

It all ends like this. It's ten p.m. I'm on Greene Street in SoHo; it's starting to rain, or it's just stopped raining. I can't tell. I go to a Gristedes to buy some cat food and a big plastic bottle of diet Snapple. The fat Hispanic checkout girl is cute but she won't look at me; when she hands me my dollar bill in change she's careful not to touch my palm, not even with her fingernails.

On Broadway I see C. in an ad for a new movie on the top of a speeding cab; it's not C., of course: she's not a movie-star, but it looks just like her.

I sit on a concrete bench outside of an apartment building.

I see a cute Asian girl walk passed in black boots; she's with a young blonde guy with spiky hair.

Fuck them.

Some people who live in the apartment building that I'm sitting in front of walk towards me. They look at me suspiciously, as if I don't belong here.

I don't.

Fuck them, too.

There's still snow on the ground, piled up here and there; it's blackened with two week's of car exhaust.

I take dinner in a diner at St. Marks place; I forget the name. I have a deli melt: turkey and corned beef covered with cheese on rye bread.

The waitress is cute: chubby, blonde, and Slavic. She has a terrible attitude.

She ignores everyone. She hangs out by the bathroom eating chocolate cake.

I practically have to beg for the check.

Tonight I was thinking of going to see David Cronenberg's *Spider* at the Angelika,

but I didn't. I was also thinking of going to a Blockbuster and renting *The Professional*, but I didn't do that either.

Instead I go home and sit on the couch until I get sleepy.

At a convenience store on the way home I buy a health food cookie. They are playing a corny Elton John torch song. It's the one with the refrain, "How wonderful life is now that you're in the world." Something like that.

It strikes me that only the most superficial clichés can really give expression to our deepest feelings. I stand there by the hot buffet, next to some chicken parts in red sauce, and listen to this hideous pop song until I feel good and miserable.

Then I pay for my cookie and go back out onto the street.

It's eight a.m. the next morning and I'm on the bus headed back to New Jersey. It's raining, but warmer than it's been. I walked about an hour to get to Port Authority under an umbrella I stole from the lobby of the building where I'm apartment-sitting. I felt dizzy. I took some pictures of locked doors and mannequins.

When I get home my refrigerator inexplicably froze the soy yogurt I was going to eat. So I eat some leftover turkey taco meat instead.

5.30am: I'm on the bus back to New York City. It's so cold and windy that ice-shavings are in the air. I slept exactly twenty minutes last night, from 11.50 to 12.10am. I got up, cruised the internet, ate some jelly beans. I jerked off for the third time in the last eighteen hours—it's been awhile since I did that. It's nice to know I still have it in me.

Last night, I ate so much that I thought I was going to have a stroke when I lay down: my eyeballs were really hurting.

This morning I got on the scale and I've gained a pound and a half: 151.5. I'm going to make a real effort to eat some fruit today.

Maybe some cubed cantaloupe?

This is my life, what it's come to, after C left me. I'm warning you, it's not pretty.

Everyone hates me where I work but that's okay because I hate everyone here right back. They're all a bunch of fucking morons.

There are maybe all of two or three women in the whole company I'd even consider balling and I've actually made half-hearted attempts at one point or another over the years to get each of them in the sack. But eventually you hear them talking with each other, going on and on about some TV show like *Six Feet Under* or spending the weekend shopping for new shower curtain rings and you realize it's all just

impossible. You can't live like that again.

I stay in my office most of the time anyway and I try not to run into anyone, especially in the men's room, where you often get trapped standing next to some jerk-off at the urinal. Sometimes I can go the entire day from nine to five without talking to a single soul. That's a good day. Usually, though, I'll at least have to nod perfunctorily at somebody in the hall.

It's two-thirty and I'm so goddamned bored and hungry that I go down to the cafeteria. I buy a can of Fresca because a whole can of Fresca has exactly zero calories. Usually it tastes so disgusting that you can't drink the whole can anyway. If you're lucky it makes you slightly nauseated so you don't have any appetite left at all.

I have maybe three fingers of whisky left in a bottle in the bottom drawer of my desk. I think of mixing it with the Fresca but I don't feel like it. Just thinking about drinking is enough to give me a dull headache.

I see an *Advil* tablet on my desk left behind from something or other. It's all dusty sitting there by my in-box among the eraser crumbs. I'm tempted to swallow it just for the hell of it—I'm pretty sure it's an Advil.

But I don't.

I leave work early because I can't take it any more. I get on the N-train to Canal Street and walk to the apartment I'm supposed to be watching. I haven't been here in a couple of days so the cat makes a real pain in the ass of itself. I have to feed it before I can take a leak or make myself some tea.

I always thought I liked living with animals, but I realize that I really don't. Maybe I've been living alone too long now, but I can't stand the slightest interruption of my peace and quiet. If the cat expresses any will of its own whatsoever, I'm ready to boot it across the room. I don't because it's not my cat, and besides, it's a pretty old cat, so it doesn't have the energy to pester me for too long. I simply thump it on the head with my knuckle or a spoon or whatever. Then it goes away.

I'm sitting now in a black massage recliner but I can't figure out how to turn it on. That's fine: those kind of fake electric vibration things just make me more tense, anyway.

I'm sipping tea and I'm doing a little reading.

Maybe I'll take a walk later. I'll have to go get something to eat for dinner in any event. I doodle a cartoon on the inside back cover of the book I'm reading.

I'll commit suicide soon enough. Maybe before the end of this book., if we're both lucky. In fact, you can even think of what you're reading as the longest suicide note in history.

Tonight it's freezing outside. Everyone walks around with their faces covered with scarves and coat collars. They all look better like that. The way the wind cuts up and down the street, it must be the coldest day of the winter, and it's March already, the worst should be over.

I want to do some aimless walking around like I usually do, but it's just too cold. It's so fucking cold you feel like your face is being peeled off your head. I look for a pizzeria, but can you believe it—I'm in downtown Manhattan and I can't find a pizzeria!

It's too cold to waste time so I just buy some breaded chicken cutlets and a package of Kaiser rolls at the Gristedes and hurry back to the apartment.

I think about stopping at a pub on Broome Street for a drink, but I don't. I pass the Angelika and I think again about seeing David Cronenberg's *Spider*, but I don't do that either.

I don't feel too badly about spending the evening at home. The streets are pretty empty tonight: no one wants to be outside.

I watch Jim Lehrer on TV while I eat my chicken sandwiches. He's talking about the war in Iraq and interviewing a couple of guys who are supposed to be experts about something or other. Someone else interviews Carol Mosley Braun who's running for president, but she gets on my nerves so much by talking nonsense that I turn the TV off.

Sometimes I think: well, I really wasted the day—I totally burned it up with nothing to show for it. But then I think: what else could I really have done with the day anyway? What wouldn't have been a complete waste of time?

How could I possibly "not" have wasted it?

I sit at the computer and run C's name through a Google search to see if by any chance she was killed in a traffic accident or something like that, but no, she's still alive, still sucking other men's cocks, I guess.

I fall asleep and wake up again and I hope it's not as freezing cold as it was yesterday. It isn't supposed to be, but I can't imagine how it's going to warm up to 40 like they say. It's five-thirty in the morning and I have a date on Prince Street. I have to get showered, shaved, and dressed. I want to photograph a pair of sexy-looking mannequins before the streets start crowding up with real people.

Lately, I've begun to consider how dangerously close I am to being one of those guys who live alone with a mannequin. The idea really doesn't seem that preposterous to me anymore. Is it really any worse than how other people live? I mean, is it really any different? After a while, I think most people end up being mannequins to each other, anyway; they just don't usually look and dress as good.

Besides, who doesn't like the idea of a sex-robot? That's sort of what a mannequin

is, I think. Without, that is, all the inner slop and involuntary contractions that would make it more satisfying to fuck than a real person.

Whatever horrible jazz music they were playing in the Starbucks I'm sitting in to make you think this was a real coffee-house has stopped and it's been replaced with this really depressing atonal piano dirge that sounds like the stuff they play in one of those arty-farty European movies that are set by the sea where everyone talks to each other in stilted subtitles.

The other day I was thinking that I would be perfectly content to be surrounded by screens and monitors. That this kind of life was the future of humanity, the closest mankind will ever get to heaven. In the future, you won't even need your body, except for the most rudimentary things: like eating and shitting and having ejaculations. The body would just be this flabby white tuber feeding your polyp-like brain bud.

You'd lie there in an adjustable bed surrounded by fifty or sixty monitors and screens. It would be like looking out of the eye of a fly, but each facet would show something else. Web-cams set up all over the place. Probably some super-rich guy is living like this right now. It would be like looking out of the heads of everyone on earth. It would be like having the fly's eye of god, or something like that.

I'm talking total nonsense now.

Anyway, when you died it wouldn't even be like dying but just gradually losing interest in the screens. You see you were never really there to begin with, you were just watching it all, like satellite TV but with infinite channels of inanity: and the beautiful thing is, in the future, everyone could do this.

There's already been enough life lived throughout the last thousands of years and it's all recorded or simulated on film or tape or CD's or whatever. They've even gone back and re-lived what it was like to live before TV, back in the days of the caveman and Cleopatra, so they could tape that, too. That's how bored we are.

Everything's been recorded. No one has to be bothered living anymore. There isn't anything left to do anyway: there's only stuff to repeat.

It's pounding rain. I'm in my favorite coffee shop at Union Square, at a corner table, watching people rushing to work. I've "borrowed" yet another umbrella because I've forgotten to bring the one I stole the other day.

Yesterday at the office Paula was talking about having an imaginary twin sister when she was a little girl. I think it might be nice to convince myself I have an imaginary friend. It could help me disassociate more. But first I'd need to think of a name for my imaginary friend. I'd need to give him a distinctive personality, preferably one very different from my own.

I don't find anything wrong with purposely inducing psychosis to escape the ego. What's the difference between mysticism and mental illness, anyway. And who cares?

They both have the same goal: Getting us the hell away from a reality that is killing us.

Sometimes I feel as if I were an alien dropped onto earth. I've been provided extensive "intelligence" about human beings and I've lived undercover among them for decades. My mission, however, has been a total failure and primarily for this reason: all the intelligence I've been given is virtually worthless. My race, apparently, knows absolutely nothing about human beings.

Real human beings never act as we've been given to believe they will act. All the books, tapes, films, CDs, TV shows, videogames we've seen are wrong. The human being projected in such media is a myth. Maybe it's even deliberate misinformation.

Whatever species I've encountered here, one thing is certain: they aren't human beings. This is my conclusion: the "human being", as it's commonly known, *does not exist*.

Last night the weatherman was right for a change: it was pretty warm out, about 40F. So I took a walk from Times Square to Union Square. I wanted to stop at the Strand but it was too crowded.

I continued down Broadway, took forty dollars from an ATM, and found myself at a smaller, crummier used bookstore on Mercer Street. But at least this one wasn't crowded and they didn't make you check your backpack. That made me immediately think of trying to steal something.

Anyway, I didn't find anything I wanted so I left and went to one of those Arab corner markets and bought cat food, soy hotdogs, and a loaf of bread.

Back at the apartment, I ate one of the soy hot dogs and it didn't taste like a hot dog. It didn't taste like anything at all, like they took nothing and formed it into a tube. Then they put way too much pepper on it so it would taste like something.

I decided I couldn't just sit at home and do nothing again even though that's what I wanted to do, so I took a walk to the West Village. I had the vague intention of going to 4th Street. I think that's where I wanted to go, anyway. But I got lost around Washington Square Park.

I ended up in a bar called Boxer's and ordered a gin-and-tonic. The bartender was cute but only because she was standing behind a bar and there wasn't anything else really to look at. She was wearing a belly shirt, but her belly was sort of fat and white. She talked to me a little about straws.

I sat there for a while but nothing was really happening. It was a Tuesday night. So I left.

It was 9.45 p.m. and I ended up in the Angelika theater waiting for the 10.05 showing of David Cronenberg's *Spider*. I didn't really feel like seeing it anymore, but I did the two previous nights, so I figured I should see it since I was in the neighborhood. Besides, I wanted some popcorn.

The only problem was that the popcorn line was way too long and the gin & tonic I just drank made me nauseous. So I didn't get the popcorn after all.

I took a seat at the very back of the theater so that I was like a football field away from the screen. I didn't care. The important thing was that no one could kick the back of my chair.

It's raining again. I'm in the bus station ticket office, waiting with the old people. I'm on my way to Manhattan and they're heading to the casinos in Atlantic City. I listen to them talking non-stop about who died, who's dying, who's sick, what medical test they took, will take, are taking. Whatever day it is, it's the anniversary of someone's death.

They've obviously lived too long. The only reason they do anything, by their own testimony, is because "it's something to do."

I listen to this for as long as I can, but it's not easy. If you're lucky enough to avoid cancer and heart disease in your fifties and sixties—this is what you have to look forward to.

I stare out the window at the rain.

In the meantime the bus to Atlantic City has come and the old people limp and wheeze their way on-board. If they're lucky, their bus will skid across three lanes of rain-slick parkway, hit a bridge abutment, roll over, land in a ditch, and burst into flames, killing them all instantly. I see them off with a little prayer to that effect.

Then I sit there on a vinyl chair waiting for a bus that's really late.

You probably wouldn't know it to look at me, but if I had my finger on the button there wouldn't even be enough time for me to finish writing this sentence. There wouldn't be enough time for anyone to bend over and kiss their ass goodbye. I'm in favor of the war, this war, that war any fucking war. I support the current administration of war-mongers.

I want Iran to strike back, or bin Laden, or whoever.

I want North Korea to indiscriminately start launching missiles.

I want everyone to start acting "childish".

I do not want "cooler heads to prevail."

Let's top pretending that things are coherent. Let's celebrate incoherence!

I want to walk down the streets of Manhattan and sense the fear everywhere. I want to know that a storefront could explode at any moment and kill me in a hail of shattered plate glass among shredded Gucci bags and half-melted mannequin limbs. I want to sniff the faintest traces of poison gas on the R-train, or the downtown 6.

I want someone to randomly open fire at Union Square, Minetta Square, Madison Square, Any Square.

I want to see people excited, living in the moment, incandescent as infected angels just like they were on September 11th.

I want people to say, "who can think about doing {fill in the blank} on a day like this when so many people died so senselessly" today and every single day of all of our short, fuse-lit days.

I want to be drenched in blood with knives in both hands screaming Non-Sense.

I want everything to die—right now!—but I want it to be sexy.

I want everything to end in one big orgasmic flash in the pan.

I don't want the apocalypse.

I want the PORNOCALYPSE!

Maybe, though, I'm really just bored.

The bus comes eventually and I'm on it and its crawling to Manhattan in the rain. Traffic stalls to a standstill. I'm missing a morning meeting. It's a Thursday. Everybody on this bus and in the backed-up cars all around me is slowly dying in the saddest, stupidest, most inane way possible. How can they stand it? We're all going to die with catheters shoved into our urethras, leaking sick piss into a bag. I want a Krispy Kreme donut.

I head down to a party I've been invited to on Astor Place. Everyone there is a writer or a wannabe writer. The moment I arrive I go straight to the booze table. I haven't eaten much since breakfast so it doesn't take long before I'm numb enough to talk to people.

The women aren't that great looking. I didn't expect they would be. Great-looking women don't usually become writers. They don't usually want to spend all that time with their mouths shut, and nothing looking back at them but a blank computer screen. I talk to a woman who sold a screenplay for a movie I'd actually heard of. Then I talk to some guy who just adopted a baby with his girlfriend. On and on he goes, describing this "experience of a lifetime." *What an idiot*, I'm thinking.

I find myself standing next to some other guy who's written a novel that he says is "just like Margaret Atwood's stuff." *Another idiot*, I'm thinking. I'm not certain but he seems to be trying to pick me up.

We're joined by a small dark woman who claims to be a travel writer and she thinks she's going to be the center of attention because she's a woman, but she's not, because we don't find her attractive at all. She keeps talking about something or other and every once in a while the guy turns to me and says, "Say something." So I say, "I am saying something," which doesn't make any sense, because I haven't said a word. I'm thinking, *We're all idiots*.

Our little ménage a trois splinters apart and I drift off. I end up talking to a guy, another guy, a girl, a guy, a girl, and another two girls.

I head to the bathrooms but the men's room is full of women because the women's room is locked or something. So I stand against the wall and wait and I sort of talk to three women standing there waiting for their friend who's still inside.

I think they are making some kind of joke about how I'll have to use a stall and sit down to piss since women are using the bathroom. I try to smile good-naturedly because I'm outnumbered, drunk, and I have to take a piss really badly. I also don't really know what the hell to answer to such childishness.

What's the matter with women anyway, I'm thinking. What a bunch of idiots.

Eventually, I take my piss and go back outside. Because I feel slightly less drunk, I quickly race over and get another glass of wine. I talk to the same people I did before. The party now has a recycled air: same people, same conversations, same smiles. It's gone on too long and it's all getting vaguely embarrassing.

I do find two new girls to talk to. One's going to Mexico for two months on some kind of writing fellowship. She's writing a comedic novel and she's really fat. I only talk to her so I have an excuse to stand there long enough to talk to her friend who's talking to someone else. Her friend has a big nose, a really bad hairdo, but she's wearing a belly shirt that exposes her very sexy belly.

I eat some potato chips, some cheese, a Pepperidge Farm Mint Milano cookie. I eventually talk to the girl in the belly shirt. We are talking for a while before I realize with a shock that we're talking about me. I quickly try to change the subject but she's called away by some other friend anyway.

I go to the bathroom again and I'm mortified to find what looks like plaster dust all over my pants: two big stripes of it across my crotch, like I've been playing with myself. I wonder, *how the hell did that get there?* I brush myself off. I lean against the wall, drunk, exhausted, and laugh at myself in the mirror. "You stupid fucking idiot," I say.

The fat girl and her friend are standing by the elevator when I go to sneak out. They are waiting for some group that's all going out to dinner together. I try to look cool and uncaring. I stand there sort of holding my coat open to show that I don't have plaster dust streaked over my crotch any more.

We say something to each other. I promise I'll say "Hi" to some mutual acquaintance. Everyone is glad they met everyone, blah blah blah blarg blah, the elevator comes and I can't fall the twelve floors to the lobby fast enough.

I walk back to the apartment and feed the cat. I turn on the TV, sit down, and eat a sandwich. I'm watching C-Span but I can't tell if what I'm watching is live or took place this afternoon or two weeks ago. I try to listen to what they're talking about and that's no help either. They seem to be talking about the president. But they could be talking about the current president or one of the past presidents or speculating on what some candidate in the upcoming election would do if he were president. I start channel surfing but I can't remember what I saw.

I want to go back out and drink some more. I want to hit that bar on 3rd Avenue. I want to go to McSorley's. But I don't do either. I want to go to Bar None or The Slaughtered Lamb. But I don't do anything.

Instead I get undressed. I lie down in my underwear. I fall asleep like a chunk of meat.

I wake up with a rock-hard boner. I really should take care of this thing but I'm too lazy to get the paper towels in the kitchen and I'm wearing my only clean pair of boxer shorts. Same thing for my t-shirt, or I'd mop myself up with that. So I just lie there

and eventually it goes away by itself. I guess it does, anyway, because when I get up to take a shower for work I'm just not in the mood anymore.

I feed the cat and then I put on my coat and walk uptown. It's sunny but bitter cold again—18F—what's new? I stop at the Starbucks on Union Square, buy a coffee and sit by the window. I watch people walk around.

After work I walk downtown. It's freezing again, but I need the exercise. I head towards the east side and then down Third Avenue. I end up at St. Marks Place and discover that the bar I thought all along was McSorley's is really Bull McCabe's

So I sit at the bar in Bull McCabe's and order a gin-and-tonic. The bartender looks a little like Rodney Dangerfield, all googly-eyed.

The place is almost empty: it's a Monday and only half-past seven. A guy and his girlfriend are playing pool. A few other people are sitting at the bar with me. On a stool or two down, a guy sits sipping a Guinness and writing in a suede journal with a little leather thong to keep his place. *Oh, please.*

I start doodling on a napkin: then I realize I haven't really got anything to doodle, so I put my pen away.

I probably take about twenty minutes to baby this one drink down my throat. I'm torn between wanting to get really shit-in-my-pants drunk and not wanting to get drunk at all.

I decide not to get drunk at all.

As I head toward Broadway, I see the woman from the party with the sexy stomach. She's wearing a hood that covers just about all of her face, except for a tiny pale circle. I can't imagine how I recognized her, and I'm sort of surprised that she recognizes me. Maybe that's why all I can manage to say is, "Hi. How are you?"

She sort of turns around as we pass and so do I, but it's freezing cold out and stopping to chat would just seem stupid and awkward, so I keep walking. Maybe I'll hook up with her later.

Then it's the next day.

I get all upset because my digital camera doesn't seem to be working but then it is working so I was all upset about nothing. I feed the cat a pile of food I hope will last it two days because that's how long I'll be gone and then I leave.

I walk down to the Starbucks in the neighborhood where I ran into that girl on the street the night before and there she is again, like it's destiny or something. I blabber away to her over a stale croissant just like I did the other night, only tonight I'm not drunk, and goddammit, if I'm not talking about myself again. How does she do it?

But what's really embarrassing is that I don't remember anything she said that night at the party and I'm not really listening this time either. Well, I think, we'll always have something to talk about: even if it's this same fucking conversation.

Instead, I'm taking a mental inventory. The bad points I remember about her are still there: the outdated hairstyle, big nose and also a few others—wide hips and hairy arms. Somehow she's able to hold this all together enough to keep me talking to her, although it may just be desperation on my part.

I'm trying to imagine how I could stand to fuck her: blindfolded, up the ass, tied up, in the mouth, drunk, with pornographic visual aids, pretending one or the other of us is dead, etc.

We talk for about twenty minutes and then she has to get going. I'm sure I made a total ass of myself.

I finish my green tea and get going myself. I walk all the way from the East Village to Port Authority. I talk to myself the whole time. Every once in a while I catch someone looking at me. I briefly wonder if I look like one of those nuts who walk around talking to themselves. Then I realize I don't really care if I do.

It's almost eleven by the time I make it to my mother's place. While she finishes cooking dinner, I sit in the living room and try to read the last ten pages of *69 Things to do with a Dead Princess* by Stewart Home. On the TV is the sitcom that my mother was watching before I came in. The show must be at least eight years old.

I sit hunched at the dining room table and eat the dinner she's made without saying a single word. She's cooked salmon and pasta. Lately that's all she cooks. Since she thinks I like it she seems to believe that means I want it all the time. Well, I don't eat with her that much so I guess it's okay. It ends up being like going to a certain restaurant when you're in the mood for the house specialty.

She asks a few questions, mainly to determine if I want anything else, more grated cheese, something else to drink, stuff a waitress might ask. I answer monosyllabically. She has to keep saying, "What?" Other than that, she keeps pretty much quiet.

I hate my mother and regard her with a kind of vague, passive disgust. I blame her for giving birth to me. She seems loathsome and evil—a real abomination, shuffling around in her flannel nightgown and terrycloth carpet slippers. I don't understand why more people don't openly hate their mothers.

To me, all this obligatory mother-love smells of a huge conspiracy to prevent us from seeing the world-denying truth: that we all secretly want to kill our mothers. All that Oedipal crap—it's just a cover. I don't want to fuck my mother: I want to beat her to death with a mallet.

It really strikes me as outrageous that all these stupid women forced us through their cunt tubing and shit us out into this nightmare and then act as if they've done something worthwhile. Something really miraculous. They act as if they've done us this giant favor. They expect to be thanked and held in reverence for it. They really deserve a kick in the head. They deserve all the misery they claim they get—and more besides. But you get a lot of odd looks if you talk like this. I think you're breaking the strongest taboo of all: you're attacking the survival instinct of the species, or

something.

I leave my mother's place about midnight. She's put on *The Tonight Show* with Jay Leno. That's not a lot better than what she had on before but at least it's something filmed during the 21st century.

Jay is doing a mean-spirited comedy skit about cloned celebrities. He's matching the faces of celebrities and then showing ordinary people walking through malls and parking lots. The ordinary people look something like the celebrities except they are older, fatter, balder, etc. The idea is that the cloning procedure didn't quite work out. What it really amounts to is that they haven't had tens of thousands of dollars of specialized plastic surgery. Still I have to admit that it's pretty interesting to watch, even though the premise is seriously flawed and I hate Jay Leno.

I go home and the parakeet is still alive. He hasn't eaten in a few days so I feed him some fresh seed. He doesn't even bother singing anymore, which suits me just fine. Now I can turn on the light in the bedroom and read in peace and quiet.

I lay down with the book *Blood Meridian* but I don't even open it. Instead I fall asleep. I have heartburn from all the salmon I ate tonight. I dream about C. We are having dinner in some kind of club. We talk almost sensibly about our relationship, except in the dream C is younger and she's black. We're suddenly interrupted when she's arrested by a police captain in an outlandish uniform reminiscent of Marcus Garvey.

No kidding.

Tonight is one of those nights when I should get drunk and pass out to keep myself from doing something stupid—but I don't. Instead, it's a Friday night and I spend almost two hours of it sitting on the couch writing a wildly insane love letter to C. The only thing that allows me to believe that I haven't completely lost my mind is that I have the sense not to e-mail it to her. I think of how I could be getting laid tonight by Beth II if I hadn't dumped her because it was just plain unbearable to roll off her at three am and be reminded of just how much she wasn't C.

I leave the apartment at ten-thirty and because it's the weekend the streets are crowded with people who seem to think they have to shout and laugh as loud as possible for no reason at all. Just to show how good a time they're having. I slip my hand reflexively into my pocket and finger my five-inch Jaguar martial arts knife. It's a weird little knife with a very sharp, jagged blade that I almost never handle without somehow cutting myself. I like to practice opening and closing this knife in my pocket; it's really comforting when I get jumpy, like counting beads on a rosary. I get a kind of secret thrill talking to strangers in the street knowing the whole time I've got an open knife in my hand. It gives me a perverse thrill, like playing with myself in public.

I walk up Mercer Street, cross Houston, stop at a late-night used bookstore. As I'm scanning the stacks, it occurs to me what poisonous advice it is to tell a kid to read. I think reading helps to alienate you from the world. I think reading ruined me, ruined

my life. You become a freak: you end up living inside your head. The outside world is never as interesting as the world in a book. Real life is never as coherent, dramatic, magical, synchronous, sexy, or intense...and neither are real people. Besides, how do you spend the day reading Ballard or Beckett and then have a conversation with any kind of real person, anyway?

Reading has nothing at all to do with real life. Real life? This pointless mind-numbing catalogue of irrelevant personal minutiae that you're reading right now: *this is real life*.

I look at the dusty rows of smelly old books with mounting disgust and don't find anything to buy so I leave and walk up Mercer again, turn east on 8th. A chubby Asian girl who ends up looking much older close up than she did from far away asks me directions to West 8th street, and since I think we're on it at the moment, I direct her in the direction she's already going in. "Just keep going," I encourage.

I cross Broadway, walk down 9th Street. I stop in the Starbucks where I was about seven hours ago and buy a green tea and sit down at a table near the wall. It's eleven now and the place is pretty crowded with people and I'd have to say that almost everyone seems like they're having a good time. It's as if they've completely forgotten that they and everyone they love is decaying and dying right this very moment.

I sit here doing nothing and wait to see if the semi-cute girl sitting next to me writing in her address book looks up and shows any interest in talking to me at all and when she doesn't, I get going.

Back in the apartment I eat some old nub of cheddar cheese that's been moldering in the refrigerator for nearly three weeks and drink two coffee mugs of Diet Peach Snapple Iced Tea. From one of the bedroom windows I watch a woman in a green top in the window of the building across the alley. She's doing something with her hands that makes it look like she's buttering a slice of bread. I watch this for while and then I lay down. I've put my hand inside my boxer shorts and I realize I've got a stiff boner for no reason at all.

The next morning I pack up my laptop and head over to the Writer's Room where I rent space to write so I can pretend to write without being alone. I get there early, around nine or so, to grab a decent desk by the window. I waste an entire day drawing a comic strip where Jesus comes back from the dead as a chain-wielding biker.

By the time I stop it's dusk and the only thing I've eaten all day is an almond croissant and three cups of strong tea. The only thing I've said to anyone is "Hi," and "It sure is nice out today." I go home and change the cat litter, throw out the trash, and sit around staring at an amateur public access TV show in which everyone calling in seems to think it's hysterically funny to call the host either a fag, a Jew, or a cocksucker. Sometimes, a real wit, a regular Oscar Wilde, manages to call the host all

three. I watch for a while and then I go back out, intending to go to St. Marks, but because of the way the traffic lights change, I walk in the opposite direction to the West Village.

I walk around randomly and wind up at Boxer's near Sheridan Square. It's about eight-thirty and I still haven't eaten anything but that almond croissant this morning so whatever I drink it goes straight to my head. It's a Saturday night and yet I find a good spot right in the middle of the bar. Wow—it must be my lucky night. I order a Bud Lite and stare at the grain of the wood ten inches under my nose.

I decide I'm going to start acting like Peter Weller in the film *Naked Lunch* in which he plays the part of the deadpan William Lee, aka William S. Burroughs. As a result I spend the rest of the evening walking around as if I'm in a foreign country. I talk in monosyllables and wry quips. I smile tightly. Maybe this explains why when I stop at a pizza place and order three slices of cheese pizza the idiot behind the counter only gives me two slices.

I find myself wondering if I would still want C. so badly if for some reason she lost her face. If her amazing eyes were gouged out, or she was hideously hacked and disfigured beyond recognition with a machete—would I still love her? Is my desire for her so superficial that it depends solely on an accidental symmetry of features—or so vast it is independent of logic, reciprocity, and human virtues? Is my love for her irrational because it is flawed and neurotic—or because it is sacred? I wonder. It occurs to me that only the superficial is limitless. I can't conceive of an infinite depth, for instance, but I can conceive of an infinite surface—a featureless desert landscape where C waits for me at the vanishing point.

Next morning, I check my email. Nothing. I end up pumping my meat to a combination of internet snuff stories starring, respectively, Kirsten Dunst and the Olsen twins. That kind of celebrity death crap doesn't usually send me over the top unless I'm really close to the top already, or it's the Olsen twins. Go figure.

I shave, take a shower, slick my hair back. I feed the cat an extra heaping bowl of kibbles to last another two days, and then I leave. It's warm out this morning. I hear birds twittering. The streets have an “after the orgy” feel to them. Too bad I wasn't invited to the orgy. Back in New Jersey, I go to Border's Books and buy a coffee at the café. I chat with the two twenty-year-olds working the counter. I think, *well, maybe*. And then I think, *Oh come on, you've gotta be kidding!*

For months now, I've been throwing books away. Today I throw out:

Zen and the Psychology of Transformation

Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings

The Original Face: An Anthology of Zen

Dropping Ashes on the Buddha: The Teachings of Zen Master Seung Sahn

Zen Seeing, Zen Drawing

Buddhism Without Beliefs

These books betrayed me. They made me believe there was something else to life than what there is. They made me hope to discover some hidden secret. To find an answer to the mystery. They promised to uncover something other than what I'm seeing right now: *absolutely nothing*. Some people think I should donate these books to an under-funded local school library, or give them to some down-on-his-luck inner city wiseman, who knows, but the way I look at it, I'm doing the kids of tomorrow a favor. I'm keeping them from making the same mistake I did. Besides, these books are mine and I get real pleasure dumping them into the big garbage dumpster out back with everyone else's cast-off useless crap: banana peels, coffee grounds, disposable diapers, and old tube socks. I'm getting more enjoyment out of tossing these books in the trash than I'd ever gotten reading them. I feel much lighter, much emptier every time I visit the dumpster and rid myself of a load of this heavy spiritual claptrap. It must be about ten pounds worth today—oh well, that's ten pounds less holding me to the earth. Is this *enlightenment*?

Driving into town later, I realize I'm not paying any attention at all to driving. I'm literally staring unseeing out a spot in the lower left hand corner of the windshield and seeing nothing. I'm ripe for an accident—or getting mugged, or something like that. I could easily get cancer—or even some kind of heart attack or stroke, I suppose. I almost think, though, that my apathy is so total that even at the cellular level the virus or whatever it is that causes cancers or AIDS would have a hard time rousing my genes out of their immense lethargy. I'm just too lazy to die.

Last night, I passed out in a drugged stupor writing another crazed love letter to C. but not as crazed as the first and this one I almost send.

I'm sitting in my office: an anonymous square on the side of a skyscraper with a view of the river and the spire of the Empire State Building. I've worked my entire life for this anonymous niche in the hierarchy. Now, if I'm really lucky, I can relax for another quarter-century or so and quietly rot in this tomb until I retire.

They have a machine in the kitchen that makes coffee and tea all by itself and in like twenty different flavors. You snap in a little bag and ten seconds later, there is your beverage. It's like living in the future. I must drink about fifteen cups of tea during the day. I keep drinking it until I get a headache. It's the best part of my job.

It's four pm and the papers I've taped to the wall with the names and addresses of freelancers, schedules, etc. is rising and falling in the air coming through the ventilation system. If you listen closely you can hear the same sound you hear when you're inside a jet.

The one bad thing about this new office is that they've stuck me next to an old woman who you hear complaining virtually from nine am to five pm every single day. No, that's not exactly true. She usually gets in early, so she really starts complaining

from eight-thirty and goes all the way without interruption to quitting time. She complains about everything. Already my teeth are on edge whenever I hear her plaintive whining voice in the hall—even on the rare occasion when she’s not complaining about something. Even when she isn’t complaining, it sounds like she’s complaining.

After work I plan on going to the Cornelia Street Café to hear a reading but after walking all the way there from midtown I don’t feel like going inside. I can’t imagine sitting there listening to someone reading their crappy little stories about their troubled relationships or dying parents or whatever. Besides the only real reason to go is to try and pick someone up and I don’t really feel like trying to pick someone up. It takes too much time and energy. I can’t be bothered.

So I just go back to the apartment: it’s my last night there anyway. I’m glad. I’m really sick and tired of the stupid cat: it follows me everywhere and won’t leave me alone. I finally have to hole up in a bedroom with the door closed just to have a little peace and privacy.

One day I’ll be dead. It’s difficult to conceive that all the clichés of death will one day be applied to you. There will be a day after you die and it will be sunny or rainy or whatever and you won’t be there. And every day after that you’ll be there less and less.

But it’s the idea that death with all its stereotypical expressions will apply to you that’s really the most troubling thought. All those phony platitudes people repeat, all those mandatory expressions of empty sorrow or disbelief or whatever. You can’t see how this will be possible: but it will be. Being reduced to a cliché: that’s what is horrible; that’s what is obscene. But then again, maybe not, maybe it’s the best way of staying hidden forever.

It’s Wednesday and I go home to New Jersey out of sheer boredom. I sit in the front seat of the bus and flip through *Time Out* magazine picking out all the things I’ll make plans to do over the next week and then not bother doing at the last possible minute. I write a third love letter to C and this one even less wildly insane than the other two, almost matter-of-fact and dull-witted. I get about halfway through and even I lose interest. She doesn’t give a damn what I feel so why do I have such a crazy desire to tell her?

At home I eat some peanut butter on a slice of bread. I take the winter lining out of my black trench coat. I goof around on the internet. I’m suddenly inspired to jerk off and I find some old picture from a cannibal fantasy photoset I downloaded and I do that thing I do lately pretending the dead girl is C and, wow, do I have a blockbuster orgasm. I can see the pitted texture of the paint on the ceiling close-up, as if it were the lunar surface.

The war started in Iraq sometimes early this morning, and it seems kind of boring

already since its pretty much the same war they fought a dozen years ago: if you really think about it, the whole thing is essentially a re-run.

I get up and make myself a cup of decaffeinated tea. I find a copy of yesterday's *New York Times Arts* section and read a review of yet another film I was going to see but didn't. I sip my tea. I think about how pointless and wasted my life has been. I sit back and stare at the wall. I think it's probably better if you just don't think about anything, so I try not to, but I do anyway.

What I really want is to be dead.

No, that's not quite enough.

What I really want is to be already dead for seventy-five years.

It's Monday morning. I jerk off to some computer porn: it costs fifteen bucks and that's much cheaper than dinner and a movie with *Beth II* and, of course, much more certain to provide at least two minutes of pure pleasure. I buy a cup of coffee and catch the seven-fifty. I stare at the back of some guy's bald mottled scalp for miles and miles and miles.

I look up and we're passing Newark Airport.

Then I'm at my desk. I do nothing. At one point I close my door and literally start sobbing.

Now it's lunch-time

For lunch I have a cinnamon bun because it's big and it's cheap and it's sweet and because the lines to get anything else are just too long. But I end up picking the slowest check-out line so I have to wait anyway.

In the elevator upstairs I keep my eyes fixed on the floor because I can't bear to look at anyone.

Back in my office, I glance up and see the top of the Empire State Building engulfed in fog. This is the first time all day I've looked out the window. I've drunk about half a liter of water so far. I've done thirty or forty push-ups.

After work I walk about fifty blocks to St. Marks place and stop at Bull McCabe's and dead doesn't begin to describe the scene there. I sit at the bar and have a beer. I should probably have eaten dinner first. Or lunch. Or breakfast.

Two women take a seat a few stools down from me but one starts immediately talking to the other about her boyfriend problems. She sounds like she's having the same problems that I used to have with C. I'd like to give her some advice, but I don't think she'd welcome it.

I order another beer. I move to a table. The bar is nearly empty. The girls are now playing pool. You can hear individual conversations. You can hear a single pair of high heels click-clacking across the wooden floor. You can hear the pool balls *miss*. That's how dead it is in here.

I eat dinner at the Kiev. Some guy asks to borrow my salt and I swear I nearly throw my water glass at him. I'm not even hungry. Then the sandwich and the French

fries come and I eat every crumb.

It's two a.m. and I'm sitting by a window looking down on the street. There's no one else at the Writers Room but some really ugly woman sleeping on the couch. I had a good look at her when I walked passed on the way back from the kitchen. While I was in the kitchen, I tried to cut my palm with a knife but I wasn't able to do it. I found that frustrating.

This is an old building that I'm in and the windows actually open. I think: I could jump out the window. I'm only on the sixth floor, though, and so I don't know if such a jump would be fatal. Of course, there's no way I could get myself to jump out a window, so it's a moot point.

I happen to look at my hand and it turns out I did cut myself, after all. The cuts are just very fine, not deep, minimal blood, the edges pink and swollen up a bit, keeping what wound there is all but closed. I get a very pleased feeling when I see that. I wonder about people who manage to slash open their wrists: do they have this kind of almost objective sense of satisfaction. Seeing themselves wounded, a tangible wound to represent all their invisible inner pain, does it seem somehow aesthetically pleasing to them? Is it that they want to display their wounds—the art of their suffering?

What I've been wondering lately, in a rather curious and undramatic way, is if I'm actually insane.

I curl up on a desk a little after three a.m. and sleep until about five-thirty. I wake up with a boner and I figure—what the hell.

I get some paper towels from the kitchen and then I sit in front of the computer in the small library and find an old porn story of mine on the internet. I know right where the good parts are so it doesn't take long. I stuff the paper towels into my shorts and quickly jerk off into them. That ugly lady from last night is still sleeping on the couch and some early morning screenwriter or whatever could come shuffling passed on their way to make a cup of coffee, but I take my chances.

No matter how many times I've ejaculated since puberty, I'm always surprised at how impossibly sloppy semen is: the globby crap gets all over everything no matter how careful you are. No wonder life keeps going on and on. I've got a blob of it somehow on my shirt that I'll be wearing all day long.

I zip up, carefully close all the windows on the computer, and go to the kitchen and make a cup of very strong black tea. About 4 minutes later, the ugly woman passes in a rumpled red skirt and jacket and her hair all lopsided on her way to the toilet

Jesus, I think, this is some fucking life I'm living.

I walk about fifty blocks back uptown. I stop at a Starbucks on 51st Street and get a coffee and a cinnamon scone. I sit at a counter by the window and watch people walk back and forth up and down Broadway. I feel like a ghost or a zombie. I want a cigarette and I don't even smoke. On the sound system they are playing the Rolling

Stones' *Wild Horses*. The whole world at this moment seems way too sad to pay attention to.

A few days later, I write what I really hope is the last—and it's the craziest of all—love letter to C. All jazzed up on coffee and repeated playings of *Gimme Shelter*, I'm sure it's a really good idea to send this email which, among other things, wildly exclaims that I want to fuck C. in a pyramid in the Egyptian desert like we were the incestuous twins Isis and Osiris. Working myself up to a near lunatic pitch of hysteria, I write that I want to “devour” her completely and that she ought to be made love to as a woman “whose very being is made out of the particles of a star.” Then I wrap it up with a not-so-thinly-veiled offer to provide her with non-committal sex anytime and anywhere of her choosing in the event that whatever guy she's with is not adoring her properly, since she always complained that all her ex-lovers and husbands were either unfaithful or impotent.

Later on, hauling a big plastic bag filled with chicken parts to the dumpster, I realize what an awful mistake sending such an email would be. I'm simply seeing way too much in a relationship that was, for her, basically just a lot of empty cock-sucking. I'd just be making a total pitiful idiot of myself by putting so much apocalyptic meaning into our “love-affair.” I should never have told her I loved her in the first place. Telling her some more how much I love her now that she's dumped me isn't going to help matters.

The only other thing I do all day is go to the mall and buy a black suit jacket so I can look like one of those psychos in *Reservoir Dogs*.

I wake up at two-thirty in the morning with a terrible headache: it's one of those headaches that make you feel sick to your stomach and start thinking you've had a stroke in the night and that half your face is paralyzed. My throat is sore. I put on CNN, FoxNews, MSNBC, every channel is showing replays of burning tanks. There's something really cozy and companionable about having so much disaster going on live at three in the morning. There's a kind of party atmosphere to it all. I really believe more people are excited about it than are letting on. These news reporters sure look orgasmic to me, that's for sure.

On 36th & Madison I've stopped at a Starbucks for tea on the hike uptown. This is one of those mornings where the answer to every problem seems to point quite logically to self-annihilation. Looking into the faces of everyone I pass, I wonder if any one of them feels even remotely what I feel.

On the sound-system, what's playing is the Beatle's song, *Let it Be*. But it's being sung by one of those black divas who so mangle up the words with their narcissistic vocal screeching that the pathos of the song is totally lost, which is good when you already feel like total crap. Oh hey, there goes a guy walking two of those French

bulldogs I've been seeing so much of lately.

Maybe I'm manic-depressive.

Here comes an old lady with a Yorkie. And, across the street, a slightly less old lady with a Pekingese.

At the office, I take care of that boner that's been haunting me on and off since morning. I pull the shades on my office windows, close the door, and open up a porn story on the computer. I'm leaning back in my new Aero chair and this is the first time I'm jerking off in it. It's a well-designed chair, perfect for flogging your meat: good back support, easy rocking, conveniently placed arm rests. The porn story I'm looking at isn't even any good but I'm so horny I'm sort of just pretending it is, making stuff up in my head as I go along, and it's only a half-dozen strokes or so till the napkin's soaked like I've been gut-shot.

After work, I walk around; I stop at this bar on 3rd Avenue and 36th Street called PJ Carney's. The place is like an old age home in the Twilight Zone. I drink about four inches of beer and beat it the hell out of there before I find the men's room and drown myself in the toilet out of sheer despair.

I passed a model on Fifth Avenue yesterday—I'm pretty sure she was a model, she was "somebody," you can tell in Manhattan, even if you can't identify them because you don't watch *Everyone Loves Raymond* or *CSI* or whatever crap is on TV nowadays. Anyway I was walking towards her, staring right at her and she was staring right at me, until we got like within four feet of each other, and then she did that bitchy little thing women do, sort of flicking me off with a redirection of her eyes, as if she'd just woken herself up out of a daydream and found herself staring at a chipped coffee cup or something—and I thought, no sweetheart, not even you with your perfect hair, your perfect cheekbones, perfect mouth, perfect eyes, perfect everything, not even you can make me forget her.

At work, I catch a glimpse of myself in the men's room mirror and this is what I saw: pure 100% insincere bastard. What I saw looking back was the kind of guy I've always hated: slicked-back hair, black clothes, shit-eating grin, overconfident, cold-jazzed eyes, no shame. If you stuck C and me the way I look right now on top of a wedding cake, we'd make the perfect couple.

Saturday morning I wake up feeling just fine and surprisingly horny. I realize I'm not looking for anyone to love anymore: just someone to touch my miserable boner. That'll be enough. Where my heart used to be there is a kind of fine red atomized mist.

I read in bed for a while, consider putting *Tokyo Torture Chamber 6* in the VCR to jerk off to, but it's hidden away at the back of the bedroom closet so one girlfriend or other wouldn't find it. Anyway, I can't be bothered digging out *Tokyo Torture Chamber 6*

or maybe it's *Tokyo Torture Chamber 2*, whatever one has the scene of a bound Japanese girl getting dunked underwater over and over until she's gasping and choking and spitting and crying and it all looks pretty real.

What I end up doing instead is jerking myself off to an internet porn story written by some guy about how he wants to be medically altered into a teenage slave girl by some middle-aged "daddy." For crissakes. I take off one of my socks, slip it over my cock, and I just sorta leisurely hang out like that for a while, reading and stroking, until I decide enough is enough and then *boom-boom-boom* it's all over.

It's still raining: fine, misty, and totally irrelevant.

The day slides on by. Nothing happens.

I wake up at four am and the feeling of sadness is the kind you have in a nightmare, but I'm wide awake. I lie there wracked and gasping for a few minutes like I'm having an orgasm. When I'm done with that, I get up to go the toilet to blow the wad of gummy snot from my nose. Big custardy clots of cold germs. I turn the light on and then I turn it off immediately because it's unbearable to see the soap dish, the bathroom tiles, the faucets, anything at all. That's a new one—and I go back to bed and lie there in the dark a little awed by what that might mean.

I fall back asleep, drained. I wake up again at six but it's really seven because of daylight savings time. I'm actually sickened to think I have an extra hour of daylight to push through from now on. The bird I thought I'd silenced is singing in its cage like it's gone insane: it's actually painful to hear it chirping away.

It's Sunday morning. Then it's Sunday afternoon. Now it's almost Sunday evening. That's pretty much a good description of my day.

I'm exhausted: I feel like I'm drugged out, but I'm not. I'm so lethargic I can barely move.

Later I go to the Dublin House for a gin-and-tonic. Nothing much is happening there and the drink is small and weak. I take a stroll to the nearby Starbucks and have green tea and read a while. There's actually more happening in Starbucks than the bar: two used-up women with a third in a wheelchair; a couple of old guys talking about a third guy who just left (he'd had his hand re-attached after a fall through a greenhouse window a few years back) some gawky but sexy jailbait sitting alone clutching her cell phone. I hit the road for home.

I wake up each day to a life that's, let's face it, basically over. I get up off the couch where I slept pretty deeply, even without the usual pharmaceutical props. I'm looking in the mirror and I'm thinking, "Oh shit not *you* again." I can almost see the voracious, amoral little worm squirming around at the core of me, at the core of all of us: it's what keeps us alive.

On the bus this morning, I hear two guys saying it's supposed to snow a few inches today. Sure enough, it's a little after one pm and it's like a blizzard outside the window. I can hardly see across the street.

I check out C.'s name on Google; it's been a week or so since the last time. And shit: it's pure coincidence but she's giving a public presentation for her business at some gay seminar in the West Village tonight. I could pay \$8 and sit amongst a bunch of homos and listen to her participate in a panel discussion on same-sex marriages. I take down the address—and then cross it out, throw away the paper, try to forget, but, of course, I've already got it memorized. The blizzard has probably canceled the event anyway, I'm telling myself, but the overpowering urge to go, or even to call her, is unbearable.

Sure enough, at five, I find myself leaving the office and walking as if by remote control toward 13th street...