



**THE ANAL-RETENTIVE
LINE EDITOR
STORY**

DENNIS COOPER

"A DISQUIETING GENIUS."—VANITY FAIR

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SHORT STORY

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“Knife/Tape/Rope” was originally the text of a performance art work of the same name created and directed by Ishmael Houston-Jones in 1985.

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THE ANAL-RETENTIVE LINE EDITOR

... I shoved my tongue deep inside his hot, tight ass [Editor's note: Many problems here. Unless your character is Gene Simmons, he'd be lucky to insert his tongue an eighth of an inch inside the ass, which, taking into account the volume of the cavity in question, doesn't qualify as deep. If he is a Gene Simmons type, you need to say so. Also, human asses aren't hot. Unless your character has spanked the ass in question vigorously—and there is no mention of that—or they are in a sauna—which they are not—the exterior would be luke-

warm or tepid at best. If you're referring to the anal cavity itself, you'd be lucky to get away with warm. In fact, the tongue has a higher temperature than the anal membranes, so the effect would be a cooling. The only exception would be if the secondary character is ill and running a fever, in which case I don't believe the main character would be rimming him, correct?] and spent a delirious hour scrounging around in his delicious, silken depths [An hour, really? It's technically possible, but your main character's facial muscles would be very sore, in which case "delirious" becomes a problem. May I suggest "minute"? Your point would still be made. "Scrounging" is effective. It does feel as though one is being scrounged, but I would never have thought of that word. "Around" is unnecessary, but I found its masculine, blue-collar tone erotic, so I'll let it stand. As for "delicious," I understand what you're getting at. Your main character thinks the secondary character is very attractive. Hence, blah blah blah. However, an asshole is not delicious. There is barely any taste at all. It's the aroma of the asshole that creates the illusion of a flavor. Of course calling attention to that aroma would be risky. You might have noticed that most pornographic descriptions of oral-anal sex avoid the issue, apart from the occasional aside that an ass smells "clean." How ambitious are you? You could break new ground by eroticizing the aroma of an ass being rimmed, or you could avoid the area entirely. In any case, "delicious" won't fly. As for "silken," silk is dry and gauzy. Anal membranes are slick and greasy. How about "rubbery"? With "depths" we have the same problem I mentioned earlier: Your main character is

not anywhere near the secondary character's depths. There is also the problem of repetition: "deep," "depths."] while he devoured [Is he a cannibal? If so, do you think he'd have the patience?] my big dick [Bland, de rigueur. Perhaps "gigantic," "monster," "humongous"? You could also indicate whether it is circumcised or not. Is the dick leaking seminal fluid? If so, that would add some pizzazz.] and juicy balls. [Oranges are juicy; testicles sweat and very modestly at that.] It took him a while, [an entire hour?] but that cute blond slut [I was going to argue against "slut" since you describe him as a virgin on pp. 13, 17, 18, 22, but, after conferring with one of my colleagues, I'll agree that slutty behavior is not a matter of expertise. Still, the word gave me pause, and it might be scrutinized by readers. Also, "cute blond" is too generic. I miss his "sleepy blue eyes," "small ski-lift nose," and "flowery pink lips." Could you remind us here? He and your readers deserve that much. I might mention here that I happen to be the "cute blond" type you are stereotyping in your story. Perhaps you'll think this throws my ability to be objective into question. Rather, I'd suggest it provides me greater insight into your story. Your "cute blond" could be far more human, individualistic, and erotic if you would be willing to go back and rewrite the beginning and middle of your story. I would be happy to provide you with more information regarding what your "cute blond" might be feeling, thinking, and wanting from your main character if you would like. We could meet for a coffee near the office during one of my breaks. How does Wednesday sound? This is not an editorial demand, of course, but rather a sugges-

tion that you may accept or disregard as you wish.] managed to deep-throat all eleven inches of my hard, thick pole. [This wouldn't be an autobiographical story, would it? If so, what's your phone number? That's a little joke. Seriously, "hard, thick pole" is lazy. Sculpt it for us. Make us feel it in our throats. Also, isn't it the privilege of knowing his dick is inside the cute blond's face that forms the source of the main character's ecstasy and impending orgasm? Mention that. It doesn't have to be more than a phrase.] His hot, [too many "hots"] gagging throat [throats don't "gag," throats "constrict" or "convulse"] crammed with more meat than it could handle [nice] sent me over the edge, [of what?] and I exploded. [Cliché, cliché. Plus, it literally makes no sense unless your character is a suicide bomber. You can do much better.] Wave after wave of hot cum [There's "hot" again. Also, not to beat a dead horse, but sperm's temperature is not "hot" but rather lukewarm. Surely you've had enough sex to know that. "Wave" is a stretch—if only!—but I'll let it go.] gushed into his sweet teenaged guts. [Unless the secondary character has had a large amount of candy in his mouth recently, his guts would not be "sweet." If you mean sweet as in adorable, how do his esophagus and stomach qualify? Have you ever seen an X-ray? I realize you're complimenting him, but this is not the place. "Guts" is inaccurate, but I like it instinctually. It makes your main character sound tough and masculine. Lastly, I spoke to our legal department, and "teenaged" is a problem. They suggested "eighteen-year-old guts" as an alternative. Does that work for you? Frankly, reading the story, I assumed the "cute blond"

was in his early twenties. Perhaps you mean he looks younger. I'm twenty-four, but I still get carded on those rare occasions when I go to a gay bar. It's possible I'm identifying with the character too much. If so, disregard. Finally, I'll end my edit with another quibble, albeit a rather large one. Why does your "cute blond" not have an orgasm? Do you find his pleasure unimportant? The ending feels very abrupt without it. If your main character thinks the "cute blond's guts" are "sweet," then what about his sperm? Are you saying your main character wouldn't want a face or mouthful of that sperm? Personally, given the personality you've chosen for him, I find that unbelievable. I can tell you that on the rare occasions when I have had sex, my partners not only wanted but demanded I have an orgasm in their mouths. In fact, it was only then that they were sufficiently satisfied to have an orgasm themselves. My experience is not everyone's, of course. I am merely suggesting that were your main character to take the "cute blond's" penis in his mouth and fellate him to orgasm, it could be the physical effect of this orgasm combined with the very potent, positive psychological effect of the main character's decision to take the "cute blond's" sperm into his mouth that would cause the "cute blond" to make the Herculean effort to deep throat the main character's rather large penis. Consequently, the taste of the "cute blond's" sperm combined with the honor of having his penis submerged in the "cute blond's" throat would give the main character a more meaningful orgasm and correct the problem of his callousness toward the "cute blond." It's your story, but I offer you my expertise on this particular topic in

the spirit of teamwork. Let me know if you'd like to have that coffee. In any case, I need your rewrite in my mailbox first thing Friday morning. Best, Peter Guest]

Dear XRay Ted,

I've had an additional hour to think further about the edit, and I have one final suggestion. Let me preface it by telling you that I don't as a general rule give such a careful edit on the porno stories that are selected to appear in the magazine. I mean this close attention as a compliment. Yours is one of the rare stories we've received that aroused me personally in any significant way. This is due in part to the physical attributes I happen to share with your secondary character, as I've explained. In addition, the inordinate attention you pay to the secondary character's asshole and surrounding region happens to conform to my fantasy of what great sex would consist of with myself in the passive or receiving role. My use of the word "would" is a slight exaggeration, as I have participated in great sex or at least very good sex of the type your story emphasizes on two of the very few occasions in which I have found an objective reason to have sex. Thus, I believe I know what your story could become were you to take a little more time with it.

Pardon me for saying this, but your strength is not your writing but rather what appears to be your fetish and the passion your writing exhibits when your imagination comes in contact with a certain body part I'm certain that I need not mention. My strengths, on the other hand, are language,

syntax, and other technical skills regarding the construction of fiction, as well as, to some degree, my imagination, at least when it is stimulated by what I suppose I would have to term my own personal fetish. (As a side note, I am currently studying for a master's degree in creative writing at Yale.) It occurs to me that our talents and fetishes are a good if not entirely perfect match. Hence, my earlier offer to form a more intimate than usual writer and editor relationship for the purpose of finessing your story. (As a second side note, I apologize for my long-windedness. I tend to become rather talkative when I am physically aroused. But I'll tell you a secret: There are ways to shut me up, and if I act hurt or indignant, one need only repeat the silencing procedure at length to make my mouth as quiet as a church.)

FYI, my limited success as a sex partner is due in large part to what I like to term nice-guy syndrome. Respect is crucial and a turn-on for me, but niceness is another thing. Truth is, I'm a nattering, self-absorbed tight ass at the best of times. I know this full well. Hence, when people are overly nice to me, all that tells me is that they're not paying sufficient attention. In my day-to-day life, people's inattentiveness to the unpleasant aspects of my personality is understandable. When fully clothed, I am not at my best. However, if I am naked and in bed with someone, and he makes too many allowances for the irritants in my behavior, and that allowance prevents him from taking full advantage of my body, then I can only conclude they find the gift of my availability unimportant, and, as far as I am

concerned, the sex we have is doomed to be mediocre and listless, and I would just as soon go home and masturbate.

No doubt you are wondering why I have chosen to share this personal and revealing information with you. The truth is, during the hour or so since I last wrote to you, I queried my coworkers about you and discovered that I have been assigned the task of editing your story as a cruel joke on us both. In their minds, my obsessive attention to detail will “drive you crazy,” in one coworker’s words. They consider you to be a very primitive person whose behavior during your occasional visits to our office in the time prior to my coming to work here was sufficient grounds for any number of sexual harassment suits against you. If it helps, I am equally unpopular here both for the same personality quirks I have displayed in my e-mails to you, and because I happen to be several thousand times more attractive than any of my fellow employees. According to them, I was only hired because the managing editor of our magazine intends to find a way to fuck me.

In the course of this discovery, I was shown a series of suggestive digital photos of you that you sent to one of my appalled coworkers, and, deep breath, I would be interested in having sex with you with one proviso: that during our encounter we engage in oral-anal sex with myself as the passive recipient at great length. Actually, I am open to all ideas you have within reason that involve anal sex with myself in the passive role just so long as oral-anal sex is the centerpiece or chorus to whatever sexual activity my ass inspires

you to perform. My genitals are fair game as well, although I will forewarn you that they are merely pleasant looking and average sized with the one plus that they, like the rest of my body, are naturally almost hairless. My heritage is Scandinavian, if you haven't guessed, while you appear to be Spanish or Italian mixed with some Arabic, if I might hazard a guess. Whatever your background, you certainly do know a thing or two about large cocks. All the more reason for me to wonder why you slighted the one in your story. A simple pole, hardly. You could give that thing of yours a name and register it to vote. But I have flattered you and debased myself long enough. Shall we meet for that coffee I suggested tomorrow and, barring faux pas, take it back to your place?

Love, Peter

... The coffeehouse was swarming with trendy young pieces of college-age shit. Blondie was trendiest, but he was also *the shit*. [Ed. Note: I was wearing a Kenzo shirt, Paul Smith jacket. That's my current "uniform." Add?] The bitch must have killed when he was fourteen. [I did, but I didn't know it, unfortunately.] At twenty-four, he looked eroded—two flitty queen's eyes, a tight, disapproving mouth, and an already weak chin blurred by faint jowls. [This is painful to read but well written. Here let me say I was of course disappointed and confused by your nonappearance at our scheduled meeting. I appreciate that you appear to have imagined this meeting on behalf of your story, but a simple SMS declaring your sudden unavailability would have been nice. Perhaps you took my

earlier discrediting of “nice-guy syndrome” into account and blew me off as a way of arousing my further interest. In doing so, you have misinterpreted my point. However, assuming this to be the case, my further interest is aroused nonetheless, which must say something unpleasant about me. While the mind-reading you presume in this vastly improved draft speaks of someone far more . . . shall we say, simple than myself (I will grant you determinedly less simple), I have decided nonetheless, based on what I can only interpret as the irrefutably heavy come-on you are addressing to me within the thin disguise of this draft, to invite you have a drink with me at Maximal’s tonight. Shall we say 7:30? Oh, I forgot to mention that my “uniform” includes jeans by Energie, an Italian label. Include if you wish.] It took me all of three seconds to want to slam-fuck the priss until his screams woke up the president of China. [Point taken, but in China’s political system, there is no president, per se. Perhaps you’re saying your desire was such that you were rendered sloppy in your thinking? If so, you might rephrase the sentence thusly: “. . . slam-fuck the priss until his moans woke up whoever’s running China at the moment.” One other suggestion: Why not something on the order of “. . . rim the priss until his moans . . .” or even “. . . slam-rim . . .” or its equivalent? Granted, your main character wants to fuck the secondary character, and surely your main character will fulfill this desire (wink), but it might be nice as well as sexy to give the secondary character a modicum of respect at this point in your story. Not to mention that your main character does indeed want to rim the secondary character very,

very much, unless I'm misunderstanding your narrative, and I believe I am not. If I'm becoming too personal at this stage of our "relationship" as editor and writer, I believe I have the right considering my above-mentioned invitation.]

I like to know whom I screw. [Well, isn't that generous of your character.] But I'm talking know a little. [I saw that coming.] So when the kid started prattling [I do] about himself, [To be fair, when I prattle, I tend to cover the bases, and when I do address myself, it is only due to a vast insecurity. How about ". . . prattling on about things that were of no interest to me—things that were surely of little interest to him as well, a tactic of avoiding the topic of our obvious mutual attraction that inadvertently spoke of nothing but the lust that his insecurities and relative lack of experience caused him to try unsuccessfully to disavow." I suppose that's not very erotic. Rephrase in your own words?] I connected his dots—a face so fucking hairless, it must have seen fewer razor blades than Pluto has seen spaceships [Actually, I have about eight fine hairs on my chin that I need to shave perhaps once a week], forearms that made a twelve-year-old's look macho [I do go to the gym twice a week, and I believe it shows]—and it was all I could do not to rip his clothes off, lay him across our tipsy little table, and lick him off his skeleton like he was ice cream. [Off the record, my cock is so hard right now. I can be notoriously full of myself as a way of masking my deep feelings of inadequacy, as I said, but I'll nonetheless venture that your writing has improved dramatically in this new draft. Might I take some of the credit for functioning as your muse? I'm certain enough of this to risk sounding presumptuous.]

Call me big headed, [You? LOL] but if I want a piece of blond ass, it's mine. I don't even need to ask. [No comment] There isn't a man, woman, or child in West Hollywood who hasn't whipped their head around and cruised me on the street. [This is a decent explanation for your character's success rate, shall we say. Still, not to be the dreaded bossy bottom, but several of my coworkers here at the magazine have made the observation that you are indeed very hot while also giving you negative points for being, in their words, "too sleazy." In fact, one of these coworkers took me aside before our scheduled meeting yesterday to caution me against becoming "a notch in (your) belt." Clearly, I have proven to be a tad deaf in that regard. Nonetheless, should something transpire between us, I would hope to be more than a notch, or, at worst, a larger than usual notch.] Calling me a stud is like calling Mother Teresa a nice lady. Give me a Bible-toting, neo-Nazi virgin who doesn't even know what reaching puberty involves, and I'll give you back a walking, talking souvenir ashtray of the Grand Canyon. [Either this goes, or the virgin has to be eighteen, but it's interesting. That's your fifth reference to sex with underage boys in two pages. Working here at the magazine where every form of pornography imaginable has wound up on my desktop at one time or another, I've seen my share of so-called child porn. I'll venture a controversial opinion and say I've had to cross my legs at times when someone too young to be nude has stared me in the face. While I can't arrive in your bed via a time machine, I think I can say with some certainty that the illegal me would have blown your mind. I could bring along some old photos if you like? There's also fantasy role-play to

consider. I will admit I've always wanted to try that.] So I let my eyes give Blondie some good, gentlemanly news while my knee drove it home with an ungentlemanly massage that pinned his knee against the wall.

"I talk too much," Blondie said suddenly, his knee struggling feebly to free itself from mine. [For the record, if it really were my knee, it would be returning the massage.]

"Why don't you take a little trip to the bathroom or somewhere so I can see your pretty ass," I said, giving him his freedom. [My question is: Would the blond character have done your character's bidding? I would say yes because he would indeed be hoping to "score" with you, and while I'm hardly the gay community's favorite cup of tea, no one's ever slipped a note into the complaint box of my "pretty" ass, as your protagonist just accurately phrased it, so, considering your main character's mixed review of "my" face and personality, a little show of strength would seem to be in order.]

"So we're entering the swimwear portion of the competition?" Blondie asked in his gayest voice yet, pushing the chair back and rising to his feet.

"More like the test drive," I said.

[Not to make myself completely transparent, but if, let's say, you had shown up at the coffeehouse as planned, and I'd ordered a drink or two instead of, oh, a latte—the vodka tonic is my nemesis, FYI—you literally could have had me on the table à la your idle fantasy of a paragraph or two back with that line. Remind me to tell you about certain tragedies that have resulted when the demon vodka tonic, myself, and a cocktail

party full of gay men with nothing better to do have come in too close a proximity. In my darkest moments, I sometimes believe I have sought out a future as a writer, intellectual, and academic entirely to evade my true calling as the kind of fading, once pretty blond alcoholic you sometimes see taking on all comers in the blackest corners of establishments with names like the Cock Ring or the Eagle. Excuse this bout of unsexiness on my part, but something about you brings out the sad slut who whispers in my inner ear: "The only ivory tower you're suited for is waiting in some smoky room between two hairy muscular legs." Perhaps tonight, my love.]

If I'd been God, [as opposed to someone who thinks he is? ;-)] I would have slowed Blondie's fifteen-second walk to the bathroom door into a three-hour epic. His ass could have been shrink wrapped and sold in any sex shop in the world and not left a loaded wallet or dry urethra in the place. It was small and plump with two delicious fender-bender dents, soft enough to crown a sundae, as pert as the tip of a Norwegian kid's nose, packed so tight in designer jeans I would have awarded his ass-crack the Oscar for Best Supporting Actor on the spot. I could have sold those jeans on eBay to scratch-and-sniff collectors and never worked another day in my life. If asses could talk, he would have whispered, "Spread me on a piece of toast." I'm no scat queen, but I would have gobbled down his shit then licked his asshole so clean they could have turned it into an ER and used it to do brain surgery on my mom. While Blondie fixed his hair or took a leak or whatever queens do in bathrooms for what feels like forever, my imagination filled his pussy hole

with the biggest load of cum in recorded history, filched it out, drooled it into his open, panting mouth, made him swish it around then feed me every teeming drop, blew it back up his hole, and fistfucked our soupy masterpiece so deep it dissolved into his bloodstream like an Alka-Seltzer.

[Speaking as your editor, this is perfect. Speaking as your hopeful date for this evening, and this might be stating the obvious, but, as far as I'm concerned, I'm happy if we hang around Maximal's just long enough to get a vodka tonic or two down my throat then high-speed cab it back to your place. I will add one forewarning: In the course of my exceedingly rare past relationships, one significant other wanted very much to fistfuck me. I was game, but, try as we both did, he was unsuccessful. My personal opinion is that our lack of success was due to his impatience rather than any physical deterrent on my part. But my asshole is rather tight at the moment due to prolonged lack of use, so patience might be the word should things between us progress to such a point. Also, should there be any question that the "scat" reference above is other than a metaphor, you should know that I would need to be very, very drunk.]

"You should have seen my ass before it was stuck at a computer ten hours a day, six days a week," Blondie said, taking his seat once again. [Something I actually might have said. Touché.]

"Bitch, your ass is so fucking sweet I'm gonna stab it with a drinking straw, throw you in a sling, and pretend I'm in my local malt shop," I said. [Idle thought here: Do you actually talk like this? If so, it's effective, I don't mind telling you.]

“So where do you stand on the issue of safe sex?” Blondie asked. It was a sneak attack I hadn’t expected. [Those are awkward moments, aren’t they? Real penis softeners. And yet it’s an issue I personally believe more pornography should address directly, giving therein what I realize is a rather politically correct opinion. I’m complicated.]

“Not a chance,” I said. “If a boy won’t let me shoot in him, plunge my fingers in his sloppy, gaping hole, and rub my juice into his membranes like it was suntan lotion, I’m outta there. I get boys pregnant. That’s who I am. But if it makes you feel better, I’d swallow a gallon of your cum with a sore throat and die shriveled up in a hospice five years from now with a Mona Lisa smile on my face.”

[A bit confusing. I’m assuming your logic is as follows: Since the blond is a bottom and hence quite at-risk, drinking his sperm is more dangerous than were your main character to subject his ass to what I believe is termed “heavy cum edge play,” because your main character is a statistically less likely to be infected total top. The question then becomes: Do you in fact intend as well as desire to swallow my cum at some point tonight, assuming my earlier invitation is accepted? I think that under the circumstances, that would relieve a potentially disruptive strain of AIDS paranoia that I seem to be struggling against regarding this unsafe business. Due to an impactful incident in my youth that I would be willing to elaborate upon when I am in closer proximity to your warm shoulder, I have come to equate the imbibing of sperm as a kind of stand-in for the words “I love you.” Hence, such an act would truly float my boat. That

goes for myself imbibing your sperm as well, particularly—I'm shivering—if it had been “filched” from my ass. Am I a narcissist therefore? Perhaps. Am I an excellent judge of a nice ass? It seems your main character would agree I am in theory. Being someone forced to have sex in a solitary manner more often than I might like, I have learned to simulate a certain objectivity about my own posterior, and thus I have come to the conclusion that its pleasures are numerous. Perhaps it would interest you were I to demonstrate some of my tricks.]

“Can I ask you for a few hours to reconcile this ‘unsafe’ issue in my head before I most likely say yes?” Blondie asked with a gutsiness that made me want to rape him with an AK-47 on top of everything else. [Goodness, that sounds so much like me I almost checked my desk for listening devices.]

“Take your chances,” I said. “But you’d better hope my neighbor’s son doesn’t come home from school with one of his itches to use my PlayStation 3.” [I like this in the story—although “school” is going to have to be “college.” I certainly would not have liked it had you met me as planned at the coffeehouse yesterday and thrown it in my face. Anyway, I think you’re lying. I don’t think there is a neighbor’s son. That’s what I think.]

“Listen, I’m eight-five percent sure,” Blondie said nervously. “Be nice. I don’t sleep with people lightly. [There’s the respect I was asking for in my last edit. Thank you.] These days, fucking is a life or death decision. [A bit didactic.] Picking you could be cherry-picking my style and date of death. But I’m ninety percent sure. Ninety-five percent even. Will you call me later?”

[Sadly, I can be the kind of tedious bore you're imagining. Still, let's leave that characterization in the story. Pornography needs more of what real tops and bottoms go through just to get a little nookie in the current climate. The truth is, were this a documentary, you could have told me you were so compromised by HIV that just lighting my cigarette—if I smoked, which I do not. Do you?—would be enough to “poz” me, and I would have thought if not outright said, “Please, sir, can you rip me a new one in the closest toilet stall?” Here's a piece of good advice about dealing with me from someone who's become quite an expert over the years. For all my intelligence and, to hear my professors at Yale, my promise as a literary talent, I'm slumming as a low-paid line editor at a gay pornographic magazine because I cannot seem to live for fifteen minutes without seeking suitable inspiration to achieve an erection. They call my condition a “mind-body disconnect,” and, based on the research I've done, those thusly afflicted usually wind up in psychiatric hospitals before the age of thirty if they're fortunate. In other words, the voice you're reading now and will hopefully hear more than you want to hear tonight is to be taken with a grain of salt always. I am yours. Maybe you can give me your rewrite on a disk when I see you? In any case, I'll be at Maximal's, 7:30 tonight. I'm going with some of the boys from the office, a few of whom claim to have met you, so it shouldn't be too difficult to find me. I'll be the sitting duck. ;-)]

XRay,

First I must make an embarrassing admission in the form of

a quite awkward question: Did we meet last night? If so, I'll imagine you can understand the confusion with which I view the previous, oh, ten or so hours. Between the initial vodka tonic I ordered, at which point I recall scanning the patrons of Maximal's rather wildly for any sign of you, and the five (or last I checked, or rather could check) and presumably counting gift vodka tonics that my workmates seemed to find it so very amusing to hand and hand to the unquenchable me—a phase during which I will admit the identity of the person(s) under whom my greedy body longed to throw itself was sadly less important than general factors such as said persons' gender and the stiffness or lack thereof of what existed between whomsoever's legs—my night, which seemed to me to have lasted not much more than forty-five minutes, appears from the state of my surroundings and of myself to have in fact stretched until not so very long ago. Excuse me if this is rather predictable news, but I awoke perhaps an hour back to find myself unexpectedly seated at my desk in the office, or, more accurately, naked and arranged (by myself, it would seem, although I fear the handiwork of my coworkers is also somewhat in evidence) before my desk in a pose so melodramatic it deserved to be surrounded by students of a life drawing class. That, and the possibly irreparable shambles that was known until this morning as my workspace, and the taste of manly seed and, I fear, other less exalted fluids gone irretrievably southwards in my mouth, and the surprising discovery that my clothes appear to have been gathered

together, rolled up like a small carpet, and used as a sex toy, then left half-protruding from my ass—something I could conceivably have done myself although it would be a first, let me tell you—clearly suggest the night did not conclude as my memory indicates with the happy sound of Prince’s “Kiss” crosscutting the normally rote playlist that Maximal’s employs and filtering down the club’s narrow flight of basement stairs into what I believe was a kind of storage room while the objectively quite unattractive gym queens with whom I work every day chiseled my lower extremities into their personal totem pole like a pack of extremely ambitious beavers. That I appear to have brightened the night—if not the past, present, and future—of this magazine’s managing editor, ad salesman, assistant designer, and at least two of the summer interns is rather humiliatingly not in question. The issue is who else may have come along for an amusement park ride on me, if anyone. If you were in fact here until not so long ago, I would appear to have enjoyed our first date immensely, and if the indiscriminate, uncontrolled me whom you could conceivably have taken great liberties with was so soused as to say otherwise, I’d like to correct that impression now. If, on the other hand, you were not in fact a participant in these undoubtedly raucous yet sadly erased activities, then let me assure you that, in spite of it having been close to a year since I last woke up to find this stinking, body-fluid-encrusted, pounding-headed, heavily tunneled-through Peter—or “Peter the peter eater” as one of my nicer tricks liked to refer to me—slumped in my

usually dignified (in my own mind) place, it appears that I have lost neither the touch I've previously described to you at length in my meandering edits nor my vaunted gung ho spirit. For instance, I have such a nasty, splitting headache that they could stand me next to the Parliament building in London right now and nickname me Little Ben. Still, upon finding your final rewrite in my mailbox mere seconds ago, I opened it so quickly and grabbed my sore, exhausted crotch so automatically that, after a brief yelp of consequent agony, I cocked my throbbing head in wonder at the appearance of what I would gather to be . . . just say it, Peter . . . love, yes, love of a romantic nature from me to you. Of course I'd hoped to find an accompanying note from you of some lurid, grateful nature, but, needy me, I should have guessed you'd maintain the tougher-than-tough-guy stance that has so riveted my thoughts of you thus far. Still, if you were indeed there last night, I must wonder why I have not received a pleasant SMS. On second thought, scratch that, as I appear to have misplaced my cell phone at some point during last night's festivities, unless it happened to join my clothing in the septic tank formerly known as my quote-unquote "steaming hot boy pussy," though I suppose I would know were that the case. If my supposing is incorrect, let's hope it's set to vibrate mode. A terrible quip, I know. Before I try to tidy up and head home for a shower that should singlehandedly get the "no swimming" signs set up on Santa Monica Beach, I'll use this strangely golden opportunity to lend what remains of my editing expertise

to what I might boldly call our little collaborative XXX-rated masterpiece. Note that normally I would have read your draft up to eight times with great care and filled a second, corresponding Word document with copious notes before offering my suggestions, but, given the circumstances I've described plus the demands of an entirely sincere if beleaguered erection given me by the mere appearance of your name in my e-mail in-box, I think it best to preserve my waning energies and tackle the text at hand cold. So, let me see . . .

About the Author

DENNIS COOPER is the author of the George Miles Cycle, an interconnected sequence of five novels that includes *Closer*, *Frisk*, *Try*, *Guide*, and *Period*. His post-George Miles Cycle novels include *My Loose Thread*, *The Sluts*, which won France's Prix Sade and the 2005 Lambda Literary Award for Best Men's Fiction, and his most recent work, the highly acclaimed *God, Jr.* He divides his time between Los Angeles and Paris.

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