

The Hovering World


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ABSTRACT

The Hovering World

Peter Dubé

This fiction concerns itself principally with the power of images, the power of desire and with the relationship between them. It situates that vital relationship principally within the imagination and its various constructions, most especially, language. Moreover, it undertakes as another part of its textual work, to investigate the nature of time, experiential and absolute, and begins a kind of questioning of the boundary between them.

The protagonist Julian, a poorly disciplined writer, undergoes an unexpected encounter with a single image that so obsesses him that it demolishes his experience of the time and place in which he lives. This revelation, ultimately, obliges him to begin a recreation of that world, the "Hovering World" of the title.

Dedication

For my Mother, Frances Doreen Cummins, without whom I would not be the kind
of man to write a book

and

For my good and bad angels, (you two can work out who's who), Doug
McColeman and Mathieu Beauséjour, without whom I would not be the kind of
man to write this book.

THE HOVERING WORLD

a fiction

-Peter Dubé-

"The same applies to the angels, who have an unchangeable being as regards their nature with changeableness as regards choice; moreover they have changeableness of intelligence, of affections, and of places, in their own degree. Therefore these are measured by aeviternity, which is a mean between eternity and time."

Thomas Aquinas, called Saint
Summa Theologica

"But it appeared quite soon that this *medium inter aeternitatem et tempus* had human uses. It contains beings (angels) with freedom of choice and immutable substance, in a creation which is in other respects determined. Although these beings are out of time, their acts have a before and after. *Aevum*, you might say, is the time-order of novels. Characters in novels are independent of time and succession, but may and usually do seem to operate in time and succession; the *aevum* co-exists with temporal events at the moment of occurrence, being, it was said, like a stick in a river."

Frank Kermode
The Sense of an Ending

... precisely the sort of day that fills you with a sense of the contradictions you are swimming in. The knowledge of pain and delight, the angry sound of traffic outside your window in the purple of 4:07 am, the laughter of all your ex-lovers heard across the room at a crowded loft party, the music you listened to 8, 9... 10 years ago that you can't even stand to hear any more - all the contradictions you could find so easy to ignore any other day - they are all crashing down around your ears... cocaine sweet and edgy in the mouth.

All the while, overhead, the vast, fat sun burns away, spending its substance. At the centre of the sky it rolls along, bloated and golden like a crazy oedipal eye ripped from the forehead of space and hurled upwards to witness the passing of aeons. Burning with an awesome nonchalance and visiting us with light and heat. Hot sun, cold sun always the same and never reassuring.

Billions of miles beneath, or beside, it, Julian slips through the crowds with an easy side-step, narrowly avoiding middle-aged women heavy with shopping bags and fashionably dressed youths, with the same indifference. He has nothing to do today and is eager to be on with it.

Strange, he thinks to himself, how so many of these faces look familiar. Maybe he has seen them in bars, at friends' homes during evenings of something or other, theatres with bad seating and peculiar scenes. Perhaps he has only imagined seeing them. He meets nobody's eye, and none meet his. He is walking quickly, resolutely forward.

The world is floating around him, he is certain. Nobody speaks, or can, they are all lost in the shimmer-shimmer of their own reflections in the shop windows. All of them, old women and smooth faced dandies, radiant as angels, lost in the business of the world and pushing the weight of their lives before them.

He smiles, the streets overflow with life, with lives, and he is busy imagining the gathering of not-life in glorious alleyways everywhere.

The world is floating around him and the day is full of contradictions.

12:16 PM

The place is called a side street, in fact, has a name attached to it, though not one of any particular importance. It isn't much of a street and is often enough lined with people's garbage cans as they overflow onto the pavement. There is someone in the area who insists on parking a blue Tercel at the entrance to it. Julian has no objection to this since it keeps people from driving through in an attempt to avoid the neighbourhood's rather rigorous network of one-way streets.

He prefers to squeeze past this car than to hear dozens of others roaring by.

The place seems to be less cluttered with litter today.

He pushes a narrow street level door open and descends a flight of stairs, then turns to the right to find another door.

The door is painted a green Julian has always found ghastly. Adam, an almost gravitational presence in Julian's life, has also always found ghastly. Between the two of them, they've found a hundred different ways to avoid doing anything about it.

The key slides in and turns with a clunking sound.

He enters and steps over a pile of mail he tossed to the floor on the way out this morning. To the right of the door the red light of the answering machine flashes aggressively. Before him the room stretches forward gloomily like a cave.

This is an image Julian finds reassuring, "a cave". He enjoys entering his home as if it were an underworld. The sense that it is hidden from the surface is a comfort to him, as if the few feet of concrete and plaster were impenetrable. Here, as it were, he can walk among the ghosts alone. The quiet phantoms of his past, his thoughts, his fragmentary scribbled pages and spectral flickerings of the screens littered about the room, moaning around him, while he fakes an Endorian involvement. In the echoing spaces of his mind he conjures up past entanglements like a hundred wandering ghosts and beings of light. The lover whose eyes were red with a monstrous need, a violence after a night out. The writer he could never get beyond five pages with, but whose five pages he will never, ever, forget. The dazzling face glimpsed in an automobile commercial. Spectres every one, as gorgeous and as terrifying.

Across the room the barred window is throwing a pattern of light and shadow to the floor. This was the first thing to greet Julian when he woke this

morning. The minute his eyes opened, perfectly parallel lines on the tiled floor sent a shudder of nausea through him. Daylightcruelty, forcing its way into the room, harder to be rid of than a late night visitor. There was something about the perfect, symmetrical rows of light, shadow, light that was annoying. An excessive regularity that seemed to forestall any possible break in the cadence of the day ahead.

Now the first part of the day is over. Little errands run, first coffee gulped down, impulse for the first cigarette shoved out of the mind. There's room left in the day, room for something special to happen, if anything will. Outside, on the surface, the air is crisp, sparkling. The city is in the grip of a vivid transparency. Every step he took, Julian felt as if he were breathing in knives that never made you bleed, only opened you up, created passages inside you -- a happy world cutting you open with a smile.

He drops himself into the sofa with a sigh and pulls up a magazine. Increasingly baroque fashions no one can afford, a photo spread on an up and coming pop diva, a brutal piece by a writer renowned for his bile and lurid turns of phrase. He casts it aside again.

The light on the answering machine is relentless.

Julian turns on the television, closes his eyes and finds a crowd.

Against his half-fluttering eyelids the images of the screen are wonderful. The vague outlines of bodies are like monsters dancing, rubbing themselves against one another. The sounds also are imprecise. The sound of an

automobile could be an angry cry from an animal. The sound of a doorbell ringing has no meaning anymore, could be anything. He is watching, he thinks uneasily, the first movies of another world. The entertainments of an alien mind.

Here, across his shut eyes, ghouls are dyeing their shaggy skins pink and speaking a language of machines. It is unbelievable, like something actually new.

Julian wonders about his persistent attraction to TV. It could be a stubborn pride, like banging his head against a wall, this unforgiving need to stare at images for such enormous lengths of time...

It seems to him that the days of his childhood were different, longer somehow. That they were full and rich, soaked in a honey-soft calm that unraveled all through the length of the afternoons. He remembers every day being filled with uncountable activities, now he is relieved, and comforted by a sense of accomplishment, if he manages to read a few pages over a couple of cups of coffee at the place down the street. Those days were less brutal somehow, never seemed to be defying you to fill them with something. They were available to you, ready to accommodate. They spun out like a full, brightly coloured ball of wool, always as thick as they begun. They never seemed too short, or so long you wondered what to do next. Now every day is guilty of at least one of those faults, many of both.

And always the television flickers, filled with sidelong glances and seduction.

And his pride, that he watches so closely, in such minute detail. A sort of self-satisfaction in recognizing every minor variation, every subtle movement -- recognizing the similarities, the accords between himself and the pictures, the uncertain alliances he can make with some of them, the refusals thrown at some others. He studies the pictures on the screen as if he were looking for omens, clues from some other world, in much the same way he does with magazines, books, songs -- anything really -- but TV is special. Perhaps, he wonders, it is the near certainty that somewhere, no matter what time of the day or night, somebody else is looking at these same pictures and could, just possibly, be finding the same messages. With the television there is at least the potential for an unknown, and unknowing, communion in the constant flow of sound and picture.

The red flash -- on and off- of the answering machine insists.

Beep.

"Hi, baby. Kiki and I are going to the café for a cup or three. Be there at about 1:00 - 1:30. Probably hang for a while and then who knows? Maybe we'll be able to pull together a plan. Meet us if you can. Don't forget about the warehouse tonight. I'm working the lights so come up and see me."

Beep.

"Change your message, Sweetie, it's getting tired. Just wanted to know what you were up to. I'm going to be in your nabe and thought I'd fall by to share some of my new goodies with you. Maybe see ya later."

Beep.

"Howdy. Just wondered if you were still thinking about coming to town next week. If you are, let me know and I'll stay here for ya. Big kiss. Bye.

Beep.

"Hi, it's me again. Just came by your place, you weren't there. But I wanted to make sure you knew I was thinking about you. Bye."

Silence.

That's it for the messages.

Julian glances at the clock and wonders whether he could meet up with his friends. Perhaps even maneuver his way into someone's dinner plans. He decides it would be simple - and appealing.

He picks up his jacket on the way to the door and has it half on when he is up the stairs.

1:08 PM

The same crush fills the street, the same flow back and forth of bodies, of money from hand to hand, of goods and services. This street seems as if it will never be empty, has never been empty. The only evidence that gives lie to that vacant promise is a slow, a nervous walk at odd, predawn hours when your only companion is the echoing of footsteps. At those times it is easy to forget the hurry of a day.

Now, though, there are people to be maneuvered around.

Masses of people swarming and moving like water. Sometimes a wave surges forward or seems to hit some unseen obstacle that slows it all down. Sometimes an eddy turns in upon itself when a group of people, familiar with one another, stop to share their newest stories. Here a head breaks the surface laughing, there another submerges as it bends to pick up a dropped parcel. Life, returns at last to some sort of ancient ocean.

Julian is back on the streets he frequents, and happy to be there.

In the store windows the mannequins keep their secrets breathlessly, uncomfortable in the clothes they've been covered in and the salespeople stand and wait for time to hurry by.

A vast window looses the images of the café into the street. Another crowd of people with notebooks and cigarette smoke. Heads tilt down looking for something in the half-empty pages, grim smiles flash between tables. They sip slowly at thick black coffee and consume innumerable cigarettes. They spend hours here, all of them, as Julian has. They read their books diligently and with a sense of duty. It is, in some respects, their greatest charm.

Julian enters, smiles at the waiter, touches the curve of muscle in his arm.

"Has Adam been in?"

"No, sorry, Julian I haven't seen him. Mind, I'm having one of those days where people's faces aren't really registering."

"Hmmm, that's odd."

"Not really. It happens all the time."

"No, not your face blindness... Adam said he'd be here."

"Look at the place, if I saw that from the street, I'd reconsider too."

"True enough." Julian picks up the pay phone, dials his number, enters a code.

A beep. A whirl. A voice.

"Sorry, sorry, sorry. The scene at the café was too ugly. Too many serious people, too few tables. We're at my place now, baby. Meet us here. We have skin care."

He hangs up.

"You were right, the place was wrong. Got to go."

"Wish I could."

"Soon, no shift lasts for ever."

"They only seem that way."

"Bye."

1:27 PM

The flow of the traffic in flesh sweeps Julian along till he reaches a familiar corner where he turns to the right and leaves the Main. This street is less hectic, a quieter place where people actually make their homes. It is less demanding, the kind of street where you might find a place to live that wouldn't make you feel self-conscious taking too much time deciding what to wear. It is lined with small

grocery shops and neighbourhood restaurants, it angles off into walk-up buildings where people sit outside drinking in the afternoon. It is filled with talk.

As Julian turns once again, he sees the tiny white fence that stands before the door to Adam's place. The slight white barrier that Adam painstakingly paints afresh each spring, slathering the thick coat of colour atop the layers of hackneyed accrued metaphors and meanings, giggling to himself with the irony. This diminutive white picket fence, half the size of the one that lingers in the national imagination keeping the comfortable family safe from the forces of chaos and old night. Adam's immaculate boundary, too small for function and still a private joke.

The apartment's door stands open.

Julian walks in without ringing and finds the sound of laughter.

At the far end of the corridor Adam stands in the kitchen, hands moving busily in a porcelain bowl. Around and around they move, spinning in that confined space, tracing minuscule circles over and over. His ring hits the sides with a clang and the circle is broken.

"Is that you, baby, I can't see with the light behind you like that."

"Yeah, you left the café, pretty quickly."

"No tables... again. Where were you?"

Julian walks down the hall. In the living room, to the right, two people are talking animatedly. He waves to them as he passes.

"I ran some errands, had breakfast with this guy."

Adam makes a face and pulls his hands from the bowl. They are coated in a thick green paste, vivid and coloured like leaves.

"What are you doing, exactly?" He leans forward to kiss his friend.

"We are going to do masks," Adam replies kissing back.

"All of you.?"

"Uh-huh. Big party tonight Julian, want to look pretty after all."

"Indeed."

He goes to put the bowl in the fridge.

"I'll just let it settle for a while. Want a beer?"

"Well, it is kind of early..."

"For what?"

"Well since you put it that way..."

Adam pulls two bottles from the fridge, then shouts, "Drinks, anyone?"

"Not just now," comes a woman's voice.

"No!"

Adam shuts the fridge and they head down the hall.

In the living room a monumental woman's hands move rapidly, gesturing and pointing their way through her conversation with her companion.

"Julian! It was very rude of you to just walk past us before. Give us a kiss."

"Hello, Kiki. I couldn't contain my curiosity. I just had to see what Adam was up to his wrists in." He leans towards her in her seat and kisses her delicately on both cheeks.

"That's certainly understandable. You never know with that one, after all. The General and I were just discussing this evening, you ought to join us. After all, you are going to the warehouse, aren't you?"

"Of course, I wouldn't miss it for the world."

"Good, good. As I was saying..."

Kiki's hands move like swallows, coursing and curving through the air as she speaks. She is a tall, very tall, woman, her hair slicked back, dangerously close to her head, her lips full and coated with a dark, dried blood coloured lipstick and her mind, and voice, active and intelligent. Her demeanor slight and superficial, it keeps the world far from her, at the kind of distance that provides a view. Julian found her fascinating from the moment he met her, decided she was the kind of person who should have been two, may have been, in fact, given her uncanny talent for being everywhere and knowing everyone.

"... as I was saying, this soiree is being put together by Stephane, and we know what that means. We don't wait in line, and we don't have to pay, though we probably have to speak to him, at least for a little while --- but we could get drink tickets if we do."

"Speak to him!" intrudes Andrew, who everyone calls the General since the poster incident. "Speak to him! You've been having sex with him for months!" A little over a year ago a series of flybills began to appear plastered to the walls and phone booths of the city's red - and black - light districts. The posters were widely rumoured to be then-Andrew's work and bore a bold rhetoric calling for

every concerned person to organize and arm themselves to fight for a republic of liberated pleasure, and free access to marijuana. The poster listed a phone number to call for more information. It was the home number of a notoriously conservative, indeed reactionary, member of the legislature.

"That is certainly true, my dear General. But it doesn't mean I actually speak to him, for heaven's sakes. I mean Julian, Adam... how many of the men you've had sex with, have you actually spoken to... before or after, I won't ask about during, I don't need the sordid details. What, ten percent, maybe fifteen?"

"Maybe fifteen," replies Julian, "How about you?"

"Definitely fifteen, maybe twenty"

"She's so sociable."

"Thanks, honey. Julian of course hates the loss of mystery once you've actually had sex with them."

"Absolutely. Before you talk to them, you can't be absolutely certain they're racist, misogynist pigs, even if you suspect it."

"So true," interrupts Kiki, "but let's talk about me."

Julian starts upright in his seat. "I thought we were. That cynical attitude certainly couldn't come from me."

Adam smacks him softly on the back of the head. Julian grabs his hand and traces the lines of his palm with a finger from the other one.

"Never," says Kiki, "You'd lie about it."

"Kiki, you say that like it was a bad thing!"

"Heavens no, just an observation."

"Well, be that as it may. I'm assuming everyone will be in attendance this evening."

There is a wave of murmuring and nodding of heads. Still outlining the possible futures in the palm of Adam's left hand, Julian mutters enigmatic half-phrases that make Adam turn towards him thinking he's missed something. Julian firmly refuses to repeat his shadowy foretellings.

Kiki stands to get her cigarettes from the coffee table. "I understand that there is some sort of huge spectacle planned for the climax... I suppose somewhere around fourish."

"Any idea what," Adam inquires putting his beer down.

"No," replies Kiki, "I suspected you would, however, since you're working at this thing."

"Please, I'm working a spotlight. I'm not exactly coordinating the talent."

"At least not the talent on the stage," says Julian.

• "Or any. It's pretty isolated up there on that platform, you know."

"Poor baby, nothing but your case of beer to keep you company."

"It will be difficult. Promise you'll come and visit me up there."

"Of course I will baby." Julian squeezes Adam's hand in his.

The loosely imaged futures vanish now in the wave of heat moving through their joined skins. Julian leaves the unknown possibilities to find their own births, passions and deaths.

"So returning to myself," begins Kiki. "I believe that I'll be arriving around two or two thirty, just before the main post-bar crowd arrives. I'm definitely going out beforehand though. What are other peoples' plans?"

The General looks up. "I'll go with you. Where are you planning to go first?"

"I'm not sure. I thought I'd check out the new place on the Main. And you Julian?"

"I'll probably meet up with you there. I think I'm going to go out East first."

"What a surprise!"

"You know me, always breaking new territory."

"Indeed." Adam interrupts. "I, however, have to be there for about eleven. Just because I'm working. It's so stupid. No one's going to get there before like one in the morning..."

"It's true. I worked at one a few months back that was completely dead until about three thirty. Then, bang... it was like absolutely everyone in the whole city shared one cab or something," Julian says swallowing the last of his beer and savouring the images of past parties more than the wet coldness running down his throat. The pictures of spangle-heavy drunks and pounding baselines thread their way through the projector of his memory, approximating heaven. Julian recalls the swanning progress of his friends and himself through any number of prior evenings, past times and fondness. The common anticipation before a mirror, the release of sweat and coloured gels across the spotlights.

The General nods. "Do you want to stop by Ray's place on the way, Kiki? He's just finished the last couple of pieces for his next show."

"Yeah. That sounds like a good idea. You sure you won't join us on our fun-filled expedition, Julian?"

"Yes, quite sure. This will be one of the rare occasions I'll be certain not to run into anyone I know in my usual haunts."

"Too true, and I'm sure you'll make the most of it. But we will see you later of course..."

"I believe our facial treatment will just about be ready by now. I'll go get it. Do continue." Adam leaves the room.

The black blind over the front window leaves a frame of light around itself. It is insistent in blocking out the day and calls attention only to its failures, the imperfections of the margins of light forcing their way into the room. Julian smiles to himself thinking how, even in the middle of the afternoon, darkness settles over this room of Adam's, making space for a maniacal intimacy and a dwelling on the details of the long night lingering in an uncertain future. Here in this imaginary nursery Kiki lights her cigarette with a gesture stolen, half-consciously, maybe more maybe less, from a memory of "Sunset Boulevard". She holds the lighter at a too perfect distance from the cigarette and flicks it alive with her thumb like she was launching a ship.

Julian and Andrew stare at each other with something close to expectation.

"Will you boys be masking?"

"Absolutely."

"Oh yes, my skin feels like a fucking tundra."

"You hide it well, dear."

Adam re-enters the room with the white porcelain bowl. "We are ready to begin now." He places the bowl on the coffee table in the centre of the room with a flourish, dips his fingers in and pulls them out coated in a thick, green paste. Adam lifts his hands to his face, pauses and begins to stroke the paste onto his skin, moving in regular, gentle circles. Slowly the green spreads across his face like a forest reclaiming the ruins of an abandoned city. Small patches at first, then larger, until the expanse of his cheeks, his forehead, is completely covered.

Kiki and The General dip their hands into the bowl as well and begin to cover their faces too.

Julian, at last, applies the masque as well.

The clay is cool and wet on his fingers, the texture like mud or some unknown, unknowable mucus. Its texture is squishy and feels good oozing between his fingers. Moving against his face, the softness recalls a caress, but not like flesh, it is moist and its temperature too low, only the gentleness is like a touch. A strangely comfortable one.

The circles he makes on his face are reassuring in their continuous sameness. Round and round - circles like circus rings, coiled and sleeping snakes, the mouths of wine glasses. Cool, soft whisper like touch on warm flesh.

Across the room he sees Adam with his face covered in masque. Circle of green with his eyes, blue as noon, in the tiny rings of flesh that alone remain exposed. His friend's face made strange, this covering of mud from some river's bed a thousand miles away. Adam, always special, now glowing with an estuary mystery.

Kiki too, and the General all of them coated in mud, echoes of another place and time with the hesitant auditory hallucination of endless drumming waiting in the eaves of his imagination.

Julian, with his fingers still moving in nervous little spirals on his face, asks his friends, "So who hasn't heard the latest dish on Claude?"

"What latest dish?" asks Kiki with a sudden turn of her head.

"Yeah!"

"Tell, tell!"

"Oh I don't know. Your eagerness just seems to make it so tawdry," Julian remarks as his hands return to the bowl for a final time.

"Oh now he's coy." interrupts Adam fanning his face with his hands.

"Well really... I just wanted to make a little small talk and this pouncing on me I'm getting from you makes it look like gossip."

"Oh, no, not at all," Kiki leans closer, "it's not like gossiping. It's just sharing community news with a few close friends. Think of it as a public service, a town-crier kind of thing. Gossip is done over a telephone late at night, one person to one other. This is nothing like that."

"Indeed... this is a friendly little conversation," the General settles back in his chair. "I mean we're not even whispering for heaven's sake."

"Well, since you put it that way. Remember the water pistol party last week?"

Three verdant faces lean forward, their clay surfaces entirely impassive save only naked eyes widening in an eager search for news. Three green worlds looking for a first living thing.

"Of course."

"We were all there."

"Apparently so was Claude although I didn't see him."

"That's surprisingly low profile for him."

"Quite. Anyway, apparently John saw him and they started firing at each other until they were both soaked. John ran out of water and since Robert was going to the bathroom John had him refill his pistol for him."

Julian's friends had settled into their seats, listening intently. All of their faces coated in mud, slowly drying and fading into a paler and paler shade of green. Wine bottle, to forest, to emerald to old and tattered money.

"When Robert returned John and Claude were chattering happily to each other. Claude kept shooting water into his mouth 'cause he was a little dehydrated or something. Robert ordered a beer and the three of them kept chatting for awhile about this and that, you know, bar conversation."

"Yeah, yeah -- where's the dish," interrupted Adam his face the colour of nature photography.

"I'm getting to that. Anyhow, some time while all of this conversation was going on Claude's pistol emptied out too. So he asks John to squirt water in his mouth. John obliges, giving the poor dear something to drink. They keep talking for a while longer and then Claude spots something to his taste and excuses himself precipitously to follow him into the crowd."

"And," Kiki can hardly contain herself, "AND..."

"Well, as he walks off Robert breaks into hysterical laughter. John, of course, looks at him like he's completely lost his mind. Apparently the management had shut off the water to the sinks because the floor of the club was covered in a good half-inch of sludge, if you remember."

"Yes, we all remember."

"Well apparently Robert had refilled the water pistol from the toilet. And Mr. Hipper than-Thou had been quenching his thirst with something other than tap water..."

All three of Julian's friends erupt with laughter. Heads thrown back and mouths wide open.

"No, don't say another word!" the General shouts between breaths, "You'll make my face crack!"

As the words leave his mouth the dried and dusty clay on his face splinters, tiny veins of real flesh revealed, traces of pink in the green, skin buried

in the drying leaves. Long flesh coloured highways leading to the tangles of his hairs. Unrecognizable ornament, cracks in the edifice of an official building, the drawings on a corporeal canvas, the tracks of his bodily presence underneath this something else. His face, and those of his other friends momentarily glimpsed after a long absence.

"Don't, don't you'll make us crack our brand-new faces!"

2:48 PM

Julian had watched his face dry and flake, then washed the clay from his pores. A flurry of good-byes and confirmation of estimated arrival times passed through the living room as he returned to the streets' flowing. Once again the tumult and the bobbing heads.

Up ahead he sees, cutting through the surface, a particular head there seems to be little hope of maneuvering around.

"Hey, hi. Julian, Hi," a broad, easy smile spreads across the face.

"How's it going."

"Not too bad, not too bad. What ya been up to."

"Denial, hanging out," he answers. "Same old routine. How about you.""Interesting you should ask that, you know."

He knows. Ted can turn any inquiry into an opportunity to outline incredibly complex concerns and issues in his life.

"Yeah, I ran into this guy a little while ago at the store... He's this guy I kinda hung out with a few months back, but nothing really came of it you know. Anyhow, I ran into him when I was out and he just came up to me and started talking... like, for a really long time. But at one point I had to go talk to this guy I know, and when I came back he was gone." Ted has fallen into step beside Julian and is walking back the way he came from. "So I gave him a call the next day and he didn't call back. I waited a few days, you know, just in case he had been busy or whatever and then I called again and left another message. That was about four days ago and he still hasn't rung me back. I just find that too fuckin' weird - like why did he even bother talking to me at all?"

"I don't know. Maybe he was just feeling talkative. Maybe there was nobody else out that night that he knew. Who knows, there could be dozens of reasons."

"You're real reassuring, you know that. Yeah, I guess you could be right, but I don't think I would spend an hour talking to someone unless I really wanted to."

"Or they had something in particular you wanted, or wanted to find out."

"Whatever. But the fact is, he was really involved in this whole conversation. It seemed to me that we were having a good time, you know what I mean?"

"Sure, but it's just a conversation in a bar after all. Nothing to get so involved in. So is anything else exciting happening?"

"Well nothing as compelling as this incident. So what are you up to anyhow?"

Julian, knowing where Ted is likely to be heading, searches for an answer that will hold him off. He can remember past encounters that stretched themselves over hours of combing through the same tiny spread of information.

"You mean right now?"

"Well yeah. What are you doing this afternoon?"

"Actually I just left Adam's place. We were making plans for the warehouse tonight"

"Cool, you're going to that too."

"Me and about 715 of our closest friends."

"Yeah the last one was really packed."

"They all are these days."

"I thought I saw Adam earlier in the afternoon. I was going to talk to him, but I totally lost him at one point, after I stopped to talk to someone else."

"Too bad."

"I could be wrong. But it really looked like Adam."

The two walk the next block and a half in quiet. Occasionally Ted throws a sideways look at Julian as if he wants to say something and thinks better of it. Julian gazes down the street.

"So, you want to go get a beer."

Pause. "Yeah, why not."

He and Ted pass the open doors of stores that spread their merchandise and ambient music out onto the street. People pause, look inside, reconsider. Julian knows where they are headed. There is on this road a single remnant of its old days, days when it was every bit as crowded, as colourful, but vastly less self-conscious.

The door is a mutilated black, the paint scratched and clawed at, filled with lines. Every line is deep, distinct-- roads on a map to who knows where, or the lines on an ancient face that has seen too much. There is a sign overhead, dull red, that is hardly more noticeable than the nondescript door itself. The smell is what you do notice, dank and musty, redolent with old beer and human bodies. It's the smell of other times, hopes and aspirations, dreams and other things clung to so tightly that the holders sweat like desperate animals.

They push the wrinkled door open and walk in.

There are a few people seated at small tables leaning heavily into their beer. Some are seated together talking quietly. The pair take a table near the door. It seems, somehow, less obtrusive.

An older man with a heavy money belt around his waist arrives and takes the order for a pitcher.

"It's so cool that I ran into you today. I was just thinking about you." Ted offers. Across the table his dark face is animated, like a film, its many movements sudden and apparently unsteady. His eyes shine like rain on

automobile windows and his closely cropped hair allows a view of the scalp it would protect. His lips are full and open on a mass of flashing teeth.

"Yeah, weird eh. So, why are you obsessing about this guy so much?"

"I don't really know, you know. It just seemed like when we were hanging out a while back that we were really hitting it off and then he just stopped calling. I thought that was truly peculiar, 'cause like I said, I thought we were having really good times together and everything. And it seems to me that when something unusual happens, like meeting someone that means something to you, you don't just blow it off. Anyhow, he stopped calling, I stopped calling. Then he just came up to me and spent so much time talking that I didn't really know how to respond. Like, are we back on or what? So I called him again. Now I think that my decision may have been a bit jerky, if you know what I mean. A little bit uncool."

"Well it's a touch late to start second guessing yourself now, you know."

"I suppose. Still, I'd really like to have a better grasp of his motivations or stuff, anyway."

"I can think of a dozen people's motivations I'd like to understand a little better -- and that's just off the top of my head."

"That may be, but how many of them are interesting enough to obsess about."

"The living or the dead?"

"You know what I mean."

"Probably. So apart from poorly behaved men, what else is interesting?"

The waiter arrives with the beer and a vague gesture. Julian offers him money.

"Glad you asked. I just happen to have with me a piece I've been working on and I'd like your feedback on it."

Ted writes, fiction mostly, and he is busily digging in his pocket to produce a repeatedly folded mass of paper which he spreads out on the table.

"Now? I thought we were just going to have a few beers."

"Sure we're going to have beers, but we have to talk about something, and this is sure to be a more interesting subject than other people. Besides how often do I get you alone, after all."

"I really don't know if I feel up to offering anything like intelligent criticism today, Ted."

"Intelligence doesn't matter right now. I just need someone to read the thing and throw a few reactions at me."

"No really, I'm not up to it."

He hasn't stopped smoothing the paper out against the table's surface.

"Come on, come on. It's not such a big deal."

Julian lets out a sigh, deep and long. "Are you sure it's more interesting than other people?"

"I'm practically willing to guarantee it."

"Practically doesn't exactly set my mind at rest."

"Just read it and say something relatively meaningful."

"All right, I'll read it. I'll read it."

Ted finishes the smoothing out of the pages with a flourish and pushes them across the battered table. There are possibly eight or ten sheets in the pile, creased with lines from their history in Ted's pocket, folded again and again and slightly discoloured. The type tidily arrayed in perfect ranks and columns.

Julian is uncomfortable to the core at the thought of this approach.

Ranged in its sequential rows of printed characters the text strikes Julian as unrelenting as Ted himself. The heavy body of text proceeding down the page without compromise, black mark clambering atop black mark. Ted's face bouncing at the far side of the table, his hand shoving the battered pages across at him.

Julian sees the first line - "Well, you would after all!" - and knows the rest of the tale will prove as shrill.

Ted nodding and grinning.

Julian pulls the pile of words across the last few inches and makes an event of arranging them.

How the tale unfolds - the first voice, raised in its embittered pilgrimage, that of an eleven year old girl. She argues with her brother, her recriminations as methodical as watchworks. In Julian's head it all rings archly. She, sounding like a fading movie actress, a hard-boiled novelist, past her prime before breakfast. Her eleven years improbable. Ted describes her as dressed in clinging gowns

and evening shoes. Ted describes her as a child, he and she both pretending ignorance of their privileged perversions.

Julian shuffles the first page to the back, flips the corners looking for a way out of continuing. He reads a little more. Eleanor, eleven, loses her temper, storms out of the room trailing invective. Liam, her brother snarls, grows snide. At the end of the passage another brother, quiet, almost absent, enters the scene. The sunshine is described as battering at the windows.

Ted's eyes are streaming across his ordered lines, even upside down. Julian tries to avoid their motion, ducks the possibility of crossing them even casually.

The children's incongruities grow, their language exceeding them. Their bile strange in their mouths. They play a game, refined, cruel, unhealthy, deriving its structure and its point from some notion of truth. They are carried away. Tempers erupt, screaming, accusations. In the end the older brother in a rage against Eleanor, kills the younger one ambiguously. The whole story ends, finally, with his almost-infant cadaver spread across a dining table, glowing golden.

4: 46 PM

Julian puts the pages down.

"Well, what do you think?"

4:47 PM

"I'm not sure, " he says fussing with the sheets on the table before him.

"Well, it's certainly your work, Ted. It's unmistakable."

"Yeah, I feel like I'm really finding a voice. Does it hit you somehow, I mean, like viscerally?"

"You know, I'm not sure, that for me at least, it does. I mean, it is shocking certainly, but 'visceral' -- I don't know if that's the right word."

"No... why not?"

The ceiling fans overhead turn idly, but relentlessly, moving the dust in the air through whirlpool patterns. Seated in the blue-gray atmosphere Julian tries to look past Ted, over his shoulder, back towards the bar at the far end of the room.

"I'm not absolutely certain, actually. Maybe it's because the text seems to be working so clearly for that reaction in so many ways."

"OK, but there should be a way that it can demonstrate its strategies and still remain effective. I mean there's no reason why a reader can't know what is expected of him and still be unable to withhold participation in it."

No reason at all, Julian thinks, no reason at all.

5:07 PM

Ted abandoned, alone on the corner with his unsuccessful attempt at forcing an invitation, Julian closes his front door with a thud.

His home spreads before him in its reassuring disarray. Piles of magazines, books. The flash of the answering machine, the pale glow of the meter on a stereo that is rarely turned off. The pile of mail beside the door which he casually kicks out of his way. He thinks about reading his letters, decides, rather to write one.

Friend

This is the place where I am seated, uneven light through graying windows, unsteady shadows on the far wall, the sound of clamorous roads and spinning records. Here the peace to talk to you with whom I have not spoken in such a long time. This place, composed as it is, of angles and indefinite ceilings. Do not misunderstand when I tell you it is, for me, outside, it is resolutely outside. Where I seat myself is completely external and those who are with me love it for that reason. There can be no question, no questioning of appropriateness, of propriety or of right or wrong. There is only sound, touch and the most uncompromising colours. There is music and pungent odours and the creaking of heavy clothing coming on, going off. In every corner (and there are many, this the horror of angularity) there is a posture being struck. The right position and we block the light, cast pregnant shadow. Outrageous form, mad and gleeful, like a scope tracing lines for measurement and for decision. The people pass alone or in pairs, rarely in groups of more than three or four. Their pockets are

stuffed with paper. The footsteps follow them nervously. I am seated. The tea water boils. I am remembering you as last I saw you. Are you still the same? You were calm always, spreading an alarming plenty all around you; equal shares of ostentation and concern. You would rear families like an architecture and speak too readily about love. There was so much that was comfortable about you, in you. Somehow, I know you've begun to shiver. Do you often think about this?

5:32 PM

The light on the answering machine still blinks insistently. Julian thinks of police sirens, the flashing red on the roofs of their cars. This too annoys him.

He sees the pile of mail still lying on the floor.

He will read it.

5:35 PM

He arranges the pile of his mail, accumulated over more than a week, on the already cluttered desk. He opens them one by one, peering inside, then putting them away. He arranges them, by colour, by size, by type and place of origin. At length he reads them.

One asks for information, one asks for money, one sends him money, one reminds him of an obligation, two send him information, two are periodicals, one

seems to be personal in nature. This one he hesitates longest of all before opening.

He hesitates some time.

The envelope is addressed to him in an elegant, if somewhat spidery, handwriting and endorsed with an enormous number of stamps in a language he can not begin to recognize. There is no return address, no name, no street, no number... no care of anybody. He lifts it, the weight of it in his hand almost negligible, yet heavy with a nervousness. It clearly contains paper. He lifts, uneasily, the glittering letter opener in his right hand.

Inside there are a number of photographs and no letter.

There are three small snapshot sized images.

ONE

A landscape. In a barren place, a ruined structure. In the distance a range of hills roll along reaching half-way to the sky. There are, at the right side of the frame, a cluster of almost naked trees hinting at an oncoming autumn. The building itself, what still remains of it, is made of stone. A strip of shattered wall. The frame of what was once a door, haunted by hopeful entrances, angry exits, and a small, and topless, tower. The photo, black and white, the image a smear of subtle grays. Here the wall is pearlesque, the spaces between the stones an uninterrupted black suggesting nothing stands between them. In the sky a white sun seems less than white hot, not a cloud to keep it company in its daily journey

past the horizon. The trees knotted, the crevices in their bodies glowing on the glossy square of paper. Nothing speaking in the picture. Nothing at all but the ruins of someplace people used to live.

TWO

A face. A portrait, in tight close-up. The wrinkled face of an old woman, comfortable at an age where years lose all of their significance. She could be seventy, eighty-seven... a hundred and twelve. Who knows. Her hair is tied up in a kerchief and her ears pierced with heavy rings. Her mouth is full and framed with deep lines, tracing a path for tears, for smiles. Ruined passageways for a life lived long. She squints, her eyes crinkled up and set deep in the shadows beneath her brows. Shadows black as ashes, black as funeral wear. Their glassiness appearing wet in that dark, looking, not at the camera, but somehow past it, but withdrawn somehow as if they saw something painful, too terrible to gaze at directly -- as if they sought to avoid a confrontation. Still, from underneath her kerchief a wisp, a hair or two, escapes and burns, dazzling in the sun. Perhaps she sees, not a horror, but something too fine, too beautiful to stare at openly.

THREE

The sky. An enormous stretch of nothing but air - barren, distant, desirable - and far below the shiny, white foreheads of mountains, their snows painfully overexposed, above which lingers a swollen sun. A perfect expanse of emptiness but for the lower left hand corner where a graceful naked figure arches his back and rides the unphotographable wind with huge and supple wings stretched out behind him, if him he be. An angel.

5:50 PM

An angel.

5:51 PM

Julian holds the picture in one hand, his head in the other.

The angel is beautiful.

Remarkably beautiful.

Beautiful as a boy often is, fair and with the sense that some vast space is opening before him, casting a gorgeous and disturbing reflection in his too naive eyes... or like a girl is, finding a strength and a certitude in her she had long suspected there. But it is incomprehensible, soaring against a sky, winged and sharing a shape with all humanity and yet so far apart from us, the glory of hair

floating on whatever breeze stirs the frozen space of images. The arch of the slim bodies as he, or she, strains against gravity, this fearful, joyous rebellion against the tyranny of natural law. This frozen magic, this artificial heaven stopped, for a moment in its motion. No explanation anywhere.

He turns the picture over and over in his hand.

On the back, in that spidery hand, this:

"O Toi, le plus savant et le plus beau des anges"

5:59 PM

DOH'IEL The angel who stands at the right hand of those given to the gift of tongues.

Julian takes the five flights of stairs two at a time. He hardly sees the steps or the landings as they rush by. At last he arrives at a grim, gray door.

He stands for a moment at the door, hesitating, uncertain that the idea facing him now is the best possible option. Then he knocks.

Harris comes to the door shirtless. His long hair hangs down, obscuring part of his face, breaking over his shoulders and smooth chest. The top button of his pants is open and he seems to have been sweating. He passes his hand through the hair pushing it back off his face.

"Hey Julian, how are you man."

"Great Harris, how've you been."

"Not so bad... long time since you dropped by."

"Yeah, I know... you busy?"

"Nah, I'm just sort of working off and on."

"So you're alone?"

"Yeah, yeah. Come on in."

Harris' place is big. A box, really. Windows along one wall and not much in the way of furniture. He has eleven TVs stacked about the place, all of them running and on different channels.

And then there's his sculpture.

It sits and sprawls in the centre of the loft, a huge conglomeration of metal and wiring, light bulbs and speakers flashing on and off, letting out grinding or shrieking noises. At the centre of it is a tower of piping and sheet metal Harris has spot-welded and forced together, rearing itself up eight or nine feet to a narrow top where a flashing red light spins around and around on like a dizzy planet. From the tower innumerable wires and pipes fan outwards for yards achieving strange extremities of speakers and pistons hooting and pumping mindlessly. At odd intervals mechanical devices shaped, Julian thinks, like toothy bear-traps snap shut and open again. There are cords of little light bulbs that light up one after another and then blink off as if they were chasing themselves to the ends of their limited world. Scaffolding leaps ceilingward, irregularly spaced, and at the four cardinal points there are strange metallic automatons that repeatedly reach their spindly arms outwards to grasp at the empty air of the

apartment and fall back down. Their bulbous heads are blank except for a cyclopean eye in each of them that Harris has fashioned from strobe lights -- flashing in a pattern that appears mindless, but that the creator has insisted is based on an intricate mathematical formula of his own devising.

Harris calls the work "The Four Horsemen" and, as far as Julian knows, has no plans to show it any time soon.

"Hey Julian, isn't that the politician guy involved in the Parliamentary sex scandal." Harris is pointing at one of the TV screens, one of four black and white ones, on which a carefully groomed man is denying something to the cameras.

"Yes, I think it is"

"I love it when the cracks start to show."

"Me too. The Horsemen look even bigger than the last time I was up."

"Yeah, I've added some more stuff to it."

"Those funny hands on the tower seem new?"

"Yeah I put 'em on a couple of days ago. Want some coffee or something?"

"Coffee would be great."

Harris turns to his coffee maker and brushes his hair out of his eyes again. "So what brings you up here anyway?"

"Nothing special. I was just hanging out at home and thought I'd come up and visit."

"Cool. So what's new?"

"Not much... really. Fell by Adam's place and hung out for a while. Then I ran into Ted today and he made me read another of his stories. ."

"You know I don't really know any of your friends Julian."

"Yeah, but still that's what I've been up to today."

"Well how about more generally than just today?"

"More generally... ducking responsibility and reality, trying to scrape together a little money, reading, trying to write. The usual stuff."

Harris has turned and moved back to survey his sculpture from another angle. He walks around its perimeter, constantly fussing with his hair. He stops at one point, scratches his chest, bends to pull something from a metal box on the floor.

He holds a plastic bag filled with small, brightly coloured things in his hand. They could be candies, buttons, hallucinogens. They are, in fact, the same light bulbs in sparkling green, orange, blue, yellow, violet. He moves carefully through the tangle of metal and wire to the central tower, where he begins to screw the bulbs into sockets awaiting them in the metal hands that dangle from the tower's sides. He screws them into the fingertips where they are an incandescent manicure. So much garish nail polish as the metal hands begin to flap from their lattice wrists.

"So you're still blocked -- no words, nowhere?"

"Yeah, but I sort of feel like it might break soon, like something wonderful is waiting just around the corner."

"That's uncharacteristically optimistic, Julian." Harris is now pulling a ladder from a closet. He carries it back to the tower with its churning hands.

"I know, almost amazing, isn't it. You going to the warehouse tonight."

"Me? Nope. I'm going to stay home, drink a little beer and tinker with this thing just about all night I think."

"Don't you ever want to go out?"

"Sometimes. But it passes."

"And sex? What do you do for sex?"

"I avoid it. Too much bother, really. I don't have to look my best to masturbate. And I don't have to make up stories about appointments to get rid of myself in the morning."

"You're a wise man, Harris. I think I spend about half my time looking for and having sex. It really interferes with my life when you get right down to it."

"I think they had a whole hour about you on Oprah the other day."

"I'm weak in the presence of so much knowledge."

Harris dangles off the ladder, hands busy with the spinning red light.

"Well, look what kind of trouble a little sex got our esteemed parliamentarian into, after all."

"True enough, thank god I'm not a public figure. Some of the shit I've pulled could cause a much bigger scandal than that little indiscretion."

"I have every confidence, Julian. You don't strike me as the kind of man to have weak passions."

"You're a flatterer. But don't take that as a criticism."

"I'm too dense to notice criticism."

"Don't you worry about falling off flailing around like that?" Julian pours himself some coffee. "It doesn't look very safe to me."

"It's not. But I've developed an instinct from being up here so often. I can actually lean way the fuck over, balance myself on one leg and screw in a bulb at the same time. On a good day, I can actually spot weld in this very position."

"Clever boy. Want some coffee?"

"Thanks, just pour me some and leave it on the counter. I'll be down in a minute or two."

"So, do you fuck with boys or girls, anyway?"

"Wow... you know I've known you for over two years, and that's the first time you've ever actually asked me that."

"Weird, eh. So what is it -- boys or girls?"

"I just told you, I'm not fucking anyone or anything."

"Well, suppose, purely for argument, that you were. Would it be a boy or a girl? Both? Or something else, for that matter, there are other possible choices after all."

"Are you looking for a date or something, Julian?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Well, that's the only possible reason it would be any of your business, as far as I can tell."

"Fine, then don't tell me."

"Unless, you're looking for a date..."

"No I'm not, right now anyway. Which is not to say it hasn't crossed my mind, Harris. But that's not my main concern right now."

"What is then?"

"Harris," Julian hesitates. "Harris, what do you know about angels?"

"Angels... angels. You mean like with wings and shiny heads?"

"You know any other kind?"

"A few dozen actually. Why would you be asking about angels?"

"I don't know, just curious. I've been thinking about angels lately."

"You haven't done anything foolish like find God have you?"

"Heaven forbid. No, no, I've just got a little project in mind, that's all."

"Must be one fucking weird project... you really want to know about angels?"

"Yeah, that's why I'm asking."

"Well I don't know all that much actually. And I doubt that anyone else does either. Angels are elusive things when you get right down to it, man."

"So why not share what you do know with me?"

Harris looks at his friend quizzically, tilts his head to one side as if changing his angle of view might clarify something and then leans back in his chair as he begins to speak.

"Well angels, aren't anywhere you might expect to find them. Take the bible, for example. Most people wanting to find them would immediately open the mediocre book and start looking there."

"And you're saying they would be disappointed, right?"

"Oh very," Harris says. "In the whole damn book you'll only find two or three of them actually named -- and that's Old and New Testaments both. Two or three lousy angels in the whole thing, and page after page, chapter after chapter of ridiculous religious law... seems sort of mundane for a book intended to inspire generations when you get right down to it doesn't it."

"The Koran is a little better, you'll find a touch more there, but really, to even begin to find out about angels, you've got to leave the established religious Holy Books all together. The first steps into the angelic world are in things like the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, fringe Biblical stuff, books and texts that got kicked out of the polished up canon. Gnostic writings, some of the early heresies. Ultimately though, even these are poor pickings... you want to know where you've really got to look for the real dish?"

"Where?"

"You've got to wade into deep, murky waters for that. Dig out the medieval grimoires and hermetic texts. Handbooks of sorcery, alchemical manuscripts, the later Neo-Platonists, once they got a little less ascetic and a little more "luxe et voluptas" into them. Now these books, man, these books really sing, even roar. You'll find dozens, scores, even hundreds of angels in them. Powers,

principalities, fallen and otherwise. Angels who preside over the hours of the day and night. Princes of the planets and fixed stars. Infernal ambassadors to various European states. Angels to call upon before a conjuration, angels whose names one commands the elements with, angels who will indwell your talismans. Those pages are like yellow pages, man, you can find an angel for any need you may run up against."

"And do any of them have anything interesting to say about angels? What they are? What they do? Where they live?"

"Shit yes! All kinds of theories -- messengers of god was, and is, a popular one with the theologically inclined. The cabalists refined that with a highly complex theory of "emanations of the divine". Some more contemporary writers like to look at them in relation to a whole range of UFO speculations.

"St. Augustine, I think anyway, might have been Thomas, said that angels were composed of fire, unlike humans who were made of earthly stuff and God who was, of course, pure spirit. This fire theory doesn't fit in with some Muslim speculators who said that it was the various races of djinni that were composed of fire.

"Certain medieval commentators said that angels occupied the various heavens in a strictly regulated and hierarchical arrangement, with the most important basking eternally in the glory of the divine presence and occupying their time with an ceaseless singing of his praises from their position at the foot

of his throne. Sounds like a rather tedious daily routine to me, if you're asking. And apparently there is a vaguely parallel structure working in hell as well.

"Another angel, I'm informed, is, even as we speak, standing guard at the gates of Eden armed with a flaming sword to keep the likes of us out... that fucking inconvenient original sin thing, you know.

"I take it from your tone that none of these theories impress you. You don't believe in angels?"

"I'm not sure that I do... and if I do, I don't believe in the kind that keep me out of a lost paradise."

"So what would angels be, if you decided there were any?"

"Angels, Julian. Angels are whatever haunts our dreams, our fantasies, our obsessions whether scented in perfume or soaked in blood. Radiant or fallen, angels are always marvelous.

"A sequestered woman, denied the autonomy, the self-possession of her own body, her own fondest touches, might see, late at night and in her all aloneness, a demon lover come to her. An ascetic, wasted to the bone, pale and crazy with the raptures of his self-denial hears the voice, faint perhaps, but touching, of some indescribable minister of light. There's nothing surprising in any of that.

"Our desires, pleasures, hopes fears.... whatever... have to take flesh somewhere and somehow to make the world wonderful all over again for us. The irrational? Who cares. The unreal is real when you give it space.

"I've spent years building angels out of sheet metal and copper wire, Julian and I still don't know what's real... and don't give a fuck. Something new has forced its way out of my imagination and into the world. And the world is changed because of it. Nothing matters. Nothing is true. But we can make the world, or maybe just our little corner of it, behave as if it were true.

"If I were love-sick, tired of the world... I too might have visions of heaven and write a book. People will read it and be changed. The world will be changed for the handful of people who read. One of them, maybe drunk one night, will remember and something with the kind of wings that can take them away from all of it will hang nervously at the edge of their peripheral vision.

"But then who cares about angels anyway? We're spinning unthinkingly through a vision of space where none of those shiny-headed creatures are guiding our orbit anymore."

"And your angel snaps at it with metal teeth."

"Sharp ones."

Harris pushes the veil of hair from his eyes and looks towards his guest.

"So maybe I know a little more than I thought I did at first."

"And maybe you don't."

Harris shrugs and kisses Julian on the cheek. "Maybe... but you should go now. I've got to work and neither of us is looking for a date."

6:44 PM

TONIEL The angel who presides over earthquakes, and possibly other natural upheavals.

Surprisingly, he thinks, Julian's apartment is as it was.

The light on the answering machine still flashes. Clothes and books are littered about the floor. On the table, where he left them, the photographs still gleam below the overhead lighting.

6:48 PM

NAHMIA An angel invoked in certain rites magic, to empower the conjurer's sword.

DAGON A fallen angel named by Milton. At another time, however, Dagon figured as a god.

The emptiness of space yawns above the unchanged mountains, trapped in a restrained, restraining frame.

The wells of darkness that pass for an old woman's eyes stare out at the world with an untroubled ambiguity.

The angel soars above the wind with his hair trailing behind him as superfluous and surprising as a grace note.

All of them surfaces, cool, even and slick as Julian takes them, one by one, in his hand. The last of them, this visionary holiday snap he holds longest of

all, brings it to his face, stares closely, looking for a flaw, finds not a single one
Lost for any reason not to, he kisses it.

He turns it around, examines it from every angle, wondering if this angel,
like those in legends, might fall when turned about. It does not. But there, on the
back, in the same unknown hand --

"Dieu trahi par le sort et privé de louanges"

7:00 PM

Who could have sent him these photographs, Julian wonders. Who would
have dreamed, who been in a position to see an angel, to photograph one yet?

He runs through a list of old friends, new ones, acquaintances, in his
mind's eye he thumbs a catalogue of people he has known over the years who
vanished with a plane ticket in one hand and a single bag in the other to go
away, nowhere in particular, just go away.

What part of the world has a sky peopled with marvels, a range of
mountains among whose peaks something so incredible might alight, might,
maybe just for a moment, touch the ground.

Julian's head is full of question marks, churning, a maelstrom, their winds
and violence ridden by the doubled angel. He paces the length of his room
without finding answers. He tracks back and forth discovering fatigue

Finally he lies down on his sofa. Finally he falls asleep.

This is the dream he has...

I am standing in a wasteland of sand. Beige sand. White sand. Blue sand. And pink. The sun is not visible but the place is hot and filled with a white light.

I do not know where I am. All around me the sands stretch as far as I can see. There is no horizon, only sand. Sand to the limits of vision.

I walk about. Moving with an ease that comes only from the knowledge that nothing you do in a situation could possibly have consequences. I stride easily over the rolling dunes of sand. There are footprints about, at strange intervals, but no sign of any other living being. Then, with the clarity of music, I hear a laugh.

The laugh is low, soft, but sounds close by. I look around and see nothing. Overhead some tattered fabric of cloud is racing by. Thin strips against the liquid blue of sky. The laugh continues softly. Where does it come from? There are no directions here. no borders, no cardinal points. The laugh comes, in cool, low waves, from everywhere.

I look about me, searching for the source of this strange sound. There is nothing, nothing. Nowhere is there a trace of another person. There is no one here to laugh and no reason for laughter. This is an empty space.

A wind comes up from somewhere. A hot, strong wind. It blows by me slapping against my face, pulling my shirt against my body. The sands rise in great clouds of colour. The laugh has ended. The sands make great painterly swirls of colour all around me. I feel myself almost swept off my feet by the

hurrying wind. Blue and pink, beige and white fill the once still air around me. Clouds of colour more commanding than the traces that ornament the sky. The wind is making something out of this barren place. The wind that came from nowhere is creating. I am struck by the beauty of it and wish it was real. Suddenly from out of the air feathers begin to fall around me. First one, then several more, finally there is a tempest of feathers filling the brilliant clouds of sand. I feel myself falling, the laugh comes back. Then my eyes open.

8:27 PM

Julian awakes with a start. He sits up and looks around the room, surprised to see neither sand, nor feathers falling from the roof, surprised that there was no laughter sounding around him.

8:31 PM

GIMELA An angel named in the grimoires to be invoked for a vision of the serpent that tempted Eve.

The phone buzzes animatedly for just a second in Julian's ear and then he punches out the tones of the number. Their musicality ends in the start-stop drone of a ring. Once. Twice. Three times. Someone picks up.

"Hello."

"Hi Adam, it's Julian. What're you up to?"

"Oh, hi. Nothing now. Those guys just left to go get showered and changed for the evening. I'm hanging around until its time to go work at the party. Why, what're you up to?"

"Nothin' really. I just thought I might drop by again, before you leave for your lighting platform."

"Sure, great. Come on over whenever. There's nothing happening here, but it's better than sitting around at home alone, right?"

"Pretty much. I'll see you later."

"Cool. I love you."

"I love you too. See you in a bit."

"Bye."

The buzz comes back and seems a little louder.

Julian grabs his jacket, shrugs it on. He heads towards the door, pauses to look once more at the improbable angel frozen in its picture plane and lain at an oblique angle towards one side of the table. It seems almost as if it could move, almost as if it might.

8:36 PM

The sun is down as Julian returns to the busy street marking the city's invisible heart and balancing point. It is becoming night, the time when Julian finds his peace with the town. Shadows thicken in the entranceways of alleys both adding to and lessening the substance of buildings and roads. Their

thickness accumulating, clogging the passages and arteries of the conurbation and making a new kind of space through which to move. Street lamps throw loose islands of near illumination against the curbs and shop doors, create phantoms in the windows. Their indifferent light a counterpoint to the insistence of the neons barking out their iconographies.

It seemed at times that the city's night asserted its difference by a counterpoint of glow-in-the-dark. The massive bodies of naked women outlined in green or yellow moving their full hips as one tube flickers on, another off. A fuschia treble clef flashing on a street corner. An immense hand holding out a glass globe in which a dozen or more white balls swirl like a contained snow storm a yard and a half above the heads of passers-by. Weird markers on a street filled with elegant idlers. All of them signifying something at the threshold of language's faltering.

Julian smiles to himself as he passes the locked doors of clubs still waiting for the night's gathering shadows to grow thicker yet. He imagines the lines that will soon form, spreading themselves along the lengths of sidewalk as people chatter to their friends, sharing gossip and stamping their feet impatiently. A few hours from now he might pass his friends bartering their familiarity with someone's name against an early entry.

Now he shares the street only with those who straggle into restaurants for dinner and the regular pattern of light reflecting in his path.

He turns off the corner towards Adam's house.

The night's beginnings have turned the white fence gray and from behind the window shade the light of a television tube shoves its glow out into the world.

Julian lets himself in.

Adam sits, almost sprawled, across the massive wreck of black sofa, burning cigarette in one hand, sandwich in the other and a large blue glass ashtray in his lap. As Julian enters he places the cigarette in the notch provided on the ashtray, lifts up a remote control unit and mutes the sound on the television.

"Hi, baby," and lifts his head up to be kissed.

Julian kisses him, responds. "Hi Sweetie."

"Long time no see."

"^eons, just aeons."

"There's nothing on TV. Nothing."

"Don't you hate it when the dream factory runs dry?"

"It makes me crazy."

"Me too."

"What have you done in all that time?" Adam stretches as he speaks.

"Not much, went to talk to Harris a bit."

"That weird guy upstairs from you."

"Yeah."

"What did he have to say."

" You know Harris --- he always has plenty to say."

"Not terribly well. But well enough to know that's probably the truth."

"How about you?"

"Like I said, those guys hung out. Dished and threw some gossip around, hammered out the last details of their plans, smoked a joint and split. Then I made a sandwich, lounged on the couch with the TV on. Made another sandwich and lounged on the couch some more. Then you came over."

"You're just a model citizen, Adam."

"Thanks."

"Such industry."

"Please, I'm working later."

"Yeah. Under the table and in the underground economy."

"It's working."

"I suppose."

"You aren't working."

"I'm a student."

"You dropped all your courses last term and forgot to register this time round."

"Shut up."

"Other than that what's new."

"Not much. Do you have any dope left."

"A little. Why?"

"I was wondering if i could like buy, I don't know, maybe ten bucks worth off of you."

"No. But you can take about ten bucks worth off of me. It's in the box."

"Thanks."

The gray enameled box sits on the corner of Adam's coffee table, just to the left of the large crack that runs across it, almost diagonally, about two thirds of the way down its length. As Julian lifts the lid off he sees the usual jumble of rolling papers and little cellophane baggies. He breaks a chunk off of a large tangle of buds and stems and rolls it up in a cigarette paper. Then he takes the chunk out again, breaks off a smaller piece and starts to roll a joint. Adam's gaze has turned back to the television's on and off amusements.

He shakes his head, "I swear to God... sometimes I wonder who dreams this crap up.'

"Most of it is hardly what I'd call a 'dream', Sweetie."

"True enough. Mind, not all dreams are pleasant either."

Julian pauses briefly, a sticky, green bud clinging to the fingers of one hand, its perfume filling his nostrils. "No, not all of them. Lots of mine are though. What about you?"

Adam looks back towards him. "What?"

"What are your dreams like?" he asks his friend.

"Actually, I don't remember many of them - or used not to anyway. I guess most of the ones I do remember are nice. Not too many terrors, really"

"Do your dreams affect you much? Do you believe in them as messages or anything?"

"What's with all the questions?"

"I'm just curious. I've been thinking a lot about dreams today. Do they affect you much, the ones you manage to remember?"

"Some do. The scary ones, or the sexy ones. Especially the ones that come true later and you suddenly remember the dream version... which you had totally forgotten before that."

On the television screen a massive creature is floating in the black of space. Long tendrils float from one end of the silhouette defining its bulk against the icy stars behind it. It catches Julian's eye as he lifts them towards Adam.

"Give me an example."

"OK... for example. Actually this is kind of weird that I even remember it because it's totally ordinary. It's hardly up to Biblical standards or anything, but for whatever reason it struck me as kind of weird at the time. A week or so ago I was having a beer with the General on the patio of the tavern and he was telling me this story about an ex of his. The story was basically about their break up and how ugly it was. The ex said some really mean things to him, saying he took advantage of him during the course of this relationship and that he never pulled his weight and stuff..."

The shadow of Adam's head against the wall, cast by a lamp he insists on keeping tucked in the corner on the floor, seems enormous as it bobs up and

down in time with his storytelling. Adam will have no direct lighting in his home. He says it makes him nervous. The busy shadow moves regularly, an eclipse behind his left shoulder.

"... The General was telling me about a particular reproach he had thrown at him concerning a holiday they took together when he stopped talking for a minute and looked away from me. He looked really sad for a second, like he was leaving something a little too personal out, and he just stared off to one side for a bit. And then it hit me, I had seen exactly this moment somewhere before, heard the whole story and found myself wondering what he wasn't saying as he looked off like that -- all before. And I remembered it had been in a dream a day or two before this conversation. I'd been through all of it, the conversation, the pause, even the beer I was drinking in exactly the same environment and sequence -- precisely the same stuff-- all in a dream. That one kind of freaked me out."

"Oh wow. That kind of stuff is so eerie. Freaks me right out when it happens to me."

"Yeah, I know. But everything, Julian. All of it. Everything, right down to the set of his chin, the look in his eyes. Even the pauses in the conversation."

"That is weird."

"Tell me."

Julian has finished rolling the joint. He lights it and inhales before speaking.

"So it creeped you out. But how has it affected your behaviour. Like do you do anything differently in your daily routine."

"Well you can be fucking sure I try harder to remember my dreams every morning. Maybe there'll be some kind of more useful information in the next dream I manage to remember."

"So you want to remember more of your dreams?"

"For sure. Why wouldn't I?"

Julian hands his friend the joint. "Well let's say there's a really bad one. A horrible dream, something violent, or a terminal illness or something. And you know that that's the one that's going to come true. Would you want to know that in advance? I'm not sure that I would. Not sure at all."

"Maybe not. But I remember having more good dreams than bad... personally."

"Well that's a good thing. Do you ever find yourself fantasizing things - things that come true. You know daydreams or something like that?"

"No, nothing like that. But I'm not much of one for fantasy anyhow. I almost never daydream."

"You're kidding me! Never fantasize, not even sexual fantasies."

"Well, yeah, of course, sex fantasies when I'm jerking off or something. But 'daydream' daydreams, like making up possible other lives for myself, pretending I'm a princess or a rock star and shit of that kind... almost never."

"Wow, really, I daydream all the time. All the fucking time. Always have too, ever since I was a kid. None of them have ever come true, so far. But I keep hoping one of them will - one day. Soon, with any luck."

"You always have been a little less literal minded than me though. Just part of that special magic that is you, I suppose." Adam pauses briefly, looks at his friend and returns his question to him. Having shared a dream that came true, which of Julian's fantasies had failed him?

Julian says nothing for a moment. How to answer a question like that, how to pull one fantasy from a lifetime lived in a succession of them. What about the angel that soars not soaring on a glossy square of paper that at this moment lies on his kitchen table. Dare he call that a fantasy, trapping it there forever - abandoning any hope of it taking its place in the hovering world? What about the brightly costumed superheroes of his awkward entrance into adolescence? The mountains of copulating bodies cluttering up the virtual pages of his computer? The unspoken images of lovers lost and suddenly returning? Julian races through the crowded intervals between his synapses wondering. The outlined eclipse split from Adam's body has stopped moving. What does he tell his friend? Long novels unwritten whose characters walk through his mind with a presence as compelling and as deeply loved as Adam's own. Antique gods whose marble faces have seemed as real as pain. Nothing, none of it what ought to be said, somehow. Impossible angels all. Then in his dimmest memory something moves, rearing itself towards a sky made from his skull's interior, a

lost city, thick with purple towers and a pointless dream of empire. A shape made in snow that vanished before spring turned it away. The empty roads beaten into the ground, the walls felled and no one weeping for this distant equinox.

"I don't know if this failed me..."

"Failed is a loose word."

"I know. But even at that..."

"What?"

"When I was a kid, a little kid, like grade seven or something. I had a friend named Eric. I've stayed in touch with him actually, all these years."

"I know, I met him when he was in town last year."

"Oh yeah, you did. He's a wonderful guy. We've been through a lot over the years."

"I know."

"Well, when we were in grade seven we hung out together. Almost exclusively together. We didn't really talk to, or do, anything with the other kids at all. We'd spend recess and lunch alone, and go home with each other after school.

"We really just spent all our time together, basically."

"During that winter we would spend recess and lunch at this spot we had discovered behind the school. It was kind of tucked away between a wing of the school and the main part of the back wall. It was really isolated for a place behind the school. Nobody else went there even though you only had to follow

the wall to this strange sort of alcove hidden behind the central part of the building. The rest of the kids just spent their free time in the playground, but Eric and I had found this out of the way spot where we could concentrate on each other's company and working out whatever it was we had to work out.

"At one point, right near the beginning of the winter, we had gotten this city into our heads. It wasn't any city we had ever heard of. It wasn't even any city that had ever existed even. It was a city we had totally invented ourselves.

"I don't know why really. Maybe it was because that was the first year in our school careers or whatever that we had actually begun to learn about ancient history. I know for sure that it was my first exposure to the history of Rome for instance. I remember being totally amazed to learn that Rome hadn't always been this depraved place I'd discovered in old movies. That at one time it had been some sort of Republic of all things. Actually a fairly disciplined and moralistic society, at least in its public literature. That really threw me for a loop, my first lesson in the difference between the world of my imagination and the hard record. Not coincidentally, one of my first big disappointments as well. I've since learned to be a little leery of those distinctions, but at that time it was a real shocker.

"At any rate, we took a city into our heads. A really elaborate city. It grew in our imaginations that November and the beginning of December, I think. It became more and more real to us. More and more compelling. I remember thinking about it in class and paying absolutely no attention to what the teacher

was on about. This city was all I, and I suspect, though I can't really say because I've never talked about it since, Eric, could think about. It took on more and more reality for me until I just couldn't stand it any more. Then Eric and I decided to make it real.

"One recess we were out behind the school in that little alcove of ours and we started to build our city out of snow. With our booted, pre-teen feet we started to kick at the hardened snow. I started to kick and carve out a road. I told John this was a road in the city we had talked about so much. He said 'Yeah, I see it' then he started to carve out a square where I had begun this road. Then he began to kick out another road.

"At lunch we came out again and started to construct, to map in fact, another sector of our city. We put down a palace just below a school window. Then there was a market place. And a fountain. We carved out a series of barracks by the far side of what we'd started. Days followed and a temple rose. Then we built more roads Then a park. We built a long highway that led to the docks and we carved out some quays then. We imagined huge triremes coming in to dock loaded with spices and skins from some far off islands. We constructed a fort at the city's outskirts, a house for the city's senate, a museum and a great library, which I suspect we had based on the one we'd heard about being in Alexandria a very long time ago.

"We built an entire city, reared idly out of the hardened crust of snow, over I really can't remember how many recesses and lunch hours. And, as we were

kicking it into existence, we made up a history for it. A history filled with warfare and a ruling caste composed of the priests of a family of bloody, terrifying gods. A clan of horrible deities who couldn't have enough of sacrifice. Our city would go to war over and over again in search of victims to offer up on the altars of the dozens of temples we'd put into the plan. Our city, we'd decided, was actually visited by these deities and the priests would speak to them and set the policy of its government for years in advance. It was a city bent on empire, we'd decided, and with the means to make it happen.

"It was really, really weird. It came out of nowhere this civilization we were building out of the snow behind our school, and it was all we could think about. I don't think we heard a word our instructors said that whole winter. All we had any interest in was the city of our imagination. Its wars, its religious conflicts, its slave markets and its politics. And none of it was real in any meaningful sense. But it was real and that is what is important. It was true to us, completely actual. I could see the crowds screaming in its public spaces. The debates in its milling taverns. The intrigues in its elegant homes. All of it happened with a passionate intensity between my ears. More actual, more real than the crowds of kids roaring about the school yard, more substantial than the red brick of my school's walls or the annoying verb tenses I would ultimately master in my French class. This place, this fantastic city that never saw the world's surface was real to me in a way I don't think anything else has been since, or at least until very recently.

"Do you understand that?"

He turns his head, the cast of his jaw softer now, "Yeah, I think I understand it."

"You know Freud once wrote somewhere, but I can't for the life of me remember where, that the mind is like a city. I believe he later dismissed the analogy as being absurd. But there may be something in it, I think. In its business, its rapid movements, its crowding, its structures and the walls it builds to defend itself the mind does resemble a city, though to me, it resembles something else even more - a story. The mind looks for neat conclusions, for an ending to every stream of events or ideas. Happy or sad, it wants resolution. The mind orders event, creates character out of even the most random glances of the people we encounter. The mind finds, and when it can't find, creates, pattern. It turns everything around it into symbol - and metaphor. There is no object where the mind is, there is only image.

"And that's what my city was finally. It was less the map of streets and towers, of market squares hawking and selling, of temples echoing with gong-blows and death screams - it was a story. A story we created that long winter for some reason I still, to this day, do not really understand. I only understand that every road, every corner and each building were characters in some weird narrative that taught us something, whatever that something was."

"What happened to the city, did it just end up melted one day?"

"No, it never did melt."

"Hunh?"

"We came in to school early one morning and found it crushed. There were footsteps all over its boulevards and the great temple in its centre had been razed to the ground. The libraries looked like someone had torn them apart by hand. One of the kids who lived around school must have found the crazy patterns in the snow and trashed them."

"Sure seems like it."

The two of them sit quietly watching the green minutes change shape on the VCR. Julian's memory walks in the ruins of his childhood's city, asking himself what noise their tumbling walls might have made while he speaks to his friend about his evening's plans. Then he falls silent once more. Adam leans back against the sofa settling in. Julian stands up.

"Well I guess I'll take off. I'll see you at the party Sweetie."

"Yeah."

Julian kisses Adam good-bye and leaves him swimming towards the shore on the far side of the television's swell of blue.

9: 49 PM

ZACHRIEL the angel presiding over memory.

Hands in pockets, the whole walk home, Julian wishes for the lacquered smoothness of the photographic stock. His memory of it strikes him as unreliable somehow. He imagines himself idly, yet urgently, running his thumb along the

edge, smooth and sharp until it hurts, until he almost feels the skin give way.

When he pulled his hand from the pocket there would be a long, pink line across the pad of the thumb, almost, but not quite, a cut.

Arriving he rushes to seat himself at the table and pull the image safely before him.

There it was, arcing like a sickle moon against the unreal sky, the mountains insignificant somehow, in the background. Hair streaming behind, limbs stretched out as if yawning at the equitable landscape. Or laughing at the wind's play with him, flirtatious attempt to move him from his course. Or screaming in rage at his loneliness, last of the angels to cruise the mid-day sky, alone, alone, alone. Julian looks at it again, still quivering in his seat. His index finger circling and circling around it as if tracing some magic ring that could hold the angel here forever - perfectly still and happy.

One by one Julian identifies the objects in the image, accounting for them, for their presence. Clouds. Sky. Mountains. Sand. Sun. Angel. The angel moving about the sky, above the mountains.

Julian pauses for a moment. He stops his adding up of materiality. The angel hovers directly underneath the sun now. Before he left for Adam's house the angel was left of the sun in the frame. He is certain of it. Every detail of the fantastic image fixed in his racing nerves. He was left of the sun before.

The angel has changed his position in the photograph. He has flown, he has moved.

This irrational document, the frozen wonder has changed. Julian stands, then sits again. He takes the photograph in his hand and holds it up, inches from his face as if the change in perspective might alter, or explain, this more outrageous change. Still the angel, arms akimbo, strains his back and spreads his wings underneath the sun, a new place in the limited frame that defines his dazzling, unnatural life. This moving picture, the momentary narrative of a no longer stationary miracle. Julian shakes the photo, turns it around again. His heart speeds blood to his extremities. He feels it rushing to his fingers, the ten of them shaking like a lover about to undress for the first time at the start of a new affair, or betrayed for the last time in a love that has passed its graceful hour. He places the photograph face down on the table. On its back another line:

"O Prince de l'exil, à qui l'on a fait tort,"

He no longer knows the world around him. Julian backs away from the table whispering things he forgets on utterance under his breath.

Photographs do not change he tells himself.

But they do.

He finds his notebook on the table and reaches for it, for the problem-riddled certainties of language, for the chance to impose some order on something, or at least to determine the direction of its mutations. Julian writes.

Friend,

Here we know almost nothing for certain. In the place of knowledge we substitute a curious kind of awareness. It offers little

in the way of sure judgment but fills every moment with huge sensation. Around every corner is some new thing, some incredible grotesque or beatific apparition, either equally marvelous. This way of ours is not a question of intellectual posturing but of survival. It is no system, but a skill. It is learned from pain, from reaction, but brought to life through pleasure. It is a gift of sorts, an offering one makes to the world and to one's selves, and it is an expensive gift. Here this is our way. It bears no relationship to thought as you understand it. We are aware that we live in a forest of signs, everything about us is numinous and loaded like a weapon, a phrase or quickly parted lips. All of our environment lives and is filled with a resonating emptiness (emptiness of a unique kind. Empty, ready to be filled by the cautious gaze.) Here we walk the gray streets before the sunlight does and see visions in tattering bill boards. Huge, vast god-like men showing expanses of golden skin speaking in a language of gold. Here is a landscape of rare myth. Towering women, curved like a space, hesitating between genders, lips shimmering. Secrets dropping from the red. We have heard them. Everywhere the hum of music. Meanings growing out of disjuncture. Immanence rising like sand from repetition. Magical street lights. In the fog and the dirt there is celebration of glittering and of wet. Here we are walking. In the windows of shops weakly defined shapes move across television screens. The screens too add themselves to the celebration. We gather. We gather together.

Everything speaks and everything remains mute. Nothing is still but the motion passes unseen. The architecture of the city speaks of structural sexuality. The roads cast their hope into the distance. They move always forward slicing the land into hemispheres, themselves spreading into indefinite varieties of distance. The buildings scream in their upwards spiralings. Perfection of concrete, glass and elevators. The rumbling of subway trains. The sound of footsteps. We imagine the view from overhead and raise our collars against the wind. Nothing is certain. Everything changes. We smile and look towards the ground. The images speak to us, we feel a great pleasure. Of course we do not believe.

10:28 PM

The white square lies there, the site of something glorious almost ruined, only the space where nothing else dares ever grow left on the mourning earth, black, angular lettering across its back. Julian will not turn it over.

He walks away from it, pulls a black tee-shirt from a drawer. Goes to his bathroom, spreads a thick pink gel through this hair, decides against shaving. He stares into his eyes where every dream-like image refuses to appear, hovering as they are around the abandoned white square on the table in the other room. He goes back to his bed, takes the tee-shirt and pulls it over his head.

He shrugs on his leather jacket and makes towards the door, striding past the table. Julian stops, turns round, turns round again. Strange snatches of stories run through his mind. He thinks of seven plagues and a broken sea, he thinks of x-wing fighters traveling through space. He thinks of the end of his last relationship and the blue of Adam's eyes. He thinks of the galloping, mechanized and maniac horsemen a few floors above him. Nothing will drive that photograph from his restless thought.

Julian grabs the newly-arrived photos, slides them into his notebook and shoves it, and a pen, into the zippered pocket of his leather jacket.

10:53 PM

Julian locks the door behind him.

11:08 PM

SUSABO The angel ruling over voyages.

RUMAL The angel of dreams.

The dashboard of the taxi glows a science-fiction green, it's colour more restrained than the lights of the city passing away outside the car's open windows and fading from his awareness. Fuel levels, mileage, oil, none of it signifying. Julian sits in the back seat, eyes half shut, forcing the city's spectacle

into a blur of fornicating lights. The radio crackles impatiently, echoing the unseen customers pacing in lobbies and tapping their toes on street corners all over town.

In the front, upright behind the wheel, the driver talks to the windshield before him.

"Me, I've always loved animals, but I can't see keeping them in the city. It just doesn't seem fair somehow. Maybe a cat, but a dog, a dog belongs in the country as far as I'm concerned. Especially a big one. Just the other day some woman tried to get in here with a huge dog, like a Great Dane or something. No way, man. I told her no way. That dog ain't getting in my cab. And it was slobbering and shit. Now a dog like that has gotta live in the country. The city's no place for it. No sir, I wouldn't treat a fine looking dog like hers that way. I just love animals too much. How about you? You like animals?"

"Hunh?"

"I said, you like animals?"

"Yeah, I like animals."

Julian stares out the window watching his progress into the future.

"Yeah, I could tell that about you. You look like someone who'd like animals. You have a gentle, friendly-like look to you. You smile. A guy who smiles that way has got to be okay. Animals can sense stuff that like that you know. A dog can tell when a guy's okay. I grew up in the country. I had a dog back then. That dog knew if a guy was okay. Someone came on to our property

and that mutt would be there like a shot and if he liked the new-come then you knew he was all right. I remember one time a stranger showed up and old Duke went running up to him. He hated him on sight. He growled, and folded his ears right back like he didn't want to hear a word the guy had to say.

"I went out to the road to see what he was fussing about and there he was, this tall, lanky guy carrying a briefcase. So, I asked him what he was doing there. The place was like, at least forty clicks from the nearest town, after all. You know what he told me?"

"No, what?"

"He told me he was looking for the Tremblay place."

"So?"

"There wasn't any Tremblay place. Not anywhere in the area. My family had lived in that part of the country for at least fifteen years. And there wasn't any Tremblay family in the whole goddamn area. So I told him that. He acted real surprised, like. Sort of stumbled all over his words saying he was sure there was a Tremblay spread in this neck of the woods. That the company he worked for sent him up there on important business. That he had to find them. So I told him again there were no Tremblays around them parts. That he must've taken a wrong turn or something. By this point he was getting real agitated and nervous. He kept moving around, checking things out and his forehead got real sweaty."

"So what happened?"

"Well as he was getting upset and insisting that the Tremblay place was nearby,

for sure, he reached out and grabbed me by the arm. That set old Duke right off. He jumped almost straight into the air and sunk his teeth right into the weird, skinny guy's wrist. You should have seen his face, his mouth flew open and he let out this god awful scream. He shook Duke offa him so rough that his briefcase opened up. All this paper flew out and that seemed to really piss him off too. Then he ran down the road, got into his car and drove away.

"There was all these papers and shit on the ground and when I bent down to pick some of the crap up I noticed some of the stuff was pictures."

"Really?" Julian shifts in his seat.

"Yeah. Fuck... I can't tell you buddy. I've never seen shit like was in some of those photos. The weirdest crap I ever saw, right down to this day. And I can tell you I've seen all kinds of sick stuff driving this cab. But I never saw anything like that before or since. And old Duke knew there was something wrong with that guy from the first second he laid eyes on him.

The kind of shit he had in that briefcase, man."

Julian shuts his eyes as they pass in front of a garish nightclub, its signs too bright to look at directly.

11:20 PM

MULCIBER An angel, Milton tells us, that built lofty towers in the acreages of heaven.

Julian paid the taxi driver with the same kind of smile he had commented on earlier. The man liked to talk, Julian thinks to himself, fine. The evening is likely to be noisy anyway.

He pushes at a door of opaque glass and it gives way to a bright restaurant. As he enters, Julian sidles past the nose of a '57 chevy that seems to have crashed through a brick wall - chrome ornamented lover forcing his way through a mob. Its headlights glow softly, almost imperceptible in the glare of the overheads. The glare lowering itself coolly downwards from the home they make in rollers of tin.

Julian steps past the roomful of light and the smell of grease. Notices an animated face here, there a mustache moving over speaking lips, he seats himself at a long chrome counter that arcs its way across the length of the room, facing a regiment of mirrored tiles set into the wall. There are an array of bottles lined along the wall, the levels of liquid in them unequal and the clash of colours remarkable. He seats himself right at the corner.

To his left, at a small table with the remains of supper spread across it, a pair of men speak softly to one another. They tell each other confidences they pretend that no one else can hear.

"I was all alone in the rehearsal room, I swear. Just a few hours ago and everything was great. I swear to God Ron, I've never played like this before. Never. The music just, I don't know, just came out of me from nowhere --

nowhere I've ever seen before. I held the fucking thing in my hands and it was like it just opened up and sang. "

The passion in the young man's voice rings even in his silent pauses. His words shake as he describes the trembling of his hands on the highly polished instrument. His friend nods while he follows the fluttering of his companion's hands as the tale unfolds. The speaking man leans forward through the whole story.

A waiter takes Julian's order for a club sandwich and a cup of coffee. He takes the menu from him, his fingers just barely brushing against Julian's as he pulls away.

The tale teller's hands arc across the table as he throws an account of his secret music to his friend. He tells him how the music grew from the sounding cavity pressed to his chin. How each note rose from it spreading into the cool air of the abandoned studio and burst, sonorous blossom into imperceptible colour. The trilling, the back and forth of bow, the phrases, movements, melody. His voice shakes, vibrato, in his eagerness. A passage that soared from him, the final notes of it inflating, almost unbearable in his ears, shattering in a mayhem of pizzicato joys. A tumult, a stream pouring over its banks and flooding the country around it with a wetness filled with moving things - reptiles, waterfowl, undines even. The moisture in his smiling eyes the tiniest memory of the flooding, the slightest trace of this happy upheaval.

And then it broke, the new sound coming, filled with poignancy, slowness and sweet sleep. The strings paling, the softness of the end of rain. Him calling up the softest notes, the ones best heard in their passing unnoticed.

Behind the two of them a massive painting stretches across the wall. Its perspective seems odd to Julian, the entire thing strangely foreshortened. It recreates a room at whose distant end is a massive picture window, drapes drawn wide, that gives on to an almost quiet street - only a single vehicle appears on it. The buildings of an unidentifiable city line up one beside the other as twilight settles over them. The trees still green for the moment, are waiting for the greater darkness to arrive. Before the window stand a few isolated bits of furniture and before that, what appears miles from the windowed horizon, is a woman dressing for the evening and rummaging through the jewellery spread before her on a dressing table. The jewels, stones and precious metals alike, are given a painstakingly detailed treatment. Sparks flash off of them at impossible angles, their colours more saturated than any Julian has seen in shop windows anywhere. They sparkle as if all of the light in the frame came only from their cold assertions. Bangles, rings, pendants fill the canvas with their presence, their insistent perfections. In the woman's right ear a golden earring is suspended, glistening above her shoulder. She seems to search among the scattered treasures before her for its mate. She is frozen there now, forever, in her uncompleted search.

The busy youth has not yet finished his account as the waiter places Julian's order before him.

The music plays on in its poignancy, its golden tragedy, for a little while yet. Him, seated, far later than any of his friends, all of whom had quit the rehearsal rooms hours before for the comforts of their homes and familiarities. He, alone with the uproar of sound and glory rising, like a phantom garden flooded, from his violin. A moment came when he left the score he learned with so much effort behind him and gave himself to the unaccounted music rushing in. It soared out of the instrument, trilling and swelling, shuddering at times, rising ever upwards, it seemed to him, piling octave upon octave and then diving down again. And again, the sadness came, the slowness and the notes drifting away in not-quite silences, tiny murmur musics and then nothing.

The young man stopped for a moment then. Leaned back in his chair and put his hands on the table.

"Just as I stopped playing, Ron, and I swear this to you, I felt a hand on the chair, just sort of brushing against my back. I turned around but there was nobody... nobody in the room with me. Then as I turned I felt this cool breeze pass by me."

"But there's no window in that room."

"I know that. But I did feel it. I swear I did. It felt like a person running by... or maybe it was just the last of the music. And you know what is really weird?"

"What... what could be weirder than this?"

"It wasn't a scary experience. It wasn't even upsetting, at all. In fact, I felt something I wouldn't have ever thought I could, if I had ever imagined something like that happening to me. Which I haven't. I felt disappointed. I felt really disappointed that there was no one there when I turned around. And I'm not sure that I was disappointed that there was nobody there because that person, or whatever it was, was helping me play like that, or because she, or he, heard me play like that."

In the painting Julian notices suddenly, in the bottom right corner, a massive shape in gold, fluted and lovely, hugely oversized by an affectation of perspective. It is the second earring, never to be found.

Julian turns to his sandwich. The discoloured toast, the masses of fried potatoes and thinks for a moment about ghosis. He eats slowly for a moment, then another till he stops and pulls his notebook from his pocket.

Friend

We are coming together in a tunnel. Overhead the automobiles race headlong to some distinct destination. We nod grimly, suppressing laughter. We know better than this. Along the sides of the tunnel we have arranged empty bottles. They shine in the light of the overhead neons. We pace, anxiously, the length of the tunnel, scribbling ambiguous shapes on the wall. Soon much of the surface is covered with figures and glyphs mating with an obscene commitment. We seize the bottles in pale hands and hold

them to the light. We let the filmy shade fall across our faces. We blink and shatter the bottles. The shards, these we gather up and cut, with great and vehement solemnity, the clothing from our bodies. Later and long into the night we eat and drink. We speak about morality and show each other our scars.

11:40 PM

The speaker, absorbed by happiness, is describing the music as golden once again. In Julian's mind that mention echoes nothing so much as a lost earring pining for the dark to come.

11:44 PM

Julian eats quickly.

Outside the diner's wide window, an old man, shuffling back and forth in stained clothing. His shoulders and arms are marked with the dirt of street corners and abandoned buildings, one long smudge tracing a coat sleeve from someplace high on his neckline, hidden by his long hair, to the tip of a fraying cuff. This same hair hangs about his face, matted together at the ends. And though, at the moment, Julian can not see his eyes he imagines them crusted at the corners with the amber residues of sleep, wet and blurry, filled with something like visions, or horrors. An empty plastic bag is stuck loosely in a hip

pocket and flaps behind him as he walks back and forth. He paces back and forth wearing one shoe on his right foot and a second plastic bag on the left.

From time to time he stops one or another of the people passing by. Some of them pause and reach into their pockets, others pass by without a flicker of their eyes. A couple, a tall young man and a woman in a dark green coat whose collar covers her chin, stop and talk to him for some time. They smile and shake their heads while the old man replies to them with a vigorous nodding. He points to some place behind the pair with his left hand. They laugh, then the man reaches into his pocket and pulls out a few small bills and gives them to him. The homeless man speaks animatedly, his lips forming words that will not pass the plate glass window between them. As he speaks tiny flecks of foam gather in the corners of his mouth and lose themselves in the coarse hairs of his beard. Some cling, briefly, and fall to the ground making a sound as inaudible to Julian as his words. He shifts his weight from one foot to another, almost hopping, agitated. His head leans back and he seems to laugh loudly. Other passers by stare as they leave him behind. The young couple go on their way, returning the weird old man to his laughter and his hopping.

Alone again, he paces before the restaurant window.

Across the road a large building has a flagpole on its roof. A lightly tattered flag flaps at the top of it, back-and-forthing in the evening's breeze, and this tiny motion seems to catch the restless old man's attention. He stops and points at it, laughing again. He jabs his finger in the air towards the fabric tumult

in the sky. In an unforeseeable burst of energy the man with the traces of sleep in his eyes whirls about, faster and faster. His outline blurs and, seeing it through the wall of glass, Julian is reminded of the blurring of film images when the reel locks in a projector and the film slows suddenly in its unwinding, muddying the screen.

He stops, frozen in his place and stretches his arms out to either side of him. He starts to laugh again, head tilted so far back on his neck that it seems he is calling to the sky to send its waters and fill him up again.

Then two policemen enter the frame.

One of them taps the crazy old man on the shoulder but he doesn't turn his head at all. The cop taps him a second time. The man ignores him once more. The cop grabs him by the shoulders and spins him around. His partner steps up on the other side of the man whose arms are still spread out.

The second policeman seems to be saying something to the old man who does not see him, his head still tilted back, his eyes shut until the cop pulls his head upright once again, his hand twisted in the long gray hair. Then the old man's eyes are open, wide and filled with something twisting between fear and astonishment.

Julian's eyes, too, are wide now.

The cop is speaking, Julian can almost see the volume of his voice rising. He grabs the old man's coat roughly and shakes him. He bends, bringing his

face closer and closer to the man with open arms, his mouth wide and flecks of spit clinging to his beard.

He shoves him, hard. The man falls against the cop's partner, slips and tumbles to the ground taking the cop behind him down as well.

The other officer is red with rage and screaming now. He points at the fallen, gray haired man. His partner rises to his feet. He screams and Julian sees, almost too quickly, one of his legs go back and then swing forward. People have begun to congregate outside. The second policeman gestures them away. The first kicks for a second time. And then again. And again.

The old man turns over. He is kicked again and a jet of something vividly red springs from his head and splatters against the diner's window. It drips down, in three narrow streams, towards the ground. The old man rises up on his hands and knees, his mouth shattered and crimson. The cop kicks him again. He falls. The second policeman grabs his partner by the wrist and says something to him, gestures around the street and at the restaurant where Julian is seated. The first listens almost calmly, looks at him, says something, less agitatedly now, to the old man struggling his way upright. Then the two of them walk away, leaving the frame as easily as they had entered it.

The old man is slow in rising to his feet, and once he does, he too shuffles out of the window's purview.

The streams of red on the glass thin out into transparency as they reach the ground.

Julian throws some money on the counter, leaves his sandwich unfinished.

11: 57 PM

On the street again, Julian pauses to watch the slow circling of the traffic, drivers seeking out parking places or companions for a perfect moment away from the activity of the street. There is no sign of the ragged man who left his blood across the picture window. Nor any trace of the two policemen either.

Julian moves down the street following the white rings let at his feet by the lights.

He moves from one circle of electrical exorcism to the next, watching the glow rise up his legs and fade away again. Framed for a moment then left alone again. Others walk by him, moving ahead or passing him by.

In its secret places, Julian's mind is draining itself of the scenes of violence and filling itself up with the shadows of angels. In his pocket, the photograph lies very still. Julian is recreating its image in his mind.

Mountains, peaks covered in snow and reaching for the clouds.

Sun, vast and lazy, a still centre whose pull, like a kind of love, reaches out to the planets spinning around it.

An angel, incomprehensible in its flesh, flying across the sky.

Is it real? What can it mean, and is it real?

Julian has seen a great many photographs in his years. Is familiar with their techniques, their technologies. If the instance in his pocket has been toyed with, it is, has been done, with unbelievable care and skill. The grain is consistent, the edge of the angel shows no discontinuity, it is lit from the right angle. The resolution is perfect. So what does it mean?

If angels are anything they are signs. The thought has just occurred to Julian, and it is commanding. They are signs.

Julian will not put his hand in his pocket, will not try to grasp at marvels.

Harris's comments still gnaw at him. What if dreams do take on flesh and walk though the world, changing it forever? What kind of world could contain the glamorous, gorgeous eruption of marvels this angel may herald? What sort of world would admit him, her, to begin with? How can you read an angelic world? And is it all real, anyway?

Running down the backroads of his synapses Julian harries the single issue of a world with room for angels.

He imagines a world flush with possibilities, where towers turn on their axes and gardens never spoil. Where improbable public monuments are erected to people who had compelling hallucinations and private citizens toast each other's pleasures. What kind of world is covered in a sky peopled with wonders?

Julian walks among the empty pools of light fishing for his answers. And if dreams can walk across the world with strides as vast as human imagination, can nightmares? Or is that even a question?

The glow on the sidewalk could be beaming across a curtain about to go up without an overture.

The streetlights shine, each isolated from the other by a shadowed stretch of city pavement. Each of them spotless, incandescent, self-contained, and strangely, somehow enlarged upon by the next. Impeccable circles all, strewn across the city, a strand of unlikely pearls scattered when the string snapped on a titan passing by. Julian imagines a place now where these same lamps would be lined with painted cellophane, and once lit, would cast pictures on the cement squares just below them. A world where every night-time walk was vocal and articulate, telling stories to the lonely strollers on the road. Scorned lovers and wicked priests with ruddy faces crawling on before him. Cities, lost and overgrown as the jungle forces its way in.

Still he, moving, zigzagging, goes from each to each as nothing but a plane passes overhead.

Julian stops outside a pay-phone, searches through his pockets for some change.

He steps into the booth, drops in a coin and punches out the number. He puts the receiver to his ear. A sound like heavy traffic caught in a violent rain storm fills his head. A terrible crackling, hissing noise tearing across the line, painfully loud, forcing Julian to pull the thing from his ear. It goes silent for a second, starts, and then is quiet once more. Julian brings the receiver close to

him again. The line is silent, then a brief, sibilant hissing sound and a strange male voice speaking.

"Hello, angel."

And the line goes dead.

MIDNIGHT

CAMAYSAR The angel of the marriage of contraries, whose name is...conjured with in alchemical procedures.

CAPRIEL An angel whose visitation provides one with the gift of an open heart.

Julian hangs up and stares at the phone for a moment. He searches for a reason to hang up with the hand set still in his grip, then pulls the photograph from his pocket. The landscape and sun are unchanged. A fixed horizon frozen in the privileged square of the photograph still. The angel has flown on. The movement is small but undeniable, the angel is moving. Julian has no doubt. Uncertain, he turns the photograph over. Written, in the now familiar stranger's handwriting, on the back of the image:

"Et qui, vaincu, toujours te redresses plus fort".

He hangs up.

12:01 AM

The change is small, but the angel is undeniably further right in the frame. Julian's lower lip trembles like the last April icicles shaking at the edges of the roof. It makes no sense to him, but he can't help believing it should.

12:03 AM

LAILAH The angel of night, also charged with the protection of things about to be born.

Julian replaces the turbulent image in his pocket and turns off the main road at its next corner. The street is a short one, lined with duplexes and small homes, sidewalks worn to a smooth finish by the endless parade of boots that make their way up and down the block every night. There are far fewer street lamps on this side street than there are up the block on the city's central artery, pumping as it does, the flow of traffic from its failing heart to its furthest tips. The gloom here settles down each night as the sun stumbles to rest in the river's bed, a few hours before the men come down in their endless troopings.

12:04 AM

The pavement underneath Julian's feet lies still, courting the moon's white blanket in the absence of the electricity the city lavishes on busier roads. Julian,

half absorbed by the compulsion of his pocket, wonders whether angels turn golden in a harder light.

12:05 AM

The door is unpainted, rises upwards about seven feet and, spread before it, a cement ramp runs out to meet the boot beaten road where it lays. The sky above it is empty of anything but the moon and the clouds that cover its smile.

Beyond, Julian notices again, is blacker than night. The vestibule, hesitant between two doors, is as dark as a body cavity. His nervous pupils dilate here. Each time Julian enters anew, he is struck by his awareness of this tight, almost instantaneous, burst of black.

On the walls, just perceptible, are the traces of white chalk men have marked on the walls as they walked through this entryway. Names and numbers. Obscene caricatures that Julian is never quite sure he will ever recognize.

Then he pulls the second door open and passes through it.

12:06 AM

The roar of the music thuds into his chest. The darkness is just a little less thick. The tall, broad man in a baseball cap lounging against the wall opposite the entrance nods at Julian, says, "Hi Jay, I think a couple of your buddies have already arrived."

Julian nods back at him and mumbles "Thanks," as he walks by.

Left of the man in the cap is an arch. Through it Julian can see a few figures drifting around, some of them swaying in time to the overwhelming music. The main bar is there, surrounded by a cage behind which a familiar bearded face is laughing.

"Al, hi," Julian says as he approaches the bars that line the counter.

"Hey, Julian, good to see ya, guy. It's been awhile, hasn't it."

"All of three days, handsome. I think you're spending too much time here."

"Just enough to pay the rent," he responds as he pulls a beer from underneath the counter and shoves it through the bars to Julian.

Julian pays him and smiles. "That sounds like a little too much to me."

"Could be."

"So what's happening here tonight?"

"Same old crap."

"Music, dancing, drinking, cruising. All your basic food groups."

"What's happening with you?"

"Not too much. But I think I may have fallen in love."

"Really, with who?"

"Don't know his name yet."

"Oh, him..."

"Very funny, Al."

"Just kidding. But really, man, I usually get the name at least."

"I'm hoping I will. I'm just not sure how to go about it."

"Oh, you're a resourceful boy. You'll find a way, I'm sure."

The cigarette smoke in the air twines its way around the bars between Julian and the barman, wrapping itself, loose as whispered secret, around the glossy black tubes, too briefly, before cascading slowly down to the beer stained counter-top. In Julian's now open pupils they become insubstantial ropes, or fetters for a willing lover.

"I have a feeling I will," he replies.

"Ya know, I can almost believe you really have fallen in love. I've never seen you hesitate that long before, definitely not when there was an unanswered question on the table."

Al spots someone at the far end of the bar with a five in his hand. He winks at Julian as he turns from him. Julian leans back against the bar and drinks from his bottle.

Men, largely dressed in black and leather, pass in and out of Julian's view.

They register only slightly, he being absorbed with the imagined sounds that wings beating overhead might make.

At the far end of the bar he leans against, there is something that catches his eye and holds it in its ironic congruity. It is carefully shaped of black wood and black metal, with walls as solid and uncompromising as an unlit movie screen. The seat is lined in leather just as dark, brilliant in this obscurity. Three steps lead to the wooden platform atop which it is placed and a high, broad back

too, is set with leather. It leaves only a narrow space between itself and the darkly stained ceiling. The seat is so elevated it seems to beckon towards an unseen choir. Before the chair two supports hold up a pair of chromed soles, perfectly matched to the boots that circle round the darkened room. Julian has seen men seat themselves there to have their boots shined by the thin, cleanly-shaven youth engaged to provide that very service. He is, Julian notices, curiously absent at the moment.

The empty chair is silent, keeping a voice to itself, miser of those many stories. Improbable accounts of tall figures moving in a night sky black and red as flags heavy with the promise of parades. Its tales of well-born, well-raised young men who found a moment of something approximating freedom as their eyes shifted nervously across the space it dominates, of lies told for the insurrectionary pleasures they create, of men who, in a drunken moment, with a faltering erection, became minotaurs for others just like them. Werewolf lust is harboured in that creaking seat and erect back - just underneath a dirty ceiling in a dirty bar. The crudely lettered sign beside it too is stained, inscribed with smudged and fading fingerprints. The cigarette smoke coils and falls away.

This shoe shine stand, alone in its corner and waits, it seems to Julian, less nervously than he, for something extraordinary to happen.

A tall dark man with a sparse mustache arrives and leans against one side of it, lights a smoke and talks to the friend that joins him. The massive, solitary chair is unmoved by his new weight.

12:17 AM

Julian drains his drink and heads for the washroom.

12: 18 AM

The men's room is long and narrow, has a single light near the entrance, four stalls at the far end and a row of urinals along one wall. The music is less loud here and the men seem very concentrated on their urination.

Julian takes his place and clears his mind just long enough to start pissing. The man beside him shifts slightly. The sleeve of his free arm brushes against Julian's side. Julian finishes, turns to his right, smiles at the man and walks away. As he exits the washroom the lights over the dance floor are flashing insistently.

Above the crowd of dancers neon penises appear and vanish at the flick of a switch one floor above. Hard-ons of gold, purple, red and blue flashing. Appearing in the darkness suddenly, showing themselves without a context, not even the suburban park or stinking washroom in a shopping mall someone warned him of so long ago. They are there, then gone. Some of them spray trails of light at irregular intervals, splashing across the ceiling, running down the walls in drips of luminescence that lend a sudden colour to the torso of a dancing man. They unclothe themselves, vulgar icons, as uncanny as a momentary filthy thought at work.

One massive neon cock straddles a wall at the far side of the dance floor. It rises from the metal bottom of the place and reaches up toward the spinning spotlights overhead outlined in the colour of daybreak. Inside of that its form is repeated again and again - green, orange, pink. Pink, orange, green. The massive phallus shrinking and enlarging once again. It is a tree of trapped gasses blossoming and withering in a hyper accelerated seasonal cycle. It is a trick of perspective and a spectacle. The huge glow-in-the-dark erection is a garish thing, a chimera, a serpent of brass thrown into the air above a desert with a promise to the insubstantial. It holds its place at the darkest end of the bar, defiant in the face of taste and as marvelous as a riot. And from its towering tip clouds of vapour have been known to flood across the room, transforming it.

"Hey, hey, hey! Julian, hi. How ya doing?"

Julian turns to see the short, smiling figure of Ted waving his hand at him.

"Great. How are you?"

"Pretty good. You looked real intense for a second there."

"Just thinking."

"Yeah. About what?"

"Just stuff, Ted. You know, the really big issues."

"Guys?"

"Not that big."

"OK. So I thought you were going to the warehouse tonight."

"I am. But it's still too early for that. What about you. I thought you were going to go too?"

"I changed my mind. It's probably going to be mad. Way too crowded. Hard to talk to people. Just too much."

"You're probably right."

"So why are you going then?"

"I don't know. All my friends are going to be there. There's nothing else going on after hours. And, you know something, I do my best thinking in really crowded places."

"That makes no kind of sense."

"No, it doesn't really, does it?"

Julian is still watching the crowd on the dance floor and the revelations of the neon pricks unveiling themselves above them. He can't help the sudden sense of amusement that slips past him.

"You should smile more often," says Ted.

"You're probably right about that too."

"You're not too evasive, are you?"

"Sorry. I'm just a little distracted tonight. So what made you decide to come here instead?"

"I'm not sure really. It just seemed like it might be more fun than the big party. I figure the guys that are here tonight really want to be here, ya know. They chose it over a much bigger event, so they know what they want."

"True enough. But a lot of them are probably going to go to the warehouse later. You know that."

"Some will. But some won't have to, or won't want to."

"So you have a mission?"

"I just like to spread a little joy anywhere I go. That's all."

"You're all heart, Ted."

"So you're definitely going."

"Definitely."

"All right then. How about a look around now?"

"Sure."

Julian and Ted make their way through the men lingering and moving, alone, in pairs or groups. The pockets of them in corners and around the bars. Here and there one of them stands farther back in the crowd with a thick perfumed smoke surrounding him. There is the odd flash of teeth as laughter erupts and the smell of beer is everywhere. One group of men, three of them, stand closely together their backs to the room. Two of the men hold one of the third's nipples in tight grip. The distant look in his eyes is as deep as a landscape. Julian sees the flicker in Ted's eyes and almost smiles again.

"Julian. Hey, Julian. You want to toot up?"

"Sure, why not?"

Ted heads towards the washroom. Julian follows him, forcing the corners of his mouth down.

Ted makes his way to the back and slides into a stall. Julian waits outside. He can just see the top of Ted's head over the toilet door. It moves slightly side to side, shakes a little. Then disappears into the darkened space below. A moment later it reappears. Ted shakes his head once more, then turns around and exits.

Julian enters and closes the door behind him. On the top of the toilet tank is Ted's dark red cigarette pack on which there is a small line of glittering white powder and a piece cut from a drinking straw. Julian takes the straw in his hand, leans over and inhales the powder with a single breath. He picks up Ted's cigarettes, turns around and leaves the stall.

Julian walks with Ted towards the door, through the narrow corridor between the urinals and the panels of mirror on the other wall. He pauses at a washbasin to wet his hands and snort a little water.

"Thanks a lot, Ted."

"Oh, no problem. No problem at all."

"You certainly seem equipped for a long evening for someone who is definitely not going to the big party tonight."

"Just because I'm not going to that party doesn't mean I'm not hoping for a long night."

"Oh, of course. You have a mission."

"That's right. Oh yeah, and thanks for reading my story this afternoon. I've been thinking a lot about what you said. I even started a little rewrite after supper. I think you might be right. I could come off a bit too arch."

"I hope you didn't misunderstand that, though. It's not like I think arch is always a bad thing, sometimes I rather like it. It just wasn't happening for me in your piece. Eleanor just came off a little too, too for me. "

"I know. That was sort of my idea at first. I wanted to do something about the way we inscribe kids in this part of the world. You know, sort of turn that whole thing upside down. I think I've got another idea about how to approach the whole subject though. I don't know if I'm ready to talk about it yet. I think I want to get something down on paper first."

"Yeah."

The two men are moving around the bar together again. At the far end, the well-hung neon tubing has begun to spit clouds of vapour over the dance floor, shrouding it and making the dancing men curiously spectral. Their naked limbs rip holes into the smoke, tanned revenants forcing their way through a tattering Hollywood backdrop. Their bodies toss in the cascading fumes to the four-four tyranny of the speakers. They shake, shudder and splash in the tumult of dry ice and coloured lighting.

"But I really think the new direction is the way I want to take this whole concept in. You'll find it interesting too, I'm pretty sure."

"Well, maybe I'll take a look at it when it's ready for looking at." "Yeah, yeah absolutely. I'm pretty sure you'll find this approach more interesting. "

"I'll bet."

The two find themselves back, and closer now, by the clique of three men who have not found an end to their single-minded involvement with each other. Now, one of the men holds the willing victim, wrists tight in his grip, tugged behind his back. His chest is forced forward where the other man tugs and twists and his nipples with a mathematical precision and a hard grin. A thin sheen of sweat has turned the surface of his chest glossy. His eyes are half-shut, his mouth half-open. Even in the semi-darkness of this room Julian can see the arc of his tongue folding up in his mouth, a retractable bridge rising above a dangerously flooded river. The man's chin is tilted up, making the shimmering swell of his chest even more apparent. The muscles in his shoulders stand out in relief as well, straining against his arms, twisted and restrained at the small of his back. The man behind him is whispering in his ear, the one before him never lifts his eyes from his business, the plucking of the sweaty man's nervous strings.

"That guy..." Ted begins.

"What guy?"

"That one."

"Which one? There are three of them."

"The one behind him. The one whispering in his ear."

"Yeah. OK. That guy. What about him?"

"I went home with him and another guy last weekend." The look on Ted's face darkens, lending a lie to the wetness of his eyes as they double the green, orange, pink of the massive flashing cock.

"I thought something was up, with the way you were looking at them. Was the other gentlemen the one working so hard on their little friend's nipples?"

"No. No, it wasn't actually. But someone something like him. "

"I gather you don't mean they looked a lot alike."

"No. But they dressed somewhat alike, and, apparently, have similar hobbies."

"Lucky you. He seems to take his work seriously."

"Very. Or at least the one that was with us did."

"Once again, lucky you."

"I suppose."

"So, go on. I'm pretty sure this isn't a casual observation."

"No it isn't really. But then... anyway. So I met him," Ted says indicating one of the two tormentors with a slight gesture, a shifting of the level of his gaze, "with another friend of his."

"He must like threesomes, because he's at it again tonight."

"He likes a hell of a lot more than threesomes, Julian. I can vouch for that."

"No doubt."

"Yeah, so I'm sort of standing around here, on a Thursday night. And its pretty crowded for a Thursday, the music's good, whatever. And the big guy shows up at the bar. He's leaning there talking to Al, drinking his beer and I think I notice him looking at me, which is fine by me because I really like the way his chaps fit him."

"Who wouldn't?" The three men play with each other, beads of sweat on their faces, unheard obscenities falling from their lips that Julian happily imagines, listening to his friend.

"Exactly. So I lean against the wall, over there, just opposite the back bar, which is where Al was working that night. I light a cigarette and kind of look his way every once in a while, to see if he really is interested, or whether I misinterpreted something."

"OK. So what happened."

"Well, I hung out there a little while, long enough to finish my smoke and start wanting another one."

"Come on, come on. Quit stalling."

"So, eventually he comes over to me. He stands right in front of me and stares straight in my eye. Like this." Ted glowers into Julian's eyes for a moment, staring intently, almost threateningly.

"Then he just walks off and stands by himself about, I don't know, eight or ten feet away. I'm a little bit freaked out by this, of course. But, you know me."

"Yup, you're a boy who can't say no."

"Not exactly that, but it was like a challenge, know what I mean. So I wait a few more seconds, then I go over to him. He looks at me, and say 'I saw you looking at me, boy.' "

"Pretty blunt."

"Yeah, but it was kind of exciting."

"I'm sure."

The music in the room swells suddenly, stretching its back and filling the area around the dance floor with a vibrating, maddening presence and then stops. The smoke streams across the room, spinning through the dancing men who pause a moment as if they were waiting for something they know is on the way. Then the lights go out and the darkness is absolute, as terrifying as the unspoken horrors of childhood. A voice rises in the darkness singing something about a perfect lover, tones modulated to a digital perfection

"Shit!" Ted yells, "I hate it when they do that. You can't see anyone"

As the lights begin to flicker once more, Julian nods, looks at him, encouraging him to continue.

"Anyway, I tell him that, sure, I was looking at him and we start to talk a bit. He has the filthy mouth right from the start, already in the role he wants to play right from the get go. He's muttering in my ear, telling me all the dirty things he wants to do to me, biting me on the neck. He's working my tit at the same time. I keep thinking to myself that I ought to be embarrassed doing this right

here in the bar, but I'm so fucking horny I don't care. He's tugging on my nipple so hard it hurts and I'm not even trying to stop him, you know?"

Julian sees, over Ted's shoulder, the man repeating his ritual with this new stranger, mirroring this strange narration. The three of them making a wall of their desires to shut the rest of the bar out. "Uh huh," he answers.

"Then all of a sudden I feel this hand on my ass. I know it's not his because I can see what his hands are doing. I start turning around to see what the story is but this guy grabs me by the chin and tells me to keep my eyes straight ahead or I'll be sorry. Then I'm kind of nervous and I think, I ought to be afraid, but I'm just really turned on. And I keep my eyes straight ahead while someone I haven't even seen is really, really squeezing my ass hard. I can see him looking at this other guy over my shoulder, making some kind of strange eye contact and head gestures. I don't know what was happening to me at that point, I mean in my own head, you know, but I didn't care anymore. I really wanted what was going on, the whole loss of control.

Anyway, this went on for a little while and then he, the first guy I mean, decided it was time to go home. So he turned me around and I saw the second guy, who was pretty nice looking. Tall, bearded, rough face - pretty tasty. Although, I was wound up so tight, and so into it I don't think I would have objected even if he weren't my type. And we split. We got into his car and went to his place. This is the weird part, or another weird part, anyway.

When we got there we went into his basement. It was really dark at first and he pushed me down on my knees and made me bow my head, so I didn't see much. And the second guy pulled my head into his crotch. He went towards the back of the room and turned on some kind of dim light and we got started on the evening."

Ted has paused for a moment, as if remembering something to himself that he did not wish to share. A wash of red plays across his face. Julian looks, uncertain of whether it is a trick of lighting or a blush.

"When I glanced up at one point," he begins. "I saw someone, or what looked like someone, tied up against the wall. Then they blindfolded me. You know, I think it might have been a mannequin dressed up in all sorts of fetish gear. But I'm not sure. I don't think another person joined in the action and still, I don't think it too unlikely that he might have had another one of his boys there. He could easily have been getting off on making him watch the whole scene. I don't know."

Ted falls silent again. Looks back at the cluster of men locked in the ceremonies governing their exchange. The sound and light whirling around them, fierce as a late night rain. Julian watches as well, adds new questions to the tumult of his preoccupations.

"Is that the end of the story? No more details."

Ted stares at him. "That's all I'm going to tell you anyway."

"OK. I'll just make up the rest for my own amusement."

"So. I think I'll take a walk around and attend to my mission. That OK by you?"

"Of course, go ahead. I'll see you later."

Ted walks off into the smoke and the sound. Looks as if he were about to turn away from the dance floor and the three men in their corner just off of it. Hesitates, then turns around. Julian watches Ted's back, his head bobbing, as if floating on some uneasy body of water, move straight towards them. Then Julian walks away.

The room has filled up noticeably while Julian was traveling through the stories of his friend. The crowds milling about are thicker, the pockets of men in corners and around jangling pinball machines more numerous. He smiles at acquaintances, nods at the faces known to him, glances at handsome strangers as he makes his way back to Al's bar.

Al smiles and brings him his beer. Julian pays him with another wink and leans against the bar again.

All around him the back and forth continues. Men wander their careful circuits from one side of the bar to the other, pausing here to steal a studied look at someone doing much the same. There they stop to speak and smile, laugh and trade their ribald mutterings with their friends. Julian stands by himself, having left one friend to his own uneasy circuit, thinking about his other friends readying themselves to go out, climbing into taxis all over town. Thinks about people he knows all too well and a newly familiar face he knows no greeting for.

Then he pulls himself away from the bar and moves out into the crowd once more.

12:49 AM

Another human tide moves around Julian, this one darker, rougher than the well lit masses owning the daytime streets he forced his way through only hours ago. At once more comfortable and more lost here, Julian hesitates, finding his place in it once again. The cool of the beer bottle in his hand reminds him of how hot the crowded room actually is, how he is sweating underneath his leather jacket. He circles around the dance floor looking for a space where the traffic is less hectic, finally settling on a small spot by the ramp leading to the men's room.

In the coloured lights' irregular flashing he sees a tall man by one of the standing bars. He is moving rhythmically, dancing in one spot and looking out at the dance floor. His hair is closely cropped, his jawline strong and the muscles in his arms, bared from the shoulder down, well-defined. Julian watches him closely, his movements, though perfectly controlled, do not match the profound beat coming from the speakers. He moves forward a little to see the man closer.

His face is deeply tanned and angular, the articulate jaw dusted with the shadow of a beard. His full lips seem to be half-moving with the words of a song that do not match the ones tearing across the club. Julian sees why now. The man is wearing earphones, connected to a portable cassette player at his belt.

He is absorbed in another music, one of his choosing, whirling through the spirals inside his ear.

Julian stares at him, amazed. He wants to look away, concerned that the man might think he is cruising him, but curious as to why someone would come to a music-filled club with music of his own. The man's body rocks, his feet shuffle slightly, in time to the music no one but he hears. His head nods, almost swings, up and down. Julian notices, now, that his eyes are shut. He will not notice this intrusive examination. He will not notice anything but his music, and the pleasure that it gives to him.

What inside him is keeping this sequestered music company, Julian thinks. The man has chosen to be alone in a room full of people. He shares nothing here with everyone else. Locked in the space between the melody he has brought with him and the inside of his eyelids he may as well be on another world, far away from here.

He is handsome, Julian thinks again, as he drains the last of his beer, looks around him one last time and decides he will leave.

12:58 AM

SATAREL The angel set over hidden things.

The heavy door thuds shut behind him. Julian pauses for a moment, enjoying the vague cool of the summer night. Overhead the moon is waxing, a

kind of drunken half-grin of yellow falling over in the sky. The air is clear and motionless. He can hear both the conversation of the men seated in the park across the street and the residual thumping coming through the walls behind him.

Across the street a string of row houses faces a large parking lot, behind them a long and poorly-lit alleyway opens up, undistinguished, gray and lined with stones and shreds of paper still as sleeping things. Julian crosses the four lanes of street and stops on the opposite corner. The men are still seated in the park talking though he can no longer hear them, but their closeness to one other and the animation with which they gesture is eloquent. Julian turns from them and enters the alleyway. The sounds of the street grow fainter as he makes his way down the dim passage behind the city's back. The paint on the fences shutting in the houses' yards is flaking off, making little patterns, wounds of a kind, where the wood is now exposed. Most of the windows are dark, the only ones glowing are on the second stories, unevenly spaced, some are even open, an odd shadow moving across the room. Julian passes through the alley as quietly as he can and exits through a dark space between two of the houses, hidden from view to anyone who did not know the place by an untrimmed hedge, to find himself on a side street.

Across the road a few cars are parked for the night, generous distances between them. An iron fence with a small open gate at its centre runs along the opposite side of the sidewalk and another alleyway opens up beside the closest

building. Julian crosses the street, looks down the staircase behind the iron gate, empty and washed with a fall of yellow. A man stands at the bottom of the cement stairs smoking a cigarette and looking up. Julian ignores him and heads towards the alleyway instead, and enters it. Halfway down the unpaved channel it opens again to the right, giving on to a strange empty lot, closed on three sides by buildings, and dotted with tall garbage dumpsters. Julian walks into this desolate non-space and looks behind the first dumpster to find nothing. There is nothing behind the second either. Behind the third a man in his early twenties holds his naked erection in his hand, stroking it slowly. Julian looks at it, the flat lightly haired belly just above, then slowly brings his gaze up to the other's. That face is impassive in the gloom, yet appears to hunger for expression. Julian stretches his hand out. He touches the other's hard on, wraps his fingers around it, warm and smooth, and feels the pulsing in the vein that runs along one side. Julian strokes it slowly, holding the man's gaze trapped in his own. He struggles with the urge to speak, softly, keeps running his hand back and forth with the regularity of tolling bells, the solemnity of a cathedral wedding. The other moves his head forward, kisses Julian on the bare length of neck between the collar of his tee-shirt and his jacket. His lips land softly and part. Julian feels the motion of teeth against his skin, light, real, the sound of dripping faucet heard from down a long hallway. A tongue then too - warm, soft, almost vanishing - then a sudden rush of breath and an arched back. The other comes, unannounced, unexpected as this moment, unexpected as a truth, with eyes shut and his fingers on Julian's

hips. His semen all over Julian's hands. It is fast and almost silent. He passes Julian a handkerchief as he buttons up his fly. Then blinks twice and nods goodbye without a word.

1:11 AM

ZAMILEL The angel to whom, in the teachings of the Persian Magi, the care of the houris of Paradise is given

Julian leaves the dumpster's court and walks through the alley to a far opening. This street is tenanted by homes, small townhouses and duplexes ranged side by side with imprecise openings between them. Their tiny stoops and staircases pouring from narrow, whitewashed doors to the lips of the street.

The stretch of road is quiet, undisturbed by the traffic moving by a few blocks to the north. The drapes pulled across the street-facing windows undisturbed by any light. Julian heads down the street, walking slowly, held back by the image still with him. Ahead he sees two men on opposite sides of the street keeping pace with each other, and he thinks he sees the occasional glance across the concrete expanse between them. Julian slows himself even further, not wishing to overtake the two.

The homes around him are still. He wonders about their occupants, how aware they are of the nocturnal visitations of their streets and alleys, backyards and back lanes. How many of them choose to live here for these very reasons. Julian has seen some of their occupants posing in dimly lit doorways in the past.

How many are completely unconscious of the reoccurring festival that unburdens itself night after night? How many ignorant of the wordless bliss that creates itself again and again in the empty spaces of the urban map, the panting here-be-dragons of the passions of silent men. How many know nothing of these inspired fornications passing among them on silent wings. The fabulous inky shadow that's cast on their swing sets, their grass-stained patio furniture as its substance slips by overhead.

What number, what curiosity, he thinks to himself.

The two men ahead of him have stopped, each on their own side of the street. One seems to stop to tie a shoe that might have come undone. Julian stops too, having no interest in joining them. He pauses, slips a hand into the pocket where the photograph waits for him to call it into the city once again. The slickness of its surface startles his fingertips. He turns the idea of taking it out over and over again in his mind, examines its many angles and chooses not to.

Across the street some unknown wag has placed a red light-bulb in the sconce above his address plate. The soft glow throws a touch of colour into the shrubbery below. Julian finds the bloody glow on the leaves disconcerting, reminding him of the none-too distant autumn. The pool of red spreads itself out on the well-trimmed lawn in a circle. There, Julian sees something unexpected, a pair of feet, one in a battered shoe, the other wrapped in a plastic bag. They appear suddenly as if precipitating themselves into the comfortable street from nowhere. Miraculously taking shape out of the aether, creating themselves in the

thaumaturgic circle of red light. They are visible only to someplace at the mid-calf. Julian stares at them from the far side of the road wonderingly, then crosses over.

The feet are actually sticking out from underneath the narrow porch and are attached to a motionless body underneath it. Julian pauses, hesitant, uncertain of what he might find. The ends of legs, the feet just lie there. Then nervously, and slower than he thought possible, Julian bends down to look into the dim enclosure.

An old man is spread across the dirt, gray hair trailing to gray beard, knotting together at his neck. The dingy brown coat has clots of the topsoil trapped in open seams. A pair of wounds cross each other at his temple. It is the same man who laughed at the movement of the flag. The crazy old man who danced on the busy sidewalk. He is still, his hands clasped between his thighs. The wounds across his forehead the only exceptions in the faded gray of his skin. He lies there, the length of him twisted strangely at the waist. Nonetheless, his chest does move, slightly. He is asleep. Julian looks at him now, no glass between them and wonders, for no reason he can think of, what his voice sounds like. He conjures up a musicality for it that has no place on this haunted street, this soiled crawl space underneath the porch. This wounded man asleep, alone, that danced to some disappearing rhythm no one else could hear

Julian stands up, pulls some shrubbery down to cover the man's legs, careful not to wake him, and returns to the sidewalk, thrusting his hands into the

pockets of his jeans. The two men he saw earlier are gone now, no trace of them left on the open asphalt. Julian looks about. A few blocks down the road a blue and white police car turns onto the street and stops for a moment. Julian moves back up towards the busier roads, the circulating crowds of bodies making their way to nightclubs and restaurants in the business of the night.

1:22 AM

RAMIEL The chief of thunders, recorded in the writings of Enoch as an angel at once holy and fallen.

On the high street the swirling is unabated, men stand together in clusters, parting those still walking around them. The well groomed and well dressed make place for themselves and linger in the hollow doorways with an awe-inspiring intention.

1:24 AM

Julian turns to the left and walks past the next corner. Pulls open an unmarked door of tinted glass and climbs the two flights of stairs that open up behind it.

At the top of the stairs he speaks softly to the young man behind another plate of glass, slides his money through and signs the slip with a pseudonym. The young man buzzes him through the second, locked door.

A different young man, eyes full of wind, hands Julian a towel, a tiny foil packet and his key. He takes them and nods thanks at the attendant. Then he walks into the semi-darkness.

The lights here are ultra-violet, darker than lavender, darker than purple, shyly hesitating before a reserved blackness. Julian is always stunned by them when he first walks in. With a little effort things could be clearer maybe, but still, he thinks, it would all seem shadowy, and why bother. Daylight is hours behind him and hours away yet. Here everything's a slow movement, a kind of eddying, a long, steady stroll in the purple purple as if the whole place were plunged beneath the surface, deep and under water.

Sudden, indistinct shapes slip by. Arriving unannounced in the flickering, vanishing again around some wall, behind some door. Bodies brush against him, their warmth almost a shock. Hunting things gliding past in silence, leaving their smell in the atmosphere like memories.

Julian rounds one of the many corners and comes face to face with a numbered room. The key turns with some difficulty, the uneven light against him. Then he is in.

He takes off his leather jacket and lays it on the narrow bed. His shirt slides off his shoulders simply. His pants hit the floor with a clang, a clatter of change, keys, imprecise chinging of metal

He sits down on the cot and takes the weight of his jacket in his hand. He slides the zippered pocket open, pulls out the notebook and the photographs it guards.

Still there the far-away, comfortable sun, the ambitious tips of the mountains, the angel. The angel is further along in its flight now, closer to the far edge of the picture. The liveness of its figure alone in the air, arms spread out as if grasping at invisible things. The angel's eyes do not turn to Julian, they scan the empty space above him, yet he has moved again. What is this angel doing? What voyage has it taken on in the tiny space allowed to it?

Julian opens his notebook.

Friend

I have a story to tell. We had gathered in the home of a friend, myself, two other friends, and a woman I had never met. We came together on a very cold night, a long night, a night of an overly weak day. Snow was filling the streets when I arrived and it was with no small pleasure that I entered. We sat in a circle, we four, and took turns choosing music (a game of sorts, but not uncommon among us.) We spoke very little. Phrases of three or four words were met with silent acknowledgement from the rest of the circle. We were waiting on our blood, waiting on the leaps of our nervous systems, the eager spinning of our genetic codes. The time moved on in its way, glancing backwards occasionally. Soon it would come, each of us felt it in a quiet sureness. The lights went

out one by one. We began to project images and bits of old Super-8 film on the wall; snippets of bishops pallid in their vestments moving jerkily like a horde of waterfowl, aerial photography, cheap science fiction distorted beyond facile recognition. We rose, filling our bodies with the light from the projector, standing in the beam. Here the bishops would join us, eyes looking nowhere, secure in their sense of direction. The images of bombs, lantern light and surgery. A music began. The images move, careening across the walls, sounds of laughter, distant no one's voice. All across the room a submarine surfaced. A music grew louder - strong rhythms and a sitar screaming from the left, hysterical melody, a talk of eagles and room full of eyes rolling further back. Louder still. On the left wall a sea parts. All of our bodies began to move. I felt my own head leaning further and further back. I let it move. All about me was the darkness (sometimes, through the stream of light, I could see shapes were shaking) moving. There were rhythms of feet spinning across the floor. The music stopped, a change in the shape of the darkness. The music started again. Movement of a kind I cannot accurately describe. A movement of certainty. A movement that is unquestionable. There were hands on my back. I spun on my own centre. I imagine I passed unnoticed as I am sure the others did. Are they too writing now? Arms and legs and the patterns that they make. Music. I could see the shimmer of a profile. I was touched

once more and a melody. Music. The window filled with frost. A
hand. Every word of this true.

1:32 AM

Julian puts the notebook down and takes up the angelic photograph. Still there, unhurried as a glacier, the angel riding the distant updrafts captured with him forever. Julian turns the square of paper over.

"Toi qui sais tout, grand roi des choses souterraines".

He looks at the phrase, very briefly, before he shuts the image up in his notebook and places it on the small shelf serving as a night stand.

Julian lies back on the bed, lights a cigarette and looks up at the ravaged ceiling of the room. The ceilings in these places are always badly painted. Thin cracks spread across them. They always seem to creep out of the corners. He imagines them a floor plan of the submerged maze on the other side of the door. Traces of the million footsteps that have made their way through this place. Pilgrims' tracks leading to the endless shore of ocean.

Splintering paint finally, nothing more.

Julian smokes listening to the slow, regular passages outside his door. There are times when he likes the silence of places like this, times when the curious hush approaches something like a kind of perfection... he wonders. Times, too, when he responds to the violent explosions of sound that often happen as well. Next door to this room there are sounds being made. Soft

noises and murmurings, the sound of pleasuring bodies moving in the dark. The gsssing of flesh against flesh.

He puts out the cigarette, wraps his towel around his waist, and goes into the ultra-violet.

The simple colour changes him, he too a kind of marine animal. Silently moving among his fellows, unendingly predatory. Through the opaque corridors everyone moves slowly, with deliberation, seeming not to look at each other as they pass. Disappearing. Rounding corners, into and out of corridors, half-rooms, the twists and turns of the space's headless entrails suddenly shaken with a flash of flesh as white as the bellies of sharks, or the flanks of drowning beasts, surprising in the curious light. Glitter of eye, of tooth, of hip, of conspiring body. Then another turn, a flight of stairs or sudden door and the purple purple washes by again.

Men stop, peer into rooms as small and black as caves. Rooms with doors half opened and inviting. A body stretches, curving, its gears moving underneath its skin. Behind the next door another sits blowing smoke out of his nostrils, his appearance as sudden as a leering face in a side-show ride. The corridor turns sharply to the right.

A tall man walks towards Julian. His shoulders, wide and powerful, heaving in the moist dark. He perambulates with the current that crackles everywhere. This or J's steps are measured as a weather report. Julian feels, more than he sees, the half-glance. He turns around a corner about half-way up

the hall. Julian idles with the idea of not following him for seconds. Maybe. Then follows. He's moving none too quickly, the next turn still before him. Julian slows his step to match the tall man's own.

He turns and Julian follows.

The man has sped up, but not too much. He stops, fumbling with a key attached to his wrist and opens the door. Julian leans against the wall with a nonchalance perfected over years of lingering in the wrong places with a pornographic idea in his mind. Start another cigarette, look up towards the murk of the ceiling and wait.

Then, for no reason he can determine, Julian moves away from his door with a sudden certainty. The pull of some hallucinatory moon is working at Julian as surely as it works the current of this place.

Around the next corner something unexpected.

A door half-open floods a stretch of corridor with harsher light. Just beyond its glare, two figures feed from each other's mouth in the shared illumination. Two looming men, strong-looking, locked in embrace. Their limbs break through the purple, into the white, then fall back into shadows. Their heads, their necks, braced one against the other, roll back and forth. One limb, then another, enters the radiant radius, shining wetly, falls back again with a splash of crystal-clear obscurity. The pool of light broken with their shuddering mass. They grunt and bellow, press their bodies one against the other, their white towels discarded on the floor kicked back and forth like spray. Their cocks,

hard, toss themselves up against a partner's belly. The noise. The sound of their rutting shatters the surface quiet.

Julian watches, intrigued, wonders about joining them. Then he decides against it, their fucking, however public, is only for themselves.

Down the hall something else flickers - on, off, on.

1:47 AM

At the end of a corridor a few men sit, or sprawl, in chairs and sofas watching the procession across a television screen.

Two men, too blonde men, fuck each other with a splendid vacancy. The grunts from their churning throats murmur through the speakers and linger in the background. The volume is far too low to hear the words they utter at each other.

One of them flips his partner over to get a better angle at his ass. As he enters him the guy on his back makes a face that's almost comical, a grimace that can't quite be placed. It could be pain or something else, maybe pleasure, but Julian can't be sure. Whatever it is, he knows it's rehearsed.

The men watching don't seem to mind. One of them plays idly with his cock. As it gets hard it pokes its length out from under the towel, stirring with the weird life men's dicks always seem to have, all their own. He strokes it comfortably, ignoring the people around him, or pretending to. One or two of the others glance at him sideways, trying to look cool, uninvolved, the studied casualness of men who want sex, but don't want to look like they need it.

Julian stands there uncertain whether he should watch the screen or the men before the screen. Faced with indecision he returns to the maze.

The bodies of almost naked men are still patrolling the hallways. The stares into tiny rooms are unabated, and the light still wonderful even as the eyes adjust.

A full third of the doors lining the corridor are ajar and as he passes the activities inside flash past Julian like the video screen he was just watching.

One man lies, sweating atop another with his head thrown back.

One man kneels between the muscled thighs of another, fiercely sucking his cock.

Two men sit beside each other, jerking off, their eyes scanning the passing trade outside their open door.

A young man with a large and intricate tattoo on his back spanks another, and a broad grin spreads across his face.

And there are doors still shut, filled with unknowable activities.

One more open door. A guy lies there with his towel draped across his middle like he thought about it. As Julian pauses at his door, he looks up. Julian looks in, takes a moment or two. Steps inside.

The door is shut and a hand reaches for Julian's thigh. His hand is cooler than one might have thought. His touch feels good. He grips Julian's leg with just enough force and Julian can feel his cock beginning to press against the towel.

He puts one knee on the bed, leaving the other free for the unfamiliar hand to continue squeezing.

Julian moves the towel from the stranger's waist and finds that cock already stiff.

He tugs at the towel around Julian, just where it is folded into itself, and it falls to the floor.

Julian grabs the cock and begins to stroke it, but the man turns towards him and takes Julian's erection in his mouth. The whole world seems warm and wet. Julian's cock gets harder and harder as the stranger slides up and down with a kind of force that sends images of waves running through his brain. An array of black and white movie stills, photos that somehow have lost all of their humour. And there is just the slightest pressure of teeth and no more pictures anywhere. The top of his head, as it moves back and forth, commands attention.

Julian leans forward, wanting the man's cock in his mouth too, finds the position awkward and moves a little, rearranging his limbs. The man's hands reach for the back of Julian's head, pull him down and fill his waiting mouth. The flesh circuit sealed, closed. The taste of him is strong and a little salty, touched with sweat. Julian wonders how the shadow of his beard feels on these unknown thighs. He rubs it against him -- and the stranger's fingers tighten themselves in Julian's hair. Once again Julian wonders if he should let it grow in a little more.

The young man's mouth is busy too.

Strange, dissonant noises bubble from the two of them.

Julian feels the beading on his forehead and lets the pressure on the back of his throat just disappear. The man's mouth slides so smoothly against his skin that Julian shakes, gives off small shivers. The hair in Julian's crotch is wet with sweat and spit.

Julian shoves against his mouth a little and the man stops just short of gagging. Then his head moves down against Julian again who feels himself sliding way into the back of the open mouth. The mouth is hot and the stranger's movements almost imperceptible in their smoothness.

Julian pulls his head off of him. Pulls his cock from his mouth.

It's just too soon. He knows he can't tell this to this other man.

As Julian stands, he feels the stranger's hand on his shoulder. The man is smiling at Julian. He gives him a little kiss. Julian thinks to himself as wraps the towel around his waist -- that he is probably a nice guy. Then, again, the purple.

2:01 AM

Around and around, one corner, two, one more.

The sounds from the TV room seem dimmer than they were before. Julian is surprised at how many of the doors were shut while he spent his time locked behind one of them, but he pushes the idea from his mind.

As he turns to the left he passes a door that is still open. A man, the same one that caught Julian's eye earlier, is there. The familiar face and form waits, leaning against the wall. His towel is draped over midriff and one thigh. The

smooth, disciplined gait of the walk Julian stalked now stilled and at rest. He's scratching at his chest. Julian's eyes work, involuntarily, across him. The one there half responds. The back of Julian's jaw grinds like an industrial plant. He stops walking and looks in at the man who lifts his head.

The door shuts and locks automatically after Julian enters.

Julian steps forward into the room and stretches his arm out. The man moves forward to meet it. The feel of his chest is hot beneath the hand. His muscles hard and taut, his skin as soft as spun cotton. The man's shoulder blades move together as he arches upwards. In the back of Julian's head something massive suddenly finds itself burning.

The tall, half-bearded man squeezes Julian tightly, pressing the length of them together. Julian's cock stirs back to the life it left behind not a moment before - he can feel it filling up and moving. The man reaches down to pull on it and puts his lips to Julian's, who runs his hands slowly down his back to the place where the waist flares out and grabs at his ass, pawing at it, rubbing it hard. Behind his closed eyes Julian is certain this unknown man's lids are as tightly shut.

Julian moves his mouth into the curve of the nameless one's neck and bites gently. The breath comes out of him, hot and slow. Julian licks at it and bites again. Both of his hands grab hard at his butt, then the right pulls back and slaps lightly. The one's tongue responds by forcing its way deeper into Julian's

mouth. Julian's hand travels, slowly, upwards to pull at a nipple. Squeezing, tugging. He moans.

The two men pull apart, stare at each other in the closeness of the room with its shabby walls and overpowering smell of them, sweating.

Julian grabs him by the shoulders, kisses him once more and turns him around, bending him over the bed. His hand slides into the cleft between the man's buttocks and rubs up and down. There is the right, nearly unnoticed, sign of a shudder in his legs. Julian's fingers finds the hole and shoves against it. The ring of muscle is tight and temperamental, seems, briefly, resistant. He presses harder, twists, and it gives way. The heat inside of him is shocking, precisely as it always is. Julian pulls his finger out and reaches for the jar beside the bed. The slippery grease coats him. He slides back in almost too easily. Julian strokes at the inner walls of the one's ass, slides his finger upwards, pushes his buttons.

On the counter beside the bed he sees the foil wrapper and reaches for it with his free hand. The corner of the package tears easily between Julian's teeth. He pulls the rubber out and reaches down, constantly amazed at how easy this once complicated procedure has become. Pinch the tip and roll it down. There is no confusion left in this.

Julian keeps the motions of his finger constant, slides in another for company. The man's back arches up, his ass moving back to meet the probing. Julian thinks of cameras everywhere.

Then he lines himself up behind, grabs his cock and shoves.

The heat strikes him again. Fucking beach-front heat, sun rays in a dark place, the kind of heat that makes everyone break out in a sweat, pouring from arm pits and back, sweating the poisons of daily life out of him. Fucking heat. The inside of his body like a furnace, a fire boiling up from the base of the spine, careering up the spinal highway for an unbelievable consummation in the jiggling, nervous brain. Heat like the blasts of science-fiction hardware, heat like the sudden lust you feel for a waiter as he turns away from your table and the curve of his ass catches your eye just long enough to make you worry whether your dinner companion might have caught that certain look. Fucking heat.

His cock is buried full length in the ass of this nameless man and he pulls back to start the in and out in and out in and out. The sliding is easy, smooth and natural and the way the One squeezes his cheeks together has a sense of rhythm to it that lends itself to Julian's own.

Julian leans forward over his back and slides his hands around to feel the One's chest, grab at his nipples. A sound comes out, so he turns his head to kiss him again, fills his mouth with tongue.

He fucks him, starting slowly where it's comfortable, back and forth with the easiest of tempos. The One's ass relaxes and joins.

In Julian's vortical eye there is something magnificent about the way the body beneath him moves as it pushes back. The way the flesh spills its moisture from every pore and they slap together with a sound - wet, dark melody. The way the hiss of breath forces out when he squeezes on his nipples and he makes his

ass tighten up against him. Julian finds delirium over even the memory of the rumbling sounds he heard when he entered him. The awkwardness. The pain. The heat.

The body beneath him shakes and moves just right. Julian rides him harder now keeping his eyes shut, opening them, shutting them again. The One's cock is hard when Julian reaches down to grab it and starts stroking.

Nothing matters anymore. Not the music pounding in this place, not the dangerous, swimming, wading, drowning creatures making their way through the purple on the other side of the door. Nothing.

Underneath the angel-ridden Julian the muscles of his back are like a monument from somewhere no photographer has ever found. Julian kneads at his shoulders then, unable to focus, somehow finds his way back to stroking on his hard, wet cock.

Julian's head is lost, wondering if he could love this man. Maybe. Or he might hate him. The image is shaky.

Julian runs his hands up to the One's neck. It is hard and he can feel a pulse, accelerated now, pushing life through his body. It's strange he thinks, this easy intimacy, filled with risk that passes by, ignored. Anything could happen. Strangers, strangers. Dangerous strangers. Places like this and parks and peep shows in cities all over the world where men like he, himself, meet each other. The constant thumbing of noses at everything preceding the sucking of cock. Dangerous, and we all slip deeper into the warm water and forget it all anyway.

His neck is strong, hot and racing with blood, Julian lets it go, bends forward and bites it as he thrusts back.

The One stands up straight, abrupt, and forces his ass against Julian. His arms reach back to grab him and pull him in closer. Julian lifts a leg up onto the bed and bends him over again.

Once more Julian's hand finds his cock and strokes at it harder and faster. The sounds coming from his throat now ring familiar. Ragged, hoarse and unrelated to any language Julian knows in that world outside. He fucks him rougher now, pulling out and pushing in with almost total unconcern. In and out in and out. Julian hears his answering sounds as if at a distance. His head begins to shake. He breathes, harder, faster and his teeth clamp down on each other. Now. A long, low sound comes out of him and just gets louder. Julian's hand slides up his dick once more and finds the One coming, the thick, sticky liquid pumping out warm. Then Julian comes.

He comes and all the fires in the hypothalamus blaze brighter, the trees and branches of his nervous system sizzle and cinder, the shuddering in his synapses seizes -- and stops.

He comes with a violence, an uproar, a rage like a hundred white cattle charging knee deep though marsh waters.

He comes, and he - and he - collapse together.

As they pull apart both are panting and oddly quiet.

He looks at Julian for a second, seems about to talk and then laughs.
Julian joins him and laughs.

Julian stands up, looks down at him. He reaches up and rubs his hand roughly through Julian's hair. Then the man kisses Julian as he is opening the door.

Purple purple again.

Julian walks a little slower now, turns the corners more easily.

On the way back to his room he stops suddenly. Against the wall is a large mirror and he is shocked at his reflection. The image is there, coated with something, wet, and in the sweat and straining against his body, in the mania of hands and fucking, Julian's hair has become wild, changed, is standing up on end like horns.

2:30 AM

NIDBAE The angel presiding over sacrifice, whom, Simon Magus reports, performs his office with his eyes eternally shut.

The angel still rides the insubstantial winds of its lonely skies when Julian returns to his room, is still as perfect and as ambiguous - untroubled by this place's strange silence and sudden noise. Julian dresses, more clear-headed, than when he entered. He slips the photograph and his notebook back into his pocket, and he leaves the marine passions of the baths to hail his evening's second taxi.

2:37 AM

His wallet back in his pocket, Julian walks around the outer edge of the vast, gray building and enters the loading area. He climbs the few steps that lead to a dusty concrete bay and sees Kiki, laughing animatedly with The General and an unfamiliar man.

"Hi girl," Julian greets her.

"Julian, you're here!" Kiki's full mouth opens, her face framed by a massive blonde afro that was absent earlier in the day. From the neck down she is sheathed in a shimmering blue catsuit with cut-out panels designed for intrigue. She leans forward and offers her cheek to Julian. He kisses her on both.

"Well, I'm surprised to see you guys out here in the lobby of all places."

"Just getting a little air, precious. It's unbelievably crowded in there for such an early hour," The General explains.

"Already?" Julian holds his palms, empty as a Monday afternoon alone, up in protest.

"You won't believe it," Kiki interjects. "You know André don't you?"

"No, actually. Hi, I'm Julian." He holds out his hand.

André has the kind of eyes that remind Julian of Bambi. Vast, and so liquid they seem on the verge of tears. He is dressed as simply as Julian, jeans and a form-fitting turtleneck.

"Hi. I've seen you around I'm sure. But we've never been introduced."

"Could be. But it's nice to finally meet you."

"Yeah. Thanks."

Kiki has taken Julian's elbow in her hand and is tugging him towards a pair of open metal doors. She moves quickly, the stacked heels of her shoes making muffled drumbeats on the concrete floor.

"Sweetie," she begins. "Take a good look at me would you."

Julian looks at her. Her height holding her above almost every man in any room, with the addition of the wig she passes barely inches under the low roof of the loading bay. Her body is full, rounded, impossible to ignore. The set of her jaw is as firm as it ever is and the slightest motion of the corner of her lips promises the sort of stories you couldn't wait to retell. Kiki never looks uncertain. Julian has never once suspected she was.

"You look great."

"Well it took you long enough. I couldn't imagine why you were ignoring me."

"But you introduced me to your friend."

"Oh, honey. You are just so literal minded sometimes," she looks at him quietly for a moment. "And you are keeping secrets from me."

"Hello. I'm feeling lonely." The General is waving at them as he arrives.

"You had André to keep you company."

Julian laughs out loud for the first time this evening. "Sweetie, company is people you know."

Kiki turns, deliberately, "Or people you want to know. Anyway, you are keeping secrets from us, aren't you Julian?"

He looks back at her, wondering what there was in his face that opened to his friend like a door you'd find only in dreams, told her so much about him and scattered his secrets across the floor like a waste of sequins cluttering the stage after the snow falls in an opera house. What transparency, what slip of tongue or visage? "Excuse me?"

"We will find out. And, you're not the only one with secrets anyway."

"Whatever do you mean?" Julian asks.

"That, you'll find out."

"So, who's working the door tonight anyhow."

"Sonia, you don't pay a cent," The General adds. "But I wouldn't bother going in right away. The music hit a lull."

"Really. I thought for sure you'd just gotten here." Julian leans against the sooty wall of the alcove and lights a cigarette. The walls are lined with posters and signs. The signs recall the daytime function of this space - instructions to the men and women who unload the trucks laden with goods for the businesses on the upper floors of this building. Tonight they've been covered over with Xeroxed flyers of differing sizes and colours. The edges of the red, instructive lettering bleeding out from behind the faces of manic dancers and celebrity DJs. The fat, bold fonts all but obliterated by pink, green, yellow flysheets and bills. The heavily made-up faces of graffiti artists and early 'sixties physique poses. On a

bed of fuschia photocopier paper a muscular youth in leather shorts swings a feather boa. On a background of yellow the camellia-crowned face of a chanteuse turns her indolent glance towards the world. The whole wall collaged into a new shape, an empire of inutility, the momentary vanishing of sense.

Julian smokes his cigarette slowly.

"We did actually," The General replies. " But we made a preliminary survey of the place and came back out here. Earlier, though, we stopped at Ray's studio to see his new stuff. Then we went to the pool place on the Main for a couple of games. Kiki did unusually well."

"I should always play drunk."

"Mavbe," Julian adds. "How is Ray's stuff."

The General shrugs. "It's definitely his. You can always tell his work. But there is something different about it this time. There's less anger, somehow. Less rage and more sadness. He's actually put flowers in them. It's the weirdest thing."

"Flowers? Ray?"

"Yeah, they're even divided into series on that basis. Like a series that have roses in them. One that has lilies."

"No way!"

"Definitely. And the whole mood isn't him. There's no violence. They're almost meditative."

"Weird I'll have to go see them."

Kiki suggests a return to the party. The three of them pass through the metal doors and into a long concrete hallway. Tiny lantern-like fixtures line its length and stretched all along the ceiling is a roll of Japan paper someone had painted, disconcertingly, with stars and planets. Julian idly looks at them trying to read the future in their immobility. The white paper is covered with them. Comets trailing paisley, curling tails behind them, five pointed stars, crudely outlined constellations. Some traced in magic marker, others daubed in by brush. Vast Jupiter, idle, beringed Saturn. There is the trace of charcoal, and there the patchy moment when the brush-stroke runs dry. The roof, an unobstructed heaven, passed through suddenly. These unruly asteroids confined, them too, in a narrow space - the strength of their colours shutting it in further.

At the end of the hallway a table is set up, a woman seated at it, flanked by two large men behind whom, in turn, the sound of music pulses. The woman, looking up, waves the three of them through and one of the men stamps Julian's hand.

"That was simple," says Julian.

"It gets easier every time," replies Kiki.

A huge room opens up, a towering cube, interrupted periodically by iron girders, iron cross-beams. Tall scaffolds dangle spot lights, spinning their unpredictable courses from corner to corner. Their positioning seems awkward, the intervals between them haphazard. Over the dance floor coloured fixtures

and two broad mirrored balls are suspended. The room is filled with dancing people and with music. And it is the music that most animates the place.

Julian scans the immediate area, finds a handful of friendly faces and a host of strangers.

"The regular crowd hasn't arrived yet," he says.

"It's not three," replies Kiki, pushing a blonde curl away from her face.

"Oh, yeah."

"It's none too far away though," The General adds. "God, I hope somebody interesting arrives soon."

"I'm sure they will," Julian turns back to his friends. "Where's the nearest bar?"

"Over there," Kiki points to a corner just right of the entrance and the three of them move towards it and order drinks.

The music here is louder even than that at the club he left almost two hours ago so Julian makes little effort at conversation. It rushes through the room, an antinomic gravity, pulling people on and off the dance floor. The mobs of people rushing forward and back, some starting to dance with a maniacal energy, others with the pointedly controlled movements of the conscious knowledge that others are watching. Some climb onto the tops of speakers wanting simultaneously to watch the mass below and draw their eyes to them, still others pull themselves atop the stage erected across the room. The movement off the floor is different, slower, more deliberate. Young men peel their

sweaty tee-shirts off and wipe the beads from their foreheads with them. Clusters of friends carefully place their hands on the shoulders of strangers guiding them out of their path to the bar. The music manipulating the unsteady motions of humanity, two-four, four-four voodoo drumming throwing itself out of the speakers like a creature surprised at being unchained. Left and right, back and forth.

The General suggests a tour of the room, a tour filled with a summing up of the attendees attire, to which Kiki agrees. Julian can not hear the invitation at first, his ears filled with the music and his mind elsewhere for a moment. It is repeated for him a second time.

"I think I'll just hang out here for a bit and get my bearings," he gestures with his bottle. "I haven't quite moved beyond arrival yet."

"It's your party, Girl. Enjoy it your way." The General waves at him as he takes Kiki by the arm and moves off.

Julian stands by the bar, the cool of his drink in his hand, and an unexpected anticipation passing over him, the room, its resonance and soundings.

2:58 AM

HATIPHAS The spirit named by Apollonius of Tyana as the genius of finery.

NUCTEMON An angel said to oversee the celestial choirs and of whom it is written "his face descends from the celestial presence radiant as gold and his vestments shineth like snow."

The room is a tempest, showers of sweat and flashes of coloured lightning. A passion, its strange attractions and repulsions moving men and women towards men and women, away from women and men. The room is a conjuration making something out of light and colour, calling up spirits for the knowledge they might bring with them. The room is the end of a world, a marvelous noise that can only end in silence.

3:03 AM

In his pocket, Julian can feel the brushing of feathers passing across the soft skin of his thighs, a secret. A sign.

3:04 AM

Julian sips from his beer, almost concentrating. There is a hesitancy in the air around him. It slips through the spaces left between the chorus and the bridge. It moves like a reptile, slowly, deliberately waiting for its opening. Julian watches it, listens.

Then the room vanishes in a torrent of blistering white light.

He throws his hands to his eyes, trying to shut it out, feels the tears filling them. His eyes blinded and wet. The whole world consumed in sudden flash.

Then beer splashing onto his cheek, tipped over in the abrupt motion. Behind his hands and lids now, Julian sails through a shimmering red, vibrant, alive, in pain. Nothing left but a wash of white bleeding into the space between face and brain. Eyes shut, rolling around in their decentred orbits. When he opens them again the whiteness is gone and a brilliant pool of spotlight is lying at his feet. Then, it sweeps away.

Across the room, high atop a scaffold, eyes coming back, Julian sees a hand wave, cutting its way through the other coursing lights, gesturing. A hand he recognizes. He moves from the bar, making his way through the press, the pull and shove.

3:11 AM

No ladder before it has ever been this tall, Julian is certain. He is convinced it ends at a tarnished door to paradise, and almost sees a procession up and down. It stretches upwards, straight and narrow. Too intimidating. He puts one hand on a rung at about chest level, one foot on the bottom rung. He clenches every nerve together like a rubber ball and sees himself throwing it straight up, then begins to follow. One hand, one foot. One hand, one foot. He can not look down, his morbid fear of heights conspires with the chemicals in his blood, relentlessly plotting against composure. An awareness of his ascent hammers at him just as he reaches the wooden platform standing in for heaven.

"Hi, baby," says a voice from behind a proffered beer. "Welcome to my little nest."

Julian takes the offered drink. "Hi, handsome. Nice view from up here."

"You made it up in one piece."

"Uh huh. Just barely." Spread out below them, people are moving in the coloured lights, dancing, sweating, adding their perfume and their presence to the celebration. They are beautiful and dressed in costumes. They are making elusive identities for themselves, fairie people that will disappear with the morning.

"Did you just get here?"

"Yes, actually. I was at the Cockpit earlier. Ted was there, in prime form."

Adam makes a face. The general dislike of Ted is no mystery to Julian who wraps his friend in a hug and kisses him on the back of the neck. Adam reaches back to run his fingers through Julian's hair.

"The party's starting slowly, but it seems to be picking up a bit now. The main crowd will arrive soon enough," he says.

Julian sips his beer and watches as Adam swings the spotlight around the crowd. In the semi-darkness, Adam's light casts momentary brightness, pixillating, stop motion photography, fossilizing people lost in their bodies for a time. It is strange to see them immobile in their motion. Men and women are peeling off pieces of their clothing, feeling their perspiration against them as the music rushes. They are all here for the pleasure they can share. In the insistent

eye of the spot every one of them experiences a momentary rush, like a sudden transient stardom. Adam occasionally fixes the light on one or another. Usually some impossibly beautiful body, glistening in the attention he gives it. He has a habit of noticing pretty things, of arching his eyebrow at their passing, as if all the world's rotation hung upon this momentary vision. He is rare, my friend Adam, Julian thinks.

Julian sits down on the stained platform leaning his back against the metal framework behind him and closes his eyes briefly. The music is loud, but here above the speakers it is not as physically insistent. He can hear it as something far away... the sound the ocean might make crashing into the shore on its other side, the sound of the unfamiliar child crying in the apartment upstairs, where no child lives. It pulses. It moves in circles for him. It is a presence that reassures beyond confirmation. The rhythm he feels as it shakes the framework of the platform is delicious. It arouses a fear that is almost sexual. Like the feeling that rides him, nightmare, when he walks the dampened sidewalks in the hours between dancing and dawn. Determinedly padding about, searching in the shadows for a furtive, frenzied embrace. It is forceful like a man, this music, grating and imposing and edged. There is no escape and no mercy here...only lightshows and a manic collage of sounds. He drains the last of the beer and helps himself to another. Cold, wet and necessary.

"Alone in your head..."

"Aren't I always?" Julian smiles obliquely at him.

"More often than not. And just what are you thinking about this time?"

"Angels. Simple angels. The kind with magnificent blue eyes that hover over city landscapes. The type that bring us messages out of heaven. The kind that make everything impossible flesh for just a second... you know the type, darlin'. The kind of angel that wears its nakedness like a trumpet note."

Adam, through his luxurious black lashes, looks at him crookedly. Julian knows with a comfortable certainty that his friend may not know what he is talking about at any given moment, but he always understands. He swings the light around, flashing it in Julian's face again. Once more, no world but a glamour of white. Then it is gone, and everything is black. Black.

"I hear you," he says. And Julian laughs.

The world comes back slowly. Adam is swinging the light around, singling people out, making a pattern. A movie turned inside out. The isolation of these people in the spot makes a frame. They are conscious of it and enjoy. They act. In the magical sphere of white light they abandon their humanity. They are luminous as gods. There is something in them that calls out for sacrifice. For blood spilt. And they are dancing like bacchantes in the frenzy of the wailing music. Moving like a mythic narrative far below. Julian and Adam, perched overhead, first movers, spreading the light over primordial chaos.

"Check that out," Julian says, gesturing.

A young man has climbed onto the bar and is peeling off his shirt. He is young and strong and exultant in it. He shines as he moves to the music,

dancing confidently, a spirit on him. The circle of light wheels like a hunting bird across the room. It bathes him, brilliant, and he moves more vehemently. Something sparkles as the whiteness passes over him. A glimmer on his chest. A gleam. There is a slender gold ring through his left nipple, an archaic sign of things to come.

Then, Adam, promiscuous psychopomp, swings the light away.

"So what's with the angels, Julian?"

"It's really hard to explain."

"Just give it a shot."

"I don't know. I guess I just want to believe that there's something looking out for these people."

"There sure ought to be."

3:26 AM

Julian sits with his friend for some time, talking, drinking, taking his turn churning the room with light. Below them, the room keeps filling up with new arrivals. Knots of friends claiming more and more of the empty zones of concrete flooring visible only from the lighting platforms. Bright things drift through the growing crowd and the steady hum of hundreds of conversations begins to rise under the music.

"Well, I think it's time for me to return to earth," Julian says. He kisses his friend good-bye and begins his uneasy descent of the ladder.

3:39 AM

JELIEL The angel said to intercede and render victory to those attacked unjustly.

Back among the party-goers, Julian makes his way as best he can. The flashing hellos and eyes, glasses littered in corners everywhere, the hands grabbing his sleeve, stopping him for a word, mark his way around the room.

The crowded room hasn't changed in its visible contours and circulations and yet something about it is different. The music seems to be fading, its compulsive volume curling up into itself and settling down to sleep. And then a little more. The random coursing of the floodlights are more purposeful now, arcing and racing along the walls till, one after another, they settle on an empty spot on the stage - its sole occupant a microphone stand.

Almost completely gone now, the music is a ghostly hum underneath the rustle of human motion and whispering.

A massive paper screen rises up behind the stage and, dwarfed, a woman approaches the microphone. She is dressed in a black strapless evening gown, slit to allow her to walk more easily. Her hair is combed back, brilliant with some hairdressing product, a white flower behind the right ear. The blonde wig was a mistake, Julia : thinks, as he recognizes Kiki, a secret shared at last.

Kiki stands before the mike as the sound in the room subsides. Then her red lips part and the song begins. It is in a language utterly unknown to Julian,

one rich in rhyming words and assonances. The trillings rise, birds of sound, to the warehouse's cavernous roof and find their freedom, never to return again. Kiki is perfectly still, only her lips moving, her voice. Her face is smooth, her shoulders square. Her eyes might as well be as closed as those of the dancers earlier for all the notice they betray of the nation gathering before her. Kiki sings in a voice undamaged by tremour or faltering. She sings words that are unrecognizable and filled with passion. Round vowels and slithering sibilants leaving her throat with love, and the memory of love. Julian begins to create meanings for these strange words - desperate to share in the glory of sound. The low moaning of the Ohs are trapped in Julian's narratives of lust. The vibrato of those phrases hesitating between Aahs and Ees Julian weaves into mournings for the friends he's lost, and those he fears to lose.

Behind Kiki the screen has begun to fill with pink light. The image of a sunrise appearing -- soon replaced by a slide of rushing water. The water slips from the screen as well, surrendering its place to a wall overgrown with weeds and wild roses.

Kiki sings on, immobile in the circle of light. Rigidly upright she overwhelms the room with stories that Julian reinscribes again and again in the cluttered hallways inside himself. Tyranny and treason, tearful good-byes, blood let in an angry moment. He has no idea what any of it means and Kiki's unflinching posture, her unflawed delivery gives nothing to him.

Behind her now a field of wheat is pushed aside by the invisible wind. A shadowed human shape before a rain-streaked window.

Julian watches her, almost a stranger at this moment, singing her thousand secrets that no one understands. Her voice rising and falling, unconnected to any immediate sense. Her posture, erect, giving lie to the incomprehensible assertions of the song, filled as it is with longing and vibrato. Sound, an impenetrable thing around her head. Julian looks at her for the first time again.

A gargoyle glowering from a cathedral's ledge. A carved pumpkin grinning out its jack-o-lantern scowl.

There is more and more. Kiki's throat opening - a door, a store, an annotated book, marked up by hand, illegible. The song rising and rising above the woman's unflinching, distant gaze. Kiki grows with the fullness of her voice.

A crown of antlers silhouetted against the sky.

Kiki wraps her hands around the microphone stand, her first motion since she began and bows a little closer. Her voice drops slightly, settling into a whispered tone. Julian hears the intake of breath as she sings, then the slow release of it, lifting the sound down to the anticipatory ears. In Julian's mind there is only the earliest hours of morning now and the time to think. Behind her the rain-streaked window again, and the pink of dawn. Kiki whispers, whispers, whispers until she can be heard no more and all the lights, everywhere, blink out

briefly. When they return, accompanied by the music, the stage, immaculate screen behind it, is empty.

3:46 AM

By the corner of the platform a group of people Julian knows stand and compare their outfits. Their long gestures are leaves on a hurrying wind, turning around for the delight of colour. The one flashes a round-mouthed "O" to the other, transported by the epiphanic curl of a belt-buckle. Hands on hips they unveil their private iconographies for each other, rapturous in the joys of self-creation. The postures of unfolding possibilities.

Another had draped himself in yards and yards of red velvet. It towers above his head, wrapped around a hidden scaffolding, coils around his neck and chin, a lustrous wimple, and falls, cascading to the floor. In his right hand an evening purse swings and smolders unconcernedly, scenting the air around the group with wisps of frankincense. Beside him, his friend's spare form is trapped, restrained by the severity of the black rubber garments that strain at the pressure of his joints. An image of a copulating cardinal in the moist embrace of some unworldly amphibian runs through Julian's mind, another film, another unpursued project.

Julian is making his way to the square of ordinary light that marks the entrance to the washroom. Strangely, the knot of people in front of it do not form

a line. An acquaintance nods at Julian as he arrives. He smiles back, squeezes his shoulder in greeting. Kisses a woman he knows, newly a red-head.

The lighting in the toilet is harsh. The form in the mirror as Julian passes by is less than pleasing so he ignores it.

In the stall, Julian drains his bladder and a tiny shudder works its way down his spine. His mind clears for a moment, filled only with the physical release. He shakes his penis off and puts it back in his jeans.

Then, unexpected as a summer shower, a doubt glides across his mind and he pulls the enigmatic image from his pocket.

The same sky and mountain tops, but the angel has moved once more, reached the far side of the picture. A miracle, a prisoner dream straining, now, at the limits of its own possibility. How, Julian wonders? New images arise, the vandals at the gate with wild beards and havoc in their eyes, the last of the tears to greet some old, old memories. The angel, arms spread and something like a smile on his lips, free and flying under the immobile sun. Legs almost bent, wings filled with the wind fluttering at the end of likelihood.

This angel impossible, beautiful, untouchable under the semi-gloss surface of his image world. Julian pulls it to his mouth, kisses the cool surface once again in the narrow confines of the toilet stall. Fills himself with the photograph and feels himself wanting to cry. There is no room anywhere here for angel and yet he wants to make that space. But what does one man remake a world with?

On the back of it now, "*Guérisseur familial des angoisses humaines*".

The photograph's sun shines icily, the angel for the moment is still. Julian returns the picture to his pocket, runs his fingers through his hair and leaves the stall.

3:58 AM

The General and Kiki, back in her wig, are among the people congregating around the entrance to the washrooms when Julian exits. He joins them.

The General is talking animatedly and Julian hears the word fabulous used as punctuation. "Julian, thank God, you made it past the vestibule. Did you see Kiki?"

"Oh, yeah. Girl, you were truly great. It was worth keeping secret."

Kiki curtsies, the massive wig dipping closer to the ground. "Thank you, thank you both. I haven't sung in years, but when Stephane brought it up as he slipped off to sleep a while back... well who could say no when his voice had the sleepy, sexy edge to it..."

Julian shrugs, the motivation clear, then asks, "What language were you singing in Kiki?"

Kiki giggles and answers elliptically, identifying the song's source as a passage from a well known work of fantastic fiction by an author known for

creating entire languages to lend reality to the cultures he creates. She explains that she and a friend had set the words to music "just to amuse ourselves."

Julian finds himself without an answer but is spared by the General's interruption. Kissing Kiki's hand repeatedly, he manages to squeeze a question out. "And where have you been, Julian?"

"Oh I took a little walk and went up top to visit with Adam for a while."

"And how is he."

"Just fine. All alone up there with a case of beer and an unobstructed view of the evening's proceedings. Couldn't be happier."

"She does like to watch."

"Yes, indeed. So have you two been staying out of trouble."

The look on The General's face turns blank, as if the question made absolutely no sense. Kiki is twirling one of the blonde curls on her massive afro and looking around idly.

"Well," The General begins. "You know what we're like. We do our very best to avoid tricky situations, but sometimes they just seem to find us."

"And what managed to find you tonight."

"Nothing, really just some dumb, drunk guy who relentlessly hit on Kiki. He was so persistent that she had to surrender to his charms and lure him to the abandoned area off behind the stage."

"And?"

"Kiki..." The General inquires.

"Well, we needed to find someplace private for our little tryst after all. And pretty quick too I might add, since I did have a costume change to get done."

"Yeah."

"Well as you know, this isn't the first party in this space. And I have waitressed at some of the previous ones, so I'm pretty familiar with the layout of this space." As she speaks she unconsciously pulls her shoulders back. Julian is reminded of another time Kiki found herself confronted with an unwelcome suitor at one of her own parties and bodily dragged him to the front door of her apartment by the back of his sweater informing him that not only did he have to leave now but that she expected a formal letter of apology. She got one and later dated the fellow briefly. "So I showed him to big metal door, opened it demurely and told him 'after you.' Then I shut it. It only opens from this side. Oh, and then there was all this hammering and yelling, that I doubt anyone not standing right beside the door will hear over the music. So I came back to rejoin my friends. There are about a million miles of twisting corridors beyond that door. Eventually, I imagine, he'll find his way to the exit to the parking lot out back. But, I don't think he'll be bothering anyone else this evening."

"Well, done, girlfriend, the first of this evening's two triumphs for you" Julian says extending his hand. Kiki shakes it and flashes a dazzling smile.

"Thank you. Thank you."

Both Julian and The General are applauding as Kiki takes bow after bow in perfect time to the music coming from the speakers. Behind her the crowd has

thickened even more as the revel climbs its way to its zenith, trailing these partygoers behind it like a mother does her rambunctious children. Then, Kiki steps forward linking her arms through her friends' and leads them to the dance floor.

4:04 AM

It is darker over the dance floor, the overheads dimmed to allow people a greater sense of anonymity. Here the music strikes into Julian like a sucker punch, all of the speakers aimed directly at an invisible point at the building's centre. All around him people are dancing. Though Kiki and The General arrived on the floor with him, they have moved out a little finding their own places, pulled under the rushes of physical movement, bodily sensation.

Again the storm, the passions and magic, the end of the world. All around him Julian sees faces - vacant, self-absorbed - nothing but the mysteries leaving their sinews to assail them. The men and women dance, closed to everything around them, they ride the joys of the electrical impulses racing through their nerves and ganglia. All of these shut eyes hiding something from him. The vague smiles and movements of hips articulate. Julian dances alone, his eyes open, looking at the radiant figures around him, losing himself in the overpowering music.

The room is a prophecy, its flashes and echoes outside of history somehow.

Everywhere the press of shiny bodies turning themselves around faster and faster, shaking off language, thought, causality, pushing themselves forward into a darkened space where they encounter the steady throb of their own heartbeat.

The room is an opening abyss, hundreds of shaking bodies falling into it, exiting, on the far side with an inability to tell the story of their fall.

Julian dances till he feels the sweat gather at the small of his back, the tactile pull of his tee-shirt clinging to his skin, the drip from his hair running along the curve behind his ear. He looks around him, The General falling into the arms of a man in a red and white striped shirt who kisses him and shoves him upright once again. Two women emptying bottled water into each other's mouth. Kiki has vanished. Someone that seems familiar standing on a speaker throwing confetti into the crowd. The tumultuous music spinning across him, a voice singing, the words "knowing how now," rushing, a tremor, across the changeling room.

4:17 AM

Julian leaves the dance floor, stands against a concrete pillar. He lights a cigarette and watches. Across the room he can see the dim shadow of Adam on his tower, turning his light across the floor. Adam sends the beam scurrying through the dancing bodies, bounces it off one of the mirror balls filling the room with a shower of white sparks, ethereal as fireflies. He pauses, points the

massive beam against the white wall far to the back and leaves it there. The unmoving circle of light stands lonely and sinister for the longest moment. Seconds tick by as the spot casts its round bulk against the wall. Then, suddenly, an inky mass crawls into the circle, curls itself up, sprouts a pair of long, narrow ears. The ears begin to wiggle as Adam manipulates his shadow rabbit. A surge of laughter spreads through the crowd as the bunny disappears.

The black mass enters from the left now, a beak appears, a forehead rises from the top a tiny space of light defining an eye in the centre of it. The duck moves its beak in silent quacking motions.

Next, from the right, a long narrow shape, widening at the end to a flattened head, the darting of finger, place holder of a tongue. The wedge-like head turns back on its obscure body, looks behind it, flickers its finger tongue rapidly. At last, the snake, too, disappears.

The circle is empty again, violent terror of white presiding over the noisy room. Two fingers form a smaller circle at its centre, waiting, and another one, extended, appears, to penetrate it over and over again.

The mass on the dance floor explodes in whistles, laughter, clapping of hands as Adam shuts his spotlight off. Then Julian feels a pair of hands on his waist.

"Hi, Sailor. New in town?" The voice is familiar.

Harris' full lips are puckered when Julian spins around. Surprised, he kisses him. "Hey, Harris, I thought you weren't going to come tonight!"

"I wasn't actually... I worked on the Horsemen for hours. You know, just tinkering around, adding bits, taking off something else. Then I had a few beers and it was three all of a sudden and I wasn't tired. So I figured I'd check the big event out. Everyone's here it looks like. People I haven't seen in months and months."

"I guess. I've sort of been avoiding everyone. Spent some time up on the lighting platform with Adam for a while."

"I figure he's the one responsible for the shadow puppets, right?"

"Absolutely. I'm glad you made it, Harris. You don't get out enough."

"I get out plenty."

The two stand quietly for a while watching people float past them, listening to the hints of conversations as they pass by. Cut out bits of gossip and unburdened confessions. The roman candle recriminations that lovers set upon each other. Whispered nonsenses turning on the vapourous air like seed pods whose growth is as unpredictable as it is hoped for.

"Are you still thinking about angels?"

"I am actually. Can't seem to stop," Julian replies.

"They're fascinating creatures. That's for sure."

Julian casts back in his memory to the talk he shared with Harris earlier, filled with ancient books and curious words. Alchemical hieroglyphs drifting across his friend's loft and the treasures of a busy life filled with utterly useless

bits of information. Six-winged seraphs and the heavy hooves of cherubim racing across the now imagined scene.

Harris' profile is set, seems concentrated to Julian. He is looking out at the dance floor, watching with an intentness out of all proportion to the scene. In his eyes, the flashing colours are reflected.

"So, Harris, what's up?"

"Nothing. It hasn't been that long since I last saw you. What could have happened?"

"Sure. I know. But what I meant was what's up in the sense of have you thought of any more interesting stuff about angels?"

"Oh, sorry. Don't see how I could have missed the obvious point of your question." Harris's face is broad, his chin heavy and square. He is suppressing a smile that causes his mouth to twitch in a way that makes Julian want to kiss him again. "Actually I sort of haven't stopped thinking about them myself. I went back to my shelves and found an illustration in an old book where this guy is in a lab or something. There are all these candles, books, beakers and stuff and there's a bunch of symbols painted on the floor. Through the windows you can see some fields and forests outside. He's holding a book in one hand and sticking his head through what looks like a wall of stars, literally, that's positioned in the middle of the room. It's like he's passing out of one space and into another. On the other side of the wall of stars there are a number of angels. The guy is

holding the hand of one them and the angel's other hand is moving through the wall, part of it is in the guy's lab."

"And..."

"Well, well. And... The problem here is you're asking me to read the whole image for you. There are hundreds of different ways to read something like that."

Harris gives himself over to the talking. Even in the hollow, noise-filled room, his voice is clear. Harris' enthusiasm is aroused now, as it always is when he gets to handle, crow-like, a shiny bit of obscurantist learning. He speaks, his hands pumping up and down in accompaniment of every theme, every point, with excitement in the face of ambiguity. He tells Julian how the illustration, he is uncertain whether it was a wood print, is unclear. The viewer can not tell whether the man is being pulled into the world of the angel, or if the angel is being drawn into ours. Harris finds this vitally important.

What he finds most fascinating is how the angel seems so intimately associated with the boundary between the worlds. Behind him, in the world beyond the wall of stars, there is a vast expanse of vague, cloudy shapes - things that seem only to be taking on form. The angels, congregating near the divide, are the only things whose shapes are clearly delineated, in sharp contrast to the surroundings of the man's laboratory. There everything is sharply edged, real, present. Every item is recognizable and convincing.

Harris goes on.

"It's like the angels mediate between these things, Julian. Like they were the go-betweens, hovering at the edges of the liminal. Like in some way, they defined the boundary itself. And I'm not talking about just the boundary between the divine and the human - though certainly that's a very traditional, canonical idea. Because the things behind the angel in that world on the other side of the divide didn't seem to be stand-ins for god, they weren't formless or transcendent in any of the regular ways one might think of god. They seemed more semi-formed sort of."

Harris is in motion now, spinning ideas out around him, jumping from subject to subject easily, pouncing almost. Again, he throws out unheard of authors and forgotten books with a tranquilizing familiarity, his field of reference vast and his face beaming. Always coming back, time and again, to the angel waiting at the boundary and always unable to specify just what that effervescent division was, Harris insisting that it was the very uncertainty of the space that was so important.

"What is really crucial is the clear relationship between these angels and the movement into form, Julian. That's what I think is so interesting. They seem to be the things that give form, or lead to it somehow. They play a role like the imagination in some ways. Creating new things, new categories of being"

Julian is standing very close to Harris. He can feel the warmth of his breath on his skin, smell the beer he's been drinking. Harris' hair has been plastered to his forehead by sweat and his shirt is clinging to him. Julian thinks

himself at a loss to respond. He says, "But what about the guy, the human guy, isn't he also passing between those two worlds, just as much as the angel is?"

Harris falls silent for a moment. He looks directly at Julian, then turns away briefly, as if casting back into his mind for something. "Yeah, he is, isn't he. I sort of left that out of my thinking about this. How really weird. I guess I'll have to get back to you on that." Then he is silent again.

4:36 AM

Harris lingers with Julian a while longer, talking, often awkwardly, about other things. He shifts a bit in his spot as he announces that he might depart. He asks Julian if he'd like to drop by his place for breakfast when he goes home. Julian says he might, but it will depend on what time he leaves the party. Harris says something else as he walks away, but the sound disappears, dissolving in the surrounding noise as it leaves his mouth.

5:06 AM

Julian watches Harris make his way to the exit, then turns toward the bar.

He orders another beer and sips at it slowly. The crowd around him is so thick now that he stops even trying to process its rampant activity. Clusters of people, glistening fabric and talk flow by him unremarked on, unremarkable. The tatters of enchantment, too common here to invite comment.

Rousing himself from all of this, he leaves the bar to look for his friends.

Julian completes his first circuit of the space, without finding anyone, just as, unexpectedly, the lights begin to dim once more and the music fade. On the dance floor the revelers slow their movements, waiting and uncertain of just what is entering their midst. Julian hears the slow beat of drums.

5:12 AM

MELEK T'AUS The peacock angel.

The room has surrendered to gray and the soft remnants of the last of the song. Black on the stage.

5:14 AM

The drum beats begin to grow, in volume, number, rhythm.

The daybreak's pink flushes across the screen again and fades as quickly, contracting into a tighter and tighter circle until there is only the tiniest point of light at the screen's centre, rosy and negligible. Now, a haze of red begins to spread across the room pushing the gray lustre from its path. Still only black on the stage and the nucleus of pink disappearing.

The drums multiplying. Behind the screen, at last, something casts a glow and a few misshapen shadows begin to appear.

Julian can not recognize them comfortably. Some shades bear the rough outlines of the human form yet have a surplus of arms or legs - hypertrophied heads - or vast, misshapen protuberances joined to their backs or abdomens. The gathering shadows lurch back and forth behind the screen, clumping together in the outlines of communication, chatting, introductions. One or two split away, scamper across the space sequestered in the frame of paper screen. They mill, they shuffle absolutely silent for the time. They are ambulating monsters, beasts beyond the pale of Julian's judgment at this time and place. Julian can not look away.

More of them arrive, bearing burdens above their heads whose shapes are more remote than even their own.

They pass these objects back and forth. Some are round, others oblong with lengthening spindles depending from their undersides. Julian hears a distant rumble and creak further back.

Their numbers growing, their movements more maniacal, they scuffle back and forth with their charges. They bump one another and begin to grunt and utter half words. The crowd of them begins, at length, to approach the far surface of the screen, their shadows life-sized and their flesh pressing against the boundary, pushing it outwards. The paper strains with a menace it ought not possess. The rhythm of the drums swells too as the room bursts with a membranous red. Then the first of the tears appears.

The paper buckles and gives way to a pair of fingers, then a hand - blue - and tipped with long, tapering nails that beckon as they make their way through the screen. Another tear - the appearance of a glittering, golden leg. Then another and another. Finally the screen gives as the horde of creatures on its far side forces a huge hole open in its centre and they come tumbling through. The sound of a flute adds itself to the beating drums.

Julian sees dozens of them, all but naked, clad in gauzy, gossamer loin cloths, their bodies garishly painted - blue, yellow, violet, red, orange, green, gold and silver - all tremulous with delight. They stretch themselves out, shake their arms and legs, jump out and down. More are pouring through the opening carrying huge, coloured eggs and what seem like the carcasses of lambs. Many have great humps on their backs, or wear vividly coloured bustles. Some have artificial arms attached to their torsos, jiggling obscenely with each movement.

More than half of the hallucinatory beings have heads of animals growing from their shoulders. On-stage, a menagerie moves, it pitches forward briefly, finds its feet and learns to dance. Julian sees the almond eyes of cats, rimmed in silver and there, above them, pointed ears. The elegantly arched necks of camels tower above their disordered companions. Again, wild dogs and jackals prowl the edges and perimeters. Dappled leopards in ebony and gold cruise among the heavily-maned lions tossing back their heads to roar.

So much movement, insurmountable, defying real observance. Julian can only see.

Two naked men pass a robin's blue egg, large as themselves, back and forth. They are seated cross-legged at the front of the stage and do not look down at the eyes following each of their movements. Behind them a cat-woman stretches left arm forward, right leg behind. The stage transforms itself, a centre of vision, a zone of apparitions. A circus of nude new beings discovering undefiled rapture. In the red warmth surrounding them they are making something unforeseen and fluid - unforeseeable. Shivering amid drums and flutes.

A short gold woman, bristling with limbs, leaps time and again, trying to reach the shorn pink lamb that two mer hold up above her head. She falls back to earth, hands full of air.

A lion man arches his back, the strands of his mane moving, twining one around another. Topaz eyes glowing in the twilight. The strands of his mane falling over his shoulders, making an alphabet in patterning on his naked skin. Each tendril signifying something. Midnight sun. First fruits of the virgin harvest. An unexpected lover. The lexicon of soothsayers spelled out in the new-born characters.

Julian watches as their numbers grow, grow more agitated. Movements more violent, sounds more visceral. Arms and legs flashing through the gloom like blades. Heads shaking atop gyrating torsos. Two, one blue, one yellow, shove into each other's stomachs until yellow falls to the ground, arms and legs akimbo. At odd intervals individuals begin to jump up and down repeatedly,

howling as they do. In his entrails, Julian feels a motion, a response. The creaking, rumbling seems louder now.

From somewhere in the centre of the crowds three more undead sheep are elevated into the vermilion light. All the gathered monsters fall motionless and the tone of the flutes rises higher, the rhythm of the drums accelerates. From somewhere deep in their throats the now still gamboling werebeasts begin to hum, or hiss, or growl. Then one by one they begin to raise their arms into the air.

Then the first among them jumps.

Then a second. And the next. Julian steps back as more and more begin to throw themselves upwards, fingers coiled, forearms tense - clawing at the lambs held overhead. They jump up from their places crouched, or sprawled, one atop the next, on the cool surface of the stage. The muscles of their legs bunching, straining, pushing them into the air. One, two, three they rush up, claw, come back to earth. Jackal, cat, leopard pounce, miss, try again. A pair of wild dogs hurl themselves up with unexpected strength from their unnatural all fours. A camel woman heaves her way into the gloom, no more successfully. The rumbling still grows behind the pipes and drums.

Julian is sweating far more freely now than earlier. The sweat running into his eyes blurring everything before him.

The roars from the stage are louder too. Behind the scene a towering shadow is growing greater on the wall.

Now, in wash of colour sprayed before his tearing eyes Julian sees a naked woman, her cat's head dented, sink her hands into one of the almost inaccessible sacrifices. She grabs on, dangling from it for just one moment, then pulls it to the ground with her. As it falls he sees a gash open in its side and a tumult of red powder stain the woman's skin - a scar of cinnabar. The sound that greets the flood is just as red - shrill - enduring. Julian wants to step back again out of the way of the chill wail. She hits the floor with an audible thud, pulling the lamb on top of her, pushing her hand into the open hole. Other creatures force themselves atop.

One of the other sheep has been unsettled. It strikes the floor and is overwhelmed as well.

The cat-like woman has pulled a mottled thing from her trophy's cavity. It is brown and red and squishes in her fingers. A naked lion is pulling yards of scarlet streamers out of the same hole. Tied up in it are other bits of meat.

Behind them a heavy-breasted camel is tug-of-warring with a six armed woman for possession of the third lamb. It stretches and stretches and stretches becoming semi-opaque at the centre and Julian sees dozens of irregular shapes turning around inside. It too snaps. An ending greeted with a guttural chorus of celebration. The high ceilings, the concrete pillars have begun to echo with the screams.

The naked thighs are streaked with other colours now, the shining metallic masks are stained. Julian sees the pendulous bottom lip of a camel dripping

blood as it claws open the hump on his neighbour's back extracting one of the blue eggs.

And then it heaves into view, pulled up a hidden ramp behind the stage - a gilded behemoth, a tinsel Trojan horse pulled into the melee by six men, shaved from head to toe.

The enormous horse is mounted on wheels and spray painted gold - off-colour in the crimson light. As it rears into view the unsensed activity almost stops. Then one of the spotted leopard lycanthropes leaps forward, pulls himself over the naked porters shoulders and dives through the belly of the beast. The wound opens up and a stream of something much like blood pours out of it.

The liquid stream runs down covering everyone, porters, cats, dogs, camels, tousled lions alike in a viscous coat. They dive and dance in it - wrap each other up in the moistened streamers. They rend the bits of meat and array each other's nakedness with them. Julian watches as the bloody flood pours down, covering the devastated stage and running over its edges, threatening the crowd around the floor.

Then he can watch no more. He turns his heels and runs to the nearest egress, his ears full of rumbling, his eyes wet with sweat and something more.

5:32 AM

T'AUS MELEK The peacock angel.

The hallway is gray, stone, unbusy. Julian finds a flight of white-painted concrete stairs, a black iron handrail. He ascends two steps at a time with his breath short, his chest heaving. One floor, another, another. A metal door ready to swing open.

5:34 AM

ISRAFEL The Angel of the Day of Judgment. From head to toe, the chroniclers write, this angel is covered in hair and tongues, each one ceaselessly praising the omnipotent creator of all things in a thousand languages. It is said that every night he, or she, draws near to hell, unseen, and weeps for the damned and that, entrusted to his, or her, care is a mighty trumpet, carved from the horn of a ram, in whose coiling chambers the souls of the dead and the unborn alike are at rest.

The air on the roof is cool, still almost silent. Only the faint sounds of distant cars find their way up to the city's ceilings. Julian is as alone as he could ever imagine being.

A dull thumping moves underneath his feet, and a metallic noise. The disquieting carnival is over, he thinks, the music turned back on. Down below, the dancing rebegins. Here, resolutely outside that artfully articulated room, the towers of the city are dressed in gray and tight-lipped. Their massive bulks silent, the workers drained from them for their week-ends among families. The moon is out of the sky, whose black is streaked with gray and blue, the slightest hint of pink far to the east. The shredded clouds sail by in the yet-absent morning's first wind.

Julian moves to the building's side and seats himself on the low wall that surrounds the edge of the roof. He thinks of his friends still in attendance at the party, of The General laughing, as he does, with his face turned away, of Kiki, too, smiling and accepting compliments on her performance, the sudden realization of her unannounced secret full upon her friends, of Adam in his aerie, his silent, accommodating smile.

He reaches into his pocket to pull the turbulent image out.

The landscape remains. A bloated sun above the impeccable tops of mountains somewhere Julian cannot place. Their snows more white than anything the world ought reasonably to hold. A few clouds, plumper than those passing overhead here. No trace of the angel remains. He, she, has vanished, its impossible movement no longer visible. A tremor runs through Julian's arm, the photograph falls. He picks it up. On the back - nothing.

The angel has disappeared.

In the hollow of Julian's hand, the once abundant picture is empty. And yet he can not pull his eyes from it.

Mountains. Snow. Clouds. Sun. The world repeated, an unheard request.

He is shocked, and strangely unsurprised. What could be less sufficient to contain marvels than four right angles? What vessel could trap wonder in its volume? This photograph, reduced at last to landscape, shines like water in the gathering day, and, much to Julian's discomfort, slides as easily through his

fingers. Overhead, he can almost count the last of the fading stars. They too unsteady and fluid.

Julian brings the other two pictures into the air.

The old woman's eyes still sparkle, her mouth slightly open as if she were about to speak.

The ruins, splendid in the light of day, cast no shadow. They have swallowed up their darkness by the roots.

5:37 AM

The angel has vanished, moved on, propelled itself out of this once privileged space. On the roof now, Julian feels almost cold.

Where could this winged thing go? Once out of the admittedly inadequate frame that first created a possible space for it, where would this glory fly? Even this sky seems far from roomy enough. But now, abandoned by stars and free of the punctual sun, it is wide open.

Julian takes his head in his hands and thinks. Improbable pictures and overheard conversations, blue eyes and full, red-painted lips, the light of street lamps and the smell of naked flesh, sweat, wrestle for their corners in his mind. He remembers the tell of a scandal in high places, the look on a friend's face as he unfolded a dirty tale. A quiet moment, a rough embrace, a man masturbating ferociously. A private vision. Julian thinks of the night waiting behind him and sees a feathered wonder presiding over all of it. The relentless rhythms and

flashing lights. The strange old man who danced for the fluttering of a flag. A youth struck with his own accomplishment. The purple. Julian dwells in the day ahead and sees a feathered wonder winging its way beyond.

Time is left, and stirred to clouds of dust by the passing of a miracle. Time spotted with event, a length of insubstantial tissue spangled with sequins, eye catching, brilliant, vulgar. Events - each one of them over now. Each one of them over? Julian stands on the roof, girdled by its diminutive wall and looks at the day's second empty sky and confrontation. Another moment calmed and shimmering in the equal iridescence that waits alongside him.

The angel has passed out of imagedom, but he can not find the certainty to say that it is gone. The sky arches onwards, its invisible muscles tireless, and begins to fill with birds. As if out of nowhere clouds of life ascend from below the building's roof, from the channels between this edifice and the next. Gulls and pigeons. A crow or two and a mob of tiny sparrows. There is no way to know what brought them together, or stirred them from their roosting places in the concrete crevices before the sun has shown its ruddy face. They wheel and turn, rushing towards the open horizon, anticipating morning. Shrill calls and fragmentary songs trail in their wake. Julian watches them spin and gyre in the gray premorning. Tiny living histories with rapid pulses, they come back time and again to the same spot in the air. He counts them as they race by. One. Two, till the thing beneath his feet shakes.

The roof trembles. The music several floors below expands suddenly. Julian feels it shudder underneath the gravel that he stands upon, thinks he hears the roar of the crowd climb upwards to meet that burgeoning.

More images. A tall shoeshine stand. A sampling of enigmatic pictures. A roomful of dancing people. A wingspan that defies all reason.

Julian looks down at the photo in his hand as a sparrow whirls by. All it contains now is a piece of the glamorous, gorgeous world. A piece that briefly held an angel he had dared to long for. A world much like this one, filled with light and living things spinning around under a nacreous sky. Why should it alone hold angels?

Julian stands at the edge and looks for reasons.

If it contained an unsullied sky, the one overhead was no less perfect. If that glossy portion had the comfort of the indolent, generous sun, then soon, it too, would take its place by the cradle of the squalling day.

This world, that scrap. Nothing between them but the four white lines that frame the one. Nothing but the intention of an unknown hand to make the difference.

Julian shakes before dawn and suddenly recognizes the wonderful indifference before him. The only thing between here and there the crisp, white frame. He looks at the photograph, seemingly emptied of all its magic, and all around him, finds it once again. Sailing across the roof before sunrise.

He takes his notebook from his pocket, writes.

Friend,

No, he thinks. He tears the page from his notebook and throws it to the ground. He starts again, cautiously copying out the celebrated words spinning in his memory. He writes them down, giving himself over to them, from their first sounding syllable to the last.

O toi, le plus savant et le plus beau des Anges,

Dieu trahi par le sort et privé de louanges,

O Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère!

O Prince de l'exil, à qui l'on a fait tort,

Et qui, vaincu, toujours te redresses plus fort,

The words flood out from the crowded neighbourhoods of his neo-cortex, down his arm as they too force their way into the world. Julian's hand is steady and fast. The words break surface with weird images in their wake. In the new space opened in his mind Julian sees beautiful amphibians finding delight in worlds wet and dry. He sees fabulous gardens set down in patterns of interwoven coils.

Toi qui sais tout, grand roi des choses souterraines,

Guérisseur familier des angoisses humaines,

The words come, looping and flowing from pen to page, marvelous in their motion, confident in their pace. The words arrive moist, shiny, filled with news. Fires on hilltops on the eve of May. Bawdy jokes. Julian envisions the unspeakable desire of an ergonomist for a marionette.

To qui sais en quel coin des terres envieuses

Le Dieu jaloux cacha les pierres précieuses,

O Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère!

And still they come, potent as the lines carved into the earth at Nazca, and as eminently open. Flesh flowers, transparent pictures of animals still to be classified. Julian sees a sea part and open on a deep salon where the table is perfectly set and no one has arrived to dine. And he writes on, the poem livid in his memory, writes unfalteringly, no word stumbled over, every one right. Julian writes and writes till he reaches the last lines of the poem breathless.

Then he turns the page and writes the words again. And again. Again. And again. He repeats them, carefully forming the text in his clearest script, suddenly knowing the rhythm and cadence with an unexpected intimacy. He writes the poem over and over until there are no pages left in his notebook. Then he stops and stands again. Stretching his cramped arms over his head, Julian hops onto the low ledge he had been sitting on and looks down at the barren early AM roads. Parked cars, pot holes in the asphalt surfaces, traces of a passing angel.

The dark circles of the public wastebins, their blank mouths open to him, chalk hieroglyphics on the gray sidewalks, the remains of a browsed through newspaper, evidence again.

The light of the street lamps, blinking out, are promises.

Julian stands on the ledge and looks at the motionless streets the hordes of birds had risen from. He begins to turn in place, his gaze passing from the roadways to the graveled surface of the roof and back again. He waves his arms, in the air, laughing suddenly. He jumps from foot to foot, exultant and laden with a new idea. Julian dancing on the building's narrow edge, silhouetted against the blueing sky, free of any witness, until he stops and opens the notebook anew.

The rows of words march across the pages. First the letters. Julian rips them out and tosses them behind him, onto the roof. Then page after page of the narrow columns of verse. Julian tears out first one and throws it onto the breeze, watching it flutter towards the ground. Turning over and over as it tumbles earthward, the page becomes a white bird, black-tipped wings roused by the wind's assertions.

Julian moves along the roof's edge and tears out another page. He gives it too to the sovereign air. The unlined page falls lightly, comes to rest on the cool concrete where, scuttling in narrow circles, it is held close in the arms of the breeze channeled down the road.

He moves down again, reaches the corner, tears out another page and throws it off the edge. Then again, and again. Until not a single page remains between the harvested covers.

Julian watches them, unbound poetry moving through the city's veins. He sits back down on the ledge, head full of ardour, wondering.

He thinks forward to a time when friends and strangers will make their way back out, stumble on these fluttering words and read them. He sees the apparitional flash of white cross the sidewalk, roll across their feet. The black markings striking. He sees them stop and take the page in hand. Julian knows that they will read the sheet driven into their path.

Julian sees that moment then in which the words will flower in the clear spaces of their day. The moment when they too will wonder, as he does now before this nearly perfect stillness spreading itself out in gridwork four floors below. They, leaving the dim hallways as the party ends, `briefly stunned that the gray AM streets might run with poetry. Then, just for a moment, this hovering world will open itself up, unfold its wings before them glittering as a miracle.

He stands again, turns his back on it all for a moment and feels his blood and hunger. The gulls overhead are shrieking, wheeling. Julian thinks of Harris across town, hammering his equine prophecies into being, brewing a strong coffee as the day begins.

As he opens the door down he sees his first torn page trapped among the winged shadows on the roof. One small word provokes the sky's first blush.

Friend....