbed the pursed hose of over-flesh. The working fingers massaged the sheath back. The inner shaft, wet, thrust from the husk. Raw in the firelight, it sagged from the hairless belly. The grasping hand thumbed the husk over the bulge.

Niger barked again and sprang at the crawling woman. She stopped shaking her hair. Nervous forepaws scraped her flanks. The dog head yipped. Hawk and snake head made their softest sounds.

Bunched haunches hunched. And hunched. The fingers guided the slick stick between her hams: flexed the wet tip in the hairy sheath; fed the mucus-filmed meat into the meat of her. Her thighs wobbled.

He stared at his delinquent appendage prodding the bestial juncture. He kept trying to breathe. And breath kept snagging on words for which there was no syntax. With his good hand he reached for her hair. It was dry and crisp. He pulled it back.

"Kiss me ..." she whispered from bad teeth. Her lips shook with the hound's rhythm. Blind sockets dribbled ocher down her nose.

Snake, dog, and bird breath were rank.

She seized his lower lip in her loose brown mouth. And she was pulling at his maimed arm, holding it to her stomach, hauling him closer. Her dugs swung against his bicep.

A tickling at the stump became pain. He tore his mouth from her (blood bubbled inside his lips, drooled his chin) to see she had a penis, the blotched color of a new bruise, jutting from her hair. She jabbed his wound, laid it along the bone. With the dog on her back, she humped his glowing stub. He jerked away.

She howled and reared, almost unmounting the beast on her. Blood from her clotted cock drooled her thigh.

He rolled on the floor, cuddling his aching wrist, eyes tight. He lay on his back. His breath made multiple *S* sounds between clamped teeth.

There was a delicate pressure about his thigh, then tiny, needling pains in his groin. He opened his eyes.

His pants were below his knees. Perched on his thigh, the little dragon nuzzled and nipped at the base of his cock. And the waving shadows of the great dragon's wing fell on him. He snatched his hand to his face to block his eyes.

He had no hand.

Scales swung above him. Ruby insects worried her flanks. Scales broke away at the wrinkled haunch. The bare flesh reddened toward the dribbling eruption below her tail. He rolled out of the way of a hind talon that scratched through the coals.

The little beast clawed to keep its footing.

The great worm twisted her head toward him, blinked one fist-sized eye, waddling, tail beating sparks from the cinders over the floor.

He sat up: she squatted, mushing her hole, like a hack in bad fruit, on his face. He thrust out his tongue through blind moments while insects chattered at his ears. But she lumbered on, leaving him reeling, nauseated by fumes of acetone. His face and eyes were filmed with her juice.

He tried to wipe it away, and his hand balked, slipped, stuck again against the silt that gummed his lids. The points of light about the burning floor were haloed and gauzed prisms. And the beast, glimmering in opal veils, heaved aside piles of smoke.

The black captain waited. In the embers, the rime on his feet glowed. The chain about his left ankle was bright black: a crescent of sweaty skin below one knee, and the underlength of his veined erections (its shadow slanted up his chest) gleamed: so did the bottoms of his lips; and his nostril rims; and the brass at his ear; and the roofs of his eyes.

The she-beast nosed the burnings around his feet. The captain reached out with flickering palms (swords of light swung through the gauze on Robby's eyes) to grasp her ears. Her head came up. Her tongue's double serpent lazed about his sack and shaft. The captain wrestled her.

The tail, thicker at its base than the black thigh, beat about his head.

The hand had scuttled to the captain's foot. Tacky with the same gum that dribbled Robby's cheek, it clawed to the ankle, clawed higher, hung a moment from the calf, then scurried up the wet thigh, palmed the testicles, and thrust the long cock in as the tail swung away. She swiveled against him, forepaws collapsing in the ashes. The captain stretched along her green back, sank yellow teeth in her scales. Blood scarfed her throat, steamed on the coals, while she hiccupped and hissed. The perspiring sides of the black buttocks hollowed, retreated, hollowed. Slowly she began to crawl forward.

The dog hobbled the whining blind woman across the floor.

The dragon reared and pranced beneath the Negro, nearing.

Robby crawled the gritty boards, his pants twisted up about his ankles. The little beast rode his ass, jutting its head down to gnaw the pursed sphincter. Blood lay on his thighs like red string.

The brass door swung open before him, and he gazed down the dark chancel. The dog, rutting the gut-hung redhead, yapped to his left. To his right, the master, laboring on the thrashing worm, ground his heel in ashes.

"Robby?" (A man's voice from the shadows.) "Come in here a minute?"

The man who stepped from the door had short white hair, wore jeans, and a work shirt. He smiled and held out his hand.

Something scuttled by Robby's knee, paused before Proctor, flattened on the cinders. The fingers bunched. It sprang through the air. Proctor caught the hand, grinned at Robby, winked. Then he walked back into the dark.

Robby felt desire. He felt it, suddenly and surprisingly, like a violent bird in the gut. As he crawled the dark, it struck out through his body and shook him.

"Do you see what they're doing to her?" the voice asked in front of him.

The hunger that was pleasure twisted down his belly. The twisting thing was a blade. Was a fire. His teeth clicked. His lips drew back. His shoulders shook. The cinders chewed his left wrist, his right palm. And pleasure beat its wings all about his body, near to knocked him over. Sensations, which, had they been visual, would have been sparks and metal, danced on the back of his neck, showered his shoulders, rolled in the valleys of his back and buttocks.

Other voices about him now, mumbling: male, male, male, female, male. They blundered over and around each other. He crawled between them, sick with ecstasy.

"Oh, this must be getting you horny, boy!"

The pressure at his belly's base struck in the mus—

cies of his thigh and stomach. He doubled, hit the floor.

"Tsk, ts, ts! You ought to get down there, boy, and rip off a piece of that! I hope you realize the trouble I've gone through to set this up!"

Robby's breath went out of him. His throat ached. His arms locked across his chest. His heels dragged up cold coals. His sides cramped. But the pain circled pleasure. Black pleasure (with its white afterimage) worked between each bone and tendon. His bones burned. His muscles melted.

"Get with it! Don't tell me you're just going to *lie* there leaking all over your leg?"

An explosion, long, slow, dark, and before it ended, centered in it, overwhelming it, an explosion that was light, and long, and did not end.

"You'd make some fine jailhouse pussy, boy! You know that? These guys that can come without even touching themselves ..."

His head went back. The sensation mounted a spectrum without terminal. He opened his mouth and tried to scream with airless lungs. His face locked on a smile; the immobility was agony.

"*Now* what the hell you call yourself doing?"

His calf, beyond unengulfable oceans, shook. One arm beat about his head. And a voice, a woman's voice, pricked him with jewels of what was so much more than pleasure he could not define it. He sobbed (without voice), while she cried out in the darkness:

CATHERINE FPOM THE ALTAP:

I could be crass and simply begin by saying: that I am sitting here on this stained napkin, my legs spread, a cross in one hand, a cock in the other, and *still* I have time to think, means (by definition, no?)

you've failed. But I beg the point. Who can satisfy me? You, or you, or you? None of you comes at me with that complete, unbridled lust to which I would quite happily give myself up. I have seen more of it through a ship's porthole hours ago than any of you can demonstrate. The rest of you arrive with variations of pride, resentment—Oh, Jonathan, that you blame on your obsession with me whatever imbalances mar your creation as proof of my culpability: for shame! That may be enough to keep a stiff dick or a sloppy box. I *do*, however, demand more than that, even without broaching the swamp of love that already you have so dishonestly touched your toe to—let's be honest—not to prepare for the truth you had to tell, but to mask that other you have so unfairly left for *me*. Seven times between noon and midnight? Frankly, Captain—and I am sure more than one of you has had the thought trickle through—if the devil can't accomplish that with ease, he isn't much of a man. Had you set your task, Jonathan, as the rounded and rich rendering of the interface between the actual and the ideal, I would be bound, however reluctantly, to accept any amount of moral slippage. But what am I—what are any of us—to do with such concise and conscious striving after the false note, the mawkish, and the thin? No, the lack of interest you have shown in your satisfaction since sunset is indicative of something more. A new age? Perhaps it signals an inchoate uncertainty whether or not you really *want* to give up this present one. After all, it's been quite good to you. It has granted you all these previous joys. Are you willing to relinquish them for the fifty-fifty possibility of pain or pleasure? As well as a certainty of the unpleasantness bound to accompany the adjustment period? What is required here, someplace between the kisses and the bites, the whips, the thrusting loins, the tensed buttocks, is one consciousness that will move freely to its own total engulfment in pleasure. Though I look over all your assembled faces, from the most demented rapist to the once-a-Sunday diddler who retires to the John with dirty novels, the self-consciousness in all of you prohibits just that step, that one extension of the will which causes not the fantasy to become concrete for that happens all the time, and we pay for it—rather for the concrete to crumble with the advent of the fantastic. That is revolution. Lord, my crotch aches for it. I would have you all until I passed out if I thought there were the least chance of giving birth to it. You accuse me, Jonathan, of having gone on to stranger pastimes. Alas, I have only had to come to terms with the facts. You, who are the most timid, Master Proctor, are so terribly much closer to the efficacious being you seek to present me with. The confusion between Faust and his Demon *is* private as well as public. No, Captain, you will definitely not do. There now, your vanity certainly can't be wounded. Perhaps I simply cannot satisfy *you*; I dare say if I presented that image of totally engaged lust I demand you to be, your balls would empty themselves in three thrusts. For it *is* the mystic black devil who must be satisfied for the new age to begin—what a magnificent vindication for the poor violated girl on the parish sitting-room couch. She died, you know, twenty minutes after the priest left.

I, who loved her, mourn her with this orgy. I am the one who has failed, if it makes you feel better. But commence a little sucking, fucking, shit-licking and the like; somewhere in this world there are creatures deranged with the desire for their own satisfaction, and in honor of their lust, I jam your cock between my legs, thrust my tongue up your pussy: and I try to forget that they are not among our number. We only imitate them, fantasize them as our masters or slaves, inform the momentary object of our passion with their attributes. With them, Captain, is the key to that most frightening of tomorrows. Kiss me. And Jonathan, you will remember each modeled thigh, each shadowed breast, the moonlight through the stained glass on the sweaty rumps and heels; remember it and render it in pigments submitted to the most exacting aesthetic on sized panels of masonite. And perhaps they, in whose honor we perform, will (inspired by us, shadows though we are) move a step nearer the entrance of the labyrinth—which is so cunningly reduplicated about itself that, even with feet on both sides of the final doorsill, it is still impossible to be sure whether movement in either direction will take one out or in. Come, glut yourselves on one another, on me; and try not to entertain even the slightest suspicion that the bright creatures I invoke in actuality do not exist at all—that, indeed, we are all there is. Occupy your minds, instead, while you hump and suck, with how disconcerted the old fart-face will be when he returns to pee stains on the altar cloth and semen in the chalice; and his little girl dead on the sitting-room couch. For one is a truth too horrible to dwell on more than moments; the other is the root of pleasure.

Her voice throbbed too much in the resonant chambers of undelved experience. Robby was dying of

suffocation; and could not die. All the terminal points of existence glowed and ran and fused and—

“What the hell do you think you’re ...”

—and stopped.

“... doing here?”

He shot over the cliff of reality. And fell miles. Someone shook his shoulder.

“Now ... what are you doing in here, boy?”

He breathed in. And when it came out it was sob-bing. He brought his hands—both hands—to his face and cried into them.

A woman said, “Proctor, maybe you better ...”

“It’ll be all right.”

Robby spread his fingers, opened his eyes. Behind the white-haired man’s shoulder a candle guttered in the coils of a cast black dragon.

The dark-haired woman beside him said, “He seems to be awake now.”

Proctor stood. “Are you all right, boy?” Before Robby could answer, Proctor turned to the woman: “Perhaps you should go now, Kim.”

“I will.” She looked around the room. “Can you tell me when you will be able to have the painting put stored?”

Against the wall was another panel. On a dark ground, the woman, in leather, was lit by a single mist-frosted bulb overhead. The highlights were harsh. The surfaces had been built of the thinnest glazes.

Proctor put his thumb on the paint. “I suppose I

shall always be doomed to restoring old work with the energy I want to put toward new.” He turned his finger around. “It won’t take very long. I can have it for you Monday.”

“Fine.” She leaned against the table’s edge to look at the painting herself. “You’ll bring it up to the Hill, then? We’ll have lunch when you come.”

Proctor nodded, still regarding the portrait. “I don’t think it really suffered that much damage when it fell.”

The woman said, “Perhaps when you come we can talk about financing this new mural you are so enthusiastic about?”

“I hope so.”

She laughed. “You have seen Nazi in the alley by the Hall mash his toes in dogshit, then stick his foot through the bars of the cellar window, to draw it out a minute later, clean?”

Proctor looked back at her, surprised. He nodded.

“I think as you put your brush in your pigments, then let the canvas lick them from the bristles, you indulge the same process.”

Now Proctor laughed. “Go away,” he said. “I will see you up at your home late Monday afternoon.”

And her laughter, terribly musical and winning, threaded his. “What about ...?” She glanced at Robby.

Proctor nodded her to silence. “He’ll be all right.”

“Then I’ll go.” Her hand came from beneath her cloak. “I must thank you for the spectacular entertainment you staged this evening.”

He took her hand. “I must congratulate you on your spectacular performance.”

The candlelight behind her set fire to the edges of her black hair. She whispered, “I think even *she* was pleased ....” and turned away, her cloak opening a moment to block the light.

“Are you going back up to the Hill?”

“No,” laughing, “I’m going to wander back down to the boats.” Pauses. “She went with them to the wharf. Goodnight, Jon.”

“Goodnight.” She paused; “Take care.”

Light again; and Robby found himself looking at her portrait against the wall, and wondering if she had really been there.

Proctor came over to him, knelt by him. “Try to sit up?”

Robby pushed himself from the floor. He looked around the study. He frowned at the paintings.

“Where am ...?”

“My studio.” Proctor looked over his shoulder. “Benny, make some coffee for us.” And the sullen boy who had been sitting in the corner with his hands too deep in his pockets stood up and went to the stove.

“Are you some kind of an artist?”

Proctor nodded.

“You paint this stuff?”

“I also write poems, stories, music.” He sat back on his heels. “But the renaissance ideal comes to so little in a specialized world. Do you feel better? You, looked fairly sick when I got here.”

“Yeah, I guess ...”

The Puerto Rican boy brought coffee.

They talk a while. Robby talks about where he’s come from, where he wants to go, the things he wants to do. It makes him feel better. That is because he is saying things that he has said before to other people; and the artist smiles, nods, makes exclama—

tions of complicity or indignation in the places where other people have, and it is reassuring. Occasionally Robby finds his eyes suddenly snatched away from the sympathetic face by some trick of a candle on the paintings—and chills clutch along his nerves. Still, Proctor listens like any ordinary man.

“You seem a lot better,” Proctor, finally. “Perhaps you can go now.”

“Oh,” Robby, warily. “Yeah, I guess I should.” He stands, a little shakily. “Thanks. For the coffee.”

At the bottom step he realizes how cold it is. And the pressure on his bladder. Leaning one hand against the wall, he urinates, occasionally looking up to see if anybody is coming. Down the street, toward the harbor, there is mist. He starts for the coiling fogs. A sound makes him look back.

A black dog has come around the corner, has stopped by the doorframe. He laps the puddle by the wall. He looks up, panting, drops his head again.

Robby puts his hands in his pockets to stop the terror that begins at the base of his spine, and hurries toward the wharf.

Sambo’s cock came out of her ass, and she was left sucking Dove deep, and the smell of his groin, and her fingers pressing brass hair, and the smell of the water around the boat. The smell of fog, the rocking around them. Her tongue played him, troweled beneath the foreskin, and as she felt the boy’s father’s juice dripping down the back of her leg, she drank the son’s first gout, and let it wash about the cylinder as he spilled in her.

Later, when she thought they were asleep, Kirsten went to the rail and looked at the ordered arc of moons the dock lights made in the fog. The night poured its damp smokes over the water. She heard bare feet behind her on the wet deck.

Nig grinned at her. His shirt hung open, his left hand held his balls. His cock angled like a piece of the night between the fallen flaps of his pants. His right reached for her smock hem. He put his other arm, now, around her shoulder, brushed his lips to her cheek mumbling, “... Hey, sweet pussy ... oh yeah, some shitty pussy ... ain’t this little blonde whore got some hot ole nasty pussy ...” There was the smell of old effort, and on that new effort bloomed. He moved his fingers back and forth in her. She had to shift her feet apart on the wet wood. He covered her mouth, pushed his tongue in her mouth. He lifted her breast again and again so that her nipple rubbed his palm. Then his fingers made bars about her head as he searched her throat with his tongue.

With one hand he took her buttocks, and bent his knees to push his cock on her hair, and pushed harder. She touched the tight hair at his groin; her fingertip felt a drop of her own juice trickle. He shoved and she slipped around him. She held his head, while he turned it back and forth, rasping her palms with his hair. Her buttocks came away from the cold rail. His warm fingers moved down them. The weight of him bent her—she started to slip.

He caught her and took her down on the wet boards. A stray cord made a hard line under one shoulder. She pushed her tongue beside his, beneath his, moved it beneath his lips covering. He pulled her up against him, got his hand under her and pushed away the twine, while the weight on her took all breath out of her before his thrust; she gasped beneath it. Her knees wagged beside his hips, and she

pushed back. Somebody else, vaguely she knew, kneeling over them:

“Hey there, boy. How about lettin’ your pappy get his old black hog-sticker in the other end of that.” And a stronger hand, warm between her and the deck. “Yeah, that’s it, honey.”

Robby’s fists hang in his pockets like warm rocks against his loins; he walks the dock trying to define what had been loosed in him. His stomach hurts. The fog licks his neck, dampens his shirt, gives him bad memories. The billows disappear before him, close behind, and the long sounds of the dock roll around. A breeze picks up the short hairs from his neck and kisses him like a corpse.

In quiet storms mists swirled the lamps. He looked at the boats, shifting, listing at one another. Nets hung from raised cranes; weathered floats swung between reefs of chain. Rope and cable sang along the outriggers. He could make out names: Dawn Star ... Laocoon ... Catherine ... Black Lightning.

And the faintest flicker from the *Scorpion’s* portal. He took his fists from his pockets; cold washed his groin. But it was the laughter, it was the glass breaking, that stopped him. Gingerly he went to the dock. Inside, one shutter obscured half the glass, but as he hooked his fingers on the curved ledge (the gentling of the boat tugged his wrists) someone inside knocked against it and it swung away!

The face of one of the colored women kept brushing the glass. The other, the darker, moved her lips on the turning cheek, pale tongue at pale tongue, lips crushing to more fullness in the pressing embrace.

Someone yanked them apart. A palm struck the window, printed it with sweat. Behind the smear the man with the swastika chained on his neck grasped the ceiling beam. In lamplight, his face twisted beyond agony. His hair straggled on his ridged forehead, flattened on his perspiring belly where his belt hung. The haunches of the Negress before him bulged over her heels. Her leaking saliva glistened on the veins webbing his cock; sweat jeweled her rough, rough hair.

Then he recognized the struggling white woman. Beautiful in the sun, in the lamplight with wet arms she was monstrosously so. Laughing, then suddenly violently sobbing, till laughter broke out again, she tried to hide her face. One of the fishermen pulled her arm, while another caught her leg. A third caught her other ankle, and clutching her right wrist was the skinny blond youngster. His lips were drawn with effort and she almost pulled him down three times as they dragged her. She heaved in their grip, breasts wobbling and shaking on her ribs. Her vagina rolled like meat in the nut-colored brush. She arched and swung, hair falling from her face, from lids clamped and centered in glittering tear tracks, from lips enlarged with rouge, and strained.

The sill tugged Robby’s fingers, tapped his chin.

A pencil in his fist, the captain was writing in what looked like an accounting ledger. Someone brushed against him and he looked up. Lamplight raddled in the Negro’s neck stubble. The captain stood, stepped around the table, stepped before the lamp so that all figures were blotted with his shadow. He stepped again.

A fisherman yanked her leg aside.

The captain, legs apart between her wider legs, stood with the twin catenary of his testicles in silhouette. He kneeled. The catenaries swung.

Her crying balked, took a rhythm with his valley-ing spine, as it arched and straightened, where light spilled back and forth. She made a sound like gagging—

The cramping muscles at his scrotal base made

Robby gas :>.

Figures swayed in the lapping light to the boat’s sway. And Robby could not ponder what he watched for disbelief. Knuckling his eyes because his lids were propped so long, he saw another man had mounted the heaving woman, or another. The pressure lower than his belly he could not touch for pain.

The gilded figures slipped.

Grinding the verdigrised sill, his chin and fingers grew sore. He sagged on the hull, eye tearing:

A woman struck a black 106 year old in the belly. The child screamed and staggered toward the window while she came on, raging. Robby jerked back as brown buttocks slapped and flattened on the glass. The boy kept shrieking, jerked left, then slipping right, while she did something to him inside.

“Hey, boy!”



From on deck the captain, arms folded on the rail, gazed down the side of the boat.

Robby opened his mouth. What wanted to become speech dissolved. The fog drifted on his blunted tongue. A dog barked in the city.

“Hey there, boy! What you doing out here tonight? Rumors going out what you got yourself into some trouble/” and laughter followed into the fog.

Robby blinked against the chill. Night’s vapors coiled between them to blur the buck. “Some people are saying you messed up one of this town’s more respectable young ladies.”

Memories confused themselves in Robby’s mind. Something raged in him and would take no name. He stepped back again, trying to speak. He was still shivering. Something coursed through, leaving a burning in his joints, setting a slow rage in his belly.

“Come on up here.”

Robby stepped on the plank. His boot hit a cross rib and he stopped. Hecks of light sped the water.

“You think it’s a good idea for you just to be hanging around like this?” The captain reached under his shirt to scratch. “We’ll be pulling out of here come dawn.”

From among the houses came a fit of canine wailing. The captain looked up. Then his eyes returned to Robby. “You going to come aboard, boy?”

Robby stepped on the boat. “What ...” and had to back off the word to get voice. “... what do you want me to do ... Captain?”

The captain frowned.

“I’ll do anything you want me to, Captain.” The sound kept roughening, snagging on harsher sounds. And there was the metallic backing of hysteria. Robby looked at the deck.

“Anything?”

“You tell me to do something. I don’t care. I’ll ... I’ll ...” He began to raise his eyes. “... do it!”

The black, bare feet on the gray boards; the heavy chain on the right ankle; the frayed denim cuffs—the seam on the left had torn halfway up the calf—and the knees, gray, and baggy; Robby’s eyes reached the second baggy place, high on the thigh. His heart drummed. His armpits greased with sweat. He watched the captain slip one thumb through a belt loop: the dark fingers arched on the lap. Did what was in the pants leg move?

The captain laughed. “You sure as shit look like you would!”

Robby’s jaw hurt, and he was very cold. His vision kept blurring with veils and wild glistenings. He forced out, “Tell me ...” and his belly had become water. He thought he was falling, thought he was rising.

“Come on down with us to the cabin.” The captain clapped Robby’s shoulder. The blow struck with more laughter, broke with the waters on the pilings about them. Within the cage of his tensed muscles, Robby prepared some motion ....

“There—” *Crack!* “—he is!”

The captain jerked his hand from the drifter’s shoulder.

Whites ringing his pupils, Robby began to clutch at his side as if some insect had gotten into his shirt. He got down on one knee—

Nig: “Hey, you got him, Bull!”

Dove: “Look at the motherfucker go!”

—opened his mouth, put one hand out to catch himself, then rolled over, face up and terrible with recognition.

Bull clomped onto the deck swinging his rifle from both hands. Nig and Dove, grinning, were behind him in a moment, peering around his elbows. Bull, licking first his upper lip, then his lower, stopped about three feet from the body. Both lips went into his mouth, then came out again.

Blood crawled on the deck to catch between the boards, spreading from the puddle in an ordered grill.

Shaking his head, Bull thumped the butt down and laid the barrel along his leg; the sight on the barrel’s tip flattened red stomach hair. (The shape defined where the metal stretches his pants is substantially thicker than the barrel.) “Shit. Guess I *had* to kill the stupid motherfucker, now, didn’t I? Priest wouldn’t let me alone nohow. And you can’t let a man go running around the streets when

everybody thinks he done something like that.” He scratched his bald head with the nubs of his hairy fingers. “I told that old black bastard you two got for a pappy you better watch out from now on. Take it easy next time. Bitch hadn’t a’ died, I wouldn’t a’ had to do this.”

Dove: “Sure, Bull.”

Nig: “Sure thing, Bull.”

Dove moves his foot aside because the blood had reached it; it leaves a track.

Nig crouches down, reaches out as though to touch the body, says: “Oh shit ...” changes his mind, and stands.

On Bull’s pants, a dime of wetness grew to a fifty-cent piece. He slapped the barrel a few more times. “I wonder what that poor piss-drinkin’ son of a bitch is starin’ at? Hey, nigger?” Bull gestured at the captain with his chin. “What you suppose he seein’ now?” Bull’s chest became a shaking hogshead of laughter. Laughing, he looked up.

They came from the hatch door. Some stood at the rails. Those at the dockside of the ship threw shadows on the deck. (Those at the far side threw shadows on the water.) The blonde girl leaned against the locker, fingering, at her breasts, her torn blue smock.

Bull took a deep breath, looked around. “All right. Somebody help me get him out of the way.”

Nig and Dove moved to grapple the carcass; but Bull swung at them with his rifle stock. “Get out of here!” They danced back, surprised. “You two bastards given me enough trouble tonight,” he grumbled. Bull swung again.

They slunk, still grinning, to the rail.

Dove left bloody footprints.

Nig left none at all.

“Come on, Captain. Help me get him put away.”

With three running steps, and two walking, Kim came up beside them, took Bull’s gun. Watching the two men pick up the body, she turned her fist on the barrel. Was it warm from the murder shot, or the murderer’s belly? The expression on her face was not a smile; but it made Kirsten think of someone smiling.

The captain hooked his hands under the corpse’s armpits.

Bull picked up the ankles. As the hips left the deck and swung, one foot slipped Bull’s hand. The shoe heel banged.

In the cabin a woman laughed. (Around the deck they look around.) Bull glanced at the hatch before he picked up the foot again.

Nazi, breathing hard, stepped from in front of the gangplank to let them pass. He rubbed the wet hair on his chest. His breath was loud. The chain, with its swinging swastika, clinked on his wrist. His smile recalled someone in rage, or agony, or both. He was not thinking much of anything.

Before the captain stepped from the gangplank to the dock, he hefted the body a little higher.

Halved by the hull, the laughter shrilled and doubled back, more shrilly, through tones it had touched before.

Light from the nearest porthole suddenly halved.

The captain looked.

A woman’s face pressed the glass, tongue caught at the corner of her mouth. Her fingers tapped the sill. Lamplight behind her exploded in loose hair, dimmed her features.

In another part of the city, the longer hand on the church clock, in three starts, lurched a minute nearer midnight. Niger lolloped and high-legged it through the streets, pausing at a studio door, at the center of the city square, at a barred cellar window, to howl the season’s turning.

A flash detonates all the combustible night.

### *Bull Redux:*

Anything? How about you want to suck on my dick. Shit, I can come ten or twelve times in a night, if I want. Last one was number nine. He leans against the rocking cabin wall, hands in his pockets. Sometimes he moves his arm to brush Gunner’s. He stares directly in front of him and tries to make it

seem as though it is the boat's sway. On the rug, a hand flexes, is locked by another, is pulled back among heaving bodies. Gunner stares at the light posts on the studs in Bull's collar, the rigid flesh of the dark elbow, the reflections on the sweat under tangled belly hair. You like piss, hey? Nazi told me you like to drink a guy's piss. You know what I like: when I get all ready to come, say when maybe some little kid is sucking on my dick, I start to pee. It's just like coming, only for a whole minute, you know? Mostly I just do it when I jerk off. I mean, I'd really like to do that. Yeah? Get down there, yeah! Like to have you around for a while, boy. You can take almost as much as I got to give. Gunner has crouched down. Bull has one hand on Gunner's shoulder. The other fumbles his fly. Okay, now come on and do it. Use your teeth ... harder, yeah, like that. Oh, yeah, fine. You're doing real fine.

## Chapter Seven. Harbor Of The Scorpion

But Doctor Faustus within a short time after he had obtained his degree fell into such fantasies and deep cogitations that he was marked of many, and of the most part of the students was called the Speculator.

—*The Historie of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faust* (1592)

### *The Scorpion's Log:*

Perhaps this is a bad book.

If there are bad things in this book then I should throw it in the water because I was afraid of what was on his face and because I was surprised and scared—I wasn't surprised at Bull in fact I guess I'm glad—because I didn't feel sorry for him at all. I didn't feel sorry for him.

And it would be too much trouble to have write this down then to tear it up. Or hire him.

It is a magic book. Words mean things. When you put them together they speak. Yes, sometimes they flatten out and nothing they say is real, and that is one kind of magic. But sometimes a vision will rip up from them and shriek and clank wings clear as the sweat smudge on the paper under your thumb. And that is another kind. I think they both have to do with one another and attention but I do not know. I know I want to tear it up. It is not I can't come like he said a seventh time because I did and did again. But there can't be any more magicians because I have learned how that works and am happier now listening to the water or maybe [The entry stops here.]

First-light burned fog from the water. The captain stepped out on the cold deck. His breath, like blue fog, curled away.

Wedge against the cabin by the water tank was a knot of sunburned arms, sun-bleached hair, khaki pants with a knee showing, bare feet clutching each other. Gunner slept curled around himself, the fingers of one hand caging his face.

The captain shook his head, smiling, went back in the cabin, came out again with the canvas coat, and put it over the boy. Gunner grunted, shifted, slept on.

Through the galley window he saw Kirsten, sitting on a crate, elbows over the table's storm lip, looking a comic. With his knuckles, he made the screen chatter. She looked up, threw back her hair, and came to the door. "Captain ...?" A hand on each jamb, she leaned out. "Will you want breakfast now?"

He swung to cuff her.

She let go with one hand, dodged sideways, then looked out again. The slightest frown battled the slightest smile. Her smock was safety-pinned.

"You haven't been to bed yet?"

She shrugged. "I'm not tired."

"Put the supper pot on the stove. I'll heat it up when I get back. Drag your half-wit brother down into the cabin. He won't be any good to me with pneumonia." He stalked across the smeared deck, irrownd at it once, but did not slow till he was on the clock.

He scratched his stomach through the flaps of his shirt, dropped his hand under his belt, scratched again.

At the end of the wharf, someone was hammer-ing. The blows echoed like gong strokes. After half a dozen shots, even that stopped.

He walked across the packed dirt, across gravel, across paving—stepped up a curb; and entered the town.

The barred frame on the cellar window of the Hall of Mirrors was open. The lock, hasp twisted back, lay on the ground. The captain pushed it with his toe; the insides jingled loosely. He grinned.

When he reached the wide street before the church, he heard a scrabbling behind. He turned as Niger's paws struck his hip. "Hey, you black devil! Where have you been all night?" The dog bounced to the pavement, bounced back. "Good to see you, you son of a ..." and pulled at the dog's ear, shook the head by the lower jaw. Two women coming up the street watched, then stopped watching when the captain watched back. Niger ahead, the captain turned the corner, back to the wharf.

As they passed Proctor's second-floor studio, Niger growled.

"What? You don't think we should let the old fool sleep out his Sunday? Well, I've found *you*. Back to the boat, boy!" Someone was whistling overhead. He looked up. The studio windows were opened and the music came through. It stopped for a few moments of conversation; the voices were Proctor's and Benny's. Then a face passing and pausing at the window: "Captain?"

"Hey, Proctor!"

And Niger barked.

"You pull out today, Captain?"

"Off in a few minutes."

"Come up for a moment, then." Face gone and only this voice: "Benny, get the captain some coffee."

Back: "I want to show you something, Captain! Come up!"

"I got to go on to the—"

Gesturing: "Come on!"

And Niger was running up and down the first four steps.

"Coffee," Benny said when the captain reached the top step.

The captain took the mug in both hands and lowered his face. His lips heated over the black disk marred with steam, his own reflection, and smelling of chicory.

"Can I give the dog ...?" Niger was already leaping at the tin pan of scraps.

"Sure." Then the captain—"Down boy!"—looked again at the wall. Wrapping paper was taped along the molding. On a stepladder, Proctor drew with a lump of chalk. The paper rattled.

"What do you think?" Proctor stepped down, left his chalk on the top rung. His fingers were stained terra cotta. "This is just a cartoon for the finished work, of course. But it suggests the composition and some of the immediate detail." He came across the floor, dusting his fingers on his jeans.

"Cartoon? It's going to move like a movie?"

Proctor laughed. "No. I just mean it's full-sized. It'll be transferred to a wall, then filled in with color. I've been working on it since before sunup."

The captain frowned at the length of paper. Then smiled.

"Ah, you can respond to it. Even at this stage. But you know all my models. Still, the problem remains aesthetic. I'm transported by the idea of using the material in such a way that all the relations remain unreal."

"You missed the best part." The captain laughed.

"I hear you went on well after I left." Proctor took a cup from Benny. "I'm only interested in chaos as far as it can be contained in ritual. Even if it's just the ritual of creation. Beyond that, reality bores me. Art is terribly limiting to certain of the sensibilities, I suppose. Oh, I'd make quite a devil."

Niger worried his bone joints to the boards.

"Pleasure, suffering, boredom, death: following the path of least resistance, you are going to have a fair amount of all four. With effort, one can avoid much of the first. With craft, one can make the last three meaningful. But what connection can art make between these inevitables?" He shrugged.

Niger left, clacking his knucklebones to sniff Proctor's boot, blotting the dust with his nose. He wheeled to the captain and tongued a wet ribbon across rayed ligaments and wormy veins. Satisfied with

the comparison, he sat by his master and thumped the floor with his tail.

"Who is that?" the captain asked, frowning at the chalkings.

"Where?"

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The captain pointed. "That one there."

"Oh, yes. A young man I found in my studio when I got back last night. He's just come into town; probably hanging around the wharf, looking for work on the boats. I'm going to hunt him up this afternoon and see if he'll sit for a couple of hours of sketching. He'll be able to use the buck or two."

The captain looked at the drawing for three breaths, then made a sound between laugh and bark. "I like your picture!" He swallowed the last of the coffee. "Come on, Niger. I go back to my boat now."

"You sure you don't want another—" But the captain's laughter filled the stairwell; over it, the dog's barking.

On the *Scorpion's* deck, Gunner sat on an overturned wire basket, rubbing the inner corner of one eye with two fingers.

"How you feel this morning?"

Gunner grinned sleepily. "Fine, Captain!"

The captain unwound the rope from the dock cleat, leapt to the deck as the rope splashed down beside the hull, and hauled it, dripping, up.

"Kirsten just put coffee on, Captain. You want—"

"Get over there and throw the line!"

Gunner leaped to the top of the locker to see which line, then landed on the deck in a running crouch. The rope, in his small hands, came spinning off its pile.

The captain stepped over the high sill of the wheelhouse door.

Gunner was still coiling when the starter motor began its double hum. The diesel thumped twice, and commenced low thunder.

"Loose!"

The boat pulled, taking the side swells.

Niger barked from the top of the water tank then jumped down and ran to the prow.

Kirsten, swaying with the boat, hair braided with wind, carried a steaming cup into the wheelhouse and set the yellow mug in a cutout on the plank behind the wheel. "Captain?" She leaned her back *on* the doorframe, both hands on the far jamb. "Niger is barking at the dolphins."

"You sad to go, little girl?"

She shrugged. "We go someplace better now."

He nodded, chuckling.

"I put the light under the supper pot. You want breakfast soon?"

He grinned at her.

Gunner came up and sat on the sill at his sister's feet. Spray sheeted above the rail. Both children turned their heads away.

"Where are we going now?" Gunner asked. "I liked the big one, with the gun."

Kirsten looked down at Gunner's hair, exchanged a look with the captain, then shook her head.

The captain laughed. "Don't you know, boy? A *new* age is on the earth; or did you sleep through it?" Spray hit the wheelhouse window. "The big one with the gun, hey? Stay around one like that for a week and you'll scare yourself to death. There're enough others for you."

"Did they have to kill him?" Kirsten asked.

"That's the law, girl."

"And the one named Peggy-Ann, who came last night?" Gunner wanted to know.

"That's the law." Niger barked from the prow, balancing in the froth. "It's their law. Not ours."

The captain turned the wheel left; the boat swung out through the sounds.

"Hey there, girl! Does that look like a new age out there?" Water hit the window again. "Does it now, boy?"

The *Scorpion* fell through glass-green troughs *to* rise on the white eruptions of the morning sea. After

a while the captain drank his coffee. Kirsten went forward to stretch by Niger in the spray. Gunner muscled back against the doorjamb, ustening to the water. As the sun rose and rose, he squinted more and more, occasionally reaching up to brush dried salt from his burning shoulder.

—New York September 1968

## Bibliographical Note

Delany first completed *Equinox* in late September 1968 in a ground floor 6th Street apartment between Avenues A and C on New York's Lower East Side. All the art works in the novel attributed to Proctor—paintings, sculptures, and constructions—are descriptions of then-existing works by the late artist Russell FitzGerald [1934-1978], which could be seen during the middle sixties at FitzGerald's ground floor "black studio" on East Second Street. A number have since been lost or destroyed; but some remain on store in Vancouver, B.C. Delany had hoped to sell his book to editor Brian Kirby at California's Essex House, publisher of some surprisingly literate erotica. But by the time the final version was got into a shape satisfactory to the writer—in San Francisco, Spring 1969—Essex House was no longer in business. The manuscript was never shown to Kirby. The novel waited four more years for publication.

When *Equinox* (now titled by publisher's mandate *The Tides of Lust*) first appeared from Lancer Books in 1973, Eileen Lottman, writing in *Publishers Weekly* (February 19, 1973), called Delany "... a fine story teller, literate and controlled." *The Tides of Lust*, she went on, "may well appeal to young people who are far out in the psychic sexual realm where the old myths and legends have led the fearless fantasts." A year later, Charles Mitchell (see below) was writing of "the arrival of a major mind" in the area of "sexual speculation," in terms of Delany's novels. The year the book appeared, Lancer went out of business, but, in the weeks before the company's demise, *The Tides of Lust* went through two printings: the first is distinguished by a small, square Lancer colophon, in black, in the lower left hand corner of the mauve cover. On the second printing, the lower left-hand colophon is absent.

Though the right to correct galleys had actually been included in Delany's Lancer contract, the clause was violated: Delany had no chance to check the copyediting; nor was he ever sent any proofs. As a result, dozens of minor typesetting errors crept into the text (for the first time corrected by the author of this edition). In 1980 in London, Savoy Books republished the book, using a photo-offset of the Lancer edition. But after the first weeks of distribution, police confiscated the remaining copies from Savoy's warehouse and burned them.

In the book trade there are recent tales of collectors' paying \$300.00 or more for one of the flaking, original paperbacks. And the novel's manuscript has been several times sold among cognoscenti for several thousands of dollars.

Following are sites of some half-dozen more intelligent discussions of Delany's novel:

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Mitchell, Charles. "Sci-Fi Meets the Tides of Porn," *Oui* 3, June, 1974: New York, 1974.

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