

Above the beach, high overhead, there is another shore. Remember this. There is a vast continent of shining cloud that stretches east over the earthbound continent, scored with rivers of air and humped with hills. Its coastline follows the inlets and points, the great curve of the bay, as though two pencils yoked in a pantograph drew the same line on separate sheets. As though the sky were an etching lifted from its plate. But though the Pacific lays a watery waste as far as the horizon, the ocean above is crowded with reefs and archipelagos that pattern the cobalt depths, impasto flecks of grey on a dropcloth. The ocean above lies still as air, calm and frozen. Below, the heavy muscles of the Pacific send throes of low surf against the beach. Waves begin to break in the south, then race northward with a muffled, rising roar, and pound past on their way to the rocky peninsula that ends the beach. Along the waterline, flat reflective viscous sand accepts footsteps and transforms them from prints to pooled blots. Still water reflects stars plunged into the bays, bights, channels, and straits of the aerial archipelago.

His mother had gone to bed early. He walked from room to room of her house, locking doors and windows, turning out lights. Barefoot, he felt the piles of wool and silk carpets, cool slick unevenness of quarry tile, dry waxed sheen of cork. Her furniture seemed all too small, fragile and spindly. If he stumbled against a chair it would break. He moved with care, working against the resistance of his left knee, the taut breathlessness of bound ribs. When he came to the back door into the kitchen he had to hunch his head down below his shoulders and edge through sideways, tightening his chest against the ache, dragging his leg. His elbow grazed a protruding stone. It wasn't pain he felt then so much as a sudden sickening lightness, a lack of gravity that fused with the pulse of his blood, the concatenation of firing nerves, an abrupt frictionlessness in the play of muscle against tendon and bone. The pressure of the wall against shoulder and hip, granite, schist, limestone, held him down, added its bulk to the weight of his bones.

He plugged in the electric kettle, measured instant coffee into a white porcelain mug. An overblown rose the color of a bruise bloomed on its side. When the kettle began to steam he poured until the cup was three-quarters full. He carried it to the gate-leg table in the bay window. The table wobbled when he sat down. There was a small earthenware vase in the center, glazed the orange of a pumpkin. He'd made it in high school, on an electric wheel that spun faster when he pressed his foot against the pedal, slippery wet clay rising under his hands, hollowing out, and then the hollow closing off around a bulb of damp air as his hands closed, as his fingers guided a narrow, centered lip. It was filled with flowers from his mother's garden, yellow and red nasturtiums, spikes of lavender, a branch of salvia, pale green dagger-shaped leaves and tubular scarlet blossoms. He had spent the afternoon in the garden, sitting in the sun and the chill ocean breeze on a brick retaining wall, drinking the cold grapefruit juice his mother brought him, watching as she weeded around the roots of the yews and the lemon verbena.

She had not asked him why he'd spent three days in the hospital, why he'd taken a week of vacation to come down the coast and sit in her garden. They took each other out to dinner every night because neither could remember how to cook for more than one. Early every morning he lay in bed listening to the ocean while light blew in around the curtains, and heard her leave the house and drive to the Club to swim. She hadn't asked him if he'd like to join her, but she had bought him a pad of drawing paper and a set of colored pencils. He drew flowers, sitting in her garden, precise botanical illustrations, as though he were an Edwardian lady of leisure with her nature diary, but the innocent language of flowers had no relevance, was inarticulate, no use to him in determining his position. The sun's pressure, the wind's, his mother's tensile stride when she brought him juice or a late violet, the easy sweep and swing of her arms, made him more aware of the strapping web of discomfort, of specific wounds and generalized aches. Concussion. Subcutaneous bleeding. Punctured lung. Three cracked ribs. Smashed kneecap. Bruises and, all told, ninety-four stitches.

The windows reflected blackness, and, from three sides, reflected him. He drew a map of his pain.

When he closed the heavy, scarred metal door of the freight elevator he noticed a new graffito: *Para hacer sexo salvo se necesita dos maricones muertos*. It overlapped the earlier statement *Help stop AIDS—Kill a fag*. He fastened the padlock and reset the alarm. Across the street a man wearing black leather came out of the bar past a rank of glittering motorcycles and ducked into a waiting taxi.

The sky overhead was scumbled and grey. He had been renting studio space in the loft for over a year and still had not gone into the bar. For the same reason he never came down here after dark. The day of the parade, last June, wanting to transcribe an image of the rainbow banners hung on every lamppost on Market from the Ferry Building to Civic Center, he walked the twelve blocks from the Financial District. Out from the crisp shadows of high-rise office buildings, he walked along wide, flat, straight avenues lined with brick warehouses and old industrial lofts. Wind coursed the streets, raising dust eddies and rolling bright bits of paper and foil along the gutters.

From three blocks away he heard the noise, a hard monotonous pounding. It distinguished itself, as he approached, as the bass-line of a disco track throbbing from massive speakers. Crowned with constructions of chrome and black vinyl emblazoned with the bar's name, a flatbed truck blocked two lanes of the street. Squadrons of motorcycles were drawn up onto the sidewalks on either side. Men wearing peaked black leather caps and calf-high cavalry boots; men whose sheened predatory torsos were ornamented with straps of glossy black leather and chromed steel chains; men whose faces flashed mirrored lenses that reflected segments of bodies carapaced in black leather; slave hoods and manacles and quirts. They seemed to move without moving, as though preserved in a suspension of thick oil, each honed muscle always in perfect ratio to the body, the incarnate image, as a whole.

He thought of the triumphal arch blowing over City Hall, the arch formed of thousands of helium balloons braided into rainbow stripes, and looked up. Into a sky as flat as if an airbrush had obscured all chance of cloud. One man stood on the cab of the truck, stood on the thick soles of heavy black construction-worker's boots. Narrow studded bands bound his biceps, and light flashed off the gold posts through his nipples, the gold rings through the helix of his ear. He stroked his narrow black beard, then drew both hands down his chest over the harness webbing his torso until they reached, encircled, hefted the black leather pouch that enclosed his genitals.

Her breasts were small. When she removed her bra they slipped a little, down her chest, and diverged. He drew a pair of small, hard yellow apples on a plate. The fishhook curve of her left clavicle: he drew the bone suspended by fine wires through screw eyes that split the bone. He asked her to cover her sternum with one hand, and he drew a white lace fingerless glove. After a while she asked if she should take off the rest of her clothes, and did so before he replied. He thought about what she wanted while he drew the creased red impression left on her belly by the waistband of her skirt. He gave her a robe and told her to take a break while he set up; he fetched her a glass of water. Garnet red and almost opaque, a leaf of torn gold lace fused into the globe, the wine goblet cast a red shadow like a flush on the pale skin in the hollow of her throat. The gold lacquer on her nails was chipped.

He dragged the posing stand out of direct light, covered it with an old Turkish carpet. He moved the easel into position. He didn't like the way canvas yielded to his brush so painted on panels of kiln-dried pine pre-treated with many coats of gesso. Before he started, the surface was already layered with a depth of brushstrokes, a texture he could fight against.

She was looking at the drawings when he asked if she was ready. She had a wide mouth with thick muscular lips; when they were clamped tight against her teeth the ridge around them whitened, a pale scar.

She pushed her hands into her hair at the temples, hooked into the mass of it and pulled it forward over her face. Through the veil of her coarse roan hair she looked at him, then pushed the robe off her shoulders and walked to the platform. Was that really how he saw her.

He wanted her to move back and forth along the rear of the platform, striking momentary naturalistic attitudes before a golden backdrop that honeyed her flesh, while he took Polaroids. He would build the images into an oblivious crowd, an oceanic multicellular organism intent on itself to the exclusion of the real scene, the real subject he intended to paint. He wanted to achieve a depth of crowdedness, a sort of concrete luminosity, an effect like angled self-reflexive mirrors. She should be self-conscious. She should be aware of being watched. She should move within her own skin, within her flesh, know the stretch of muscle, the pull of tendon, the slip of flesh and slide of skin. She should think of bodies, their palpability, the way they could melt into and against each other. Feel the blood pulsing, saliva rising under the tongue, moisture easing and satisfying the eyes as they move from corner to corner, the drop of sweat that rolls down the ribcage, hesitates at the hip, slides on.

Would she stop now, come forward, settle down on the carpet, against that field of muted purples and carmine, find a position she could hold for some time, which her nerves could memorize, sit, yes, legs spread, head down. The specificity of the curved shadow below her breast. The way her thigh and buttock flattened against the carpet. How her skin pebbled. Move one hand, the far hand, to the top of the thigh. Burnt sienna thinned to translucence with linseed oil. Titanium white. Alizarin crimson. Cobalt. Cochineal. Viridian.

What did she think about, what did she remember. He filled the wine glass again, brought water to her. He draped the robe around her slumped shoulders. The silk woven in broad stripes of dull brown and green took on the warmth of her hair. Her eyes, the irises translucent around hard black pupils, slid away although she did not turn her head from him. The north window, when he turned around, a wall of panes each with its own index of refraction, offered refuge from the question he was going to ask. Some panes were lit around the edges, others dull

like brushed metal. He felt a drop of sweat draw a snail track on the inside of his arm before being absorbed by the fabric of his shirt, and unbuttoned the shirt, took it off. What did she want. What did he want. He wiped his armpits, his chest with the damp shirt. His sweat seemed to smell of semen, acrid, penetrating. Would she, for the painting, show him how she masturbated.

She asked him to remove the rest of his clothes. He could not take pictures. The figure must not have her face. She would charge extra. He could not touch her. Her hand was on her breast, covered it, cupped it, lifted it. He let his shirt fall. On the stained wood floor it made a dense ink-blue blot. She spread her fingers to show him the taut blind eye of her nipple. Crouched low to untie his shoes, he watched her other hand slide down the slope of her thigh. He expected it to move in, to burrow into her thick pubic hair, darker than the hair on her head, but when he looked up from his shoe she was watching him, still as stone, her hands still as stone. She watched him stand and unbutton the fly of his jeans. She wanted him to turn around. She wanted to see his ass first.

He had never undressed like this before, before a woman, on demand. He turned his back to her. The floor was gritty under his feet. Light from the window beat hot and flat against his face. His fingers seemed larger than they were, stiffer. The muscles above his knees clumped and his thumbs caught in the deep grooves between tendon and flesh. But although his hands were so clumsy, they felt the hairs on his thighs the way a hand might feel, without touching, another body's heat. He pushed the jeans over one ankle, the other, straightened, then pushed his shorts down and stepped out of them.

He felt her gaze like a wall of glass against which his buttocks and shoulder blades were flattened. She told him to go to the easel. She had moved a little, opened her legs wider. Now both hands bent over the labia. Her breasts, elongated, pressed together between upper arms, the nipples hard as knuckles. This was how she masturbated. How he thought she must masturbate. The narrow sable brush picked up a clump of greasy garnet-red paint. She was not watching him now. Her lower lip dipped, slack, below the tongue that touched the upper

with moisture. The motion of his hand, the brush, all in the wrist. The motion of her hands.

He watched the panel now, more than he watched her. Watched the fierce line of her hand rise through the wrist into the arm, pierce her shoulder, and in the calligraphic stroke of the clavicle reach like a fist into her gut. Watched the blind prodding of her breasts and the angular reach of thigh and shin. Sweat dried in the heart of his back, on a line down his vertebrae.

He looked up. She was gone. She took the brush from his hand and with two strokes drew, between her thighs, filling her hands, a phallus. She gave him back the brush, and a hard smile. While she dressed he wrote her a check.

Hé'd had trouble finding a place to park—Friday night, high summer, four blocks from the Castro. Then the directions were complicated, and he didn't know the area, and had left his street map at home. One streetlamp, at the corner, flickered, its light refracted in an orange spill by the fog. Glass crunched underfoot. He walked uphill, sure he could find his way once he found 18th again. It couldn't be more than two or three blocks away. At work Tuesday morning the word-processing-group lead, delivering the draft of a report for him to approve, had mentioned seeing the show at the gallery. I didn't know you were an artist, the man had said. Did you buy anything, he wanted to ask. The man had bought the poster. I've never known a real artist. Would you sign it, before I take it to be framed?

The poster was an aberration among the works in the show—the only figural piece and the only oil in a group of cool watercolors, botanical and architectural studies and still lifes and portraits of windows. He had argued with its being chosen to represent his work. It was a self portrait, from a photograph of him asleep, an experiment, feeling his way back into human anatomy for the first time since art school. He thought it compromised the integrity of the show as

a whole and hadn't wanted it included at all, but couldn't budge the gallery's owner.

The word processor, Bryan, was looking out the window, over the bay to the Oakland shore and the unused military airfield. He was tall and wore cowboy boots that made him taller, set his hips on edge, leaning forward, and broadened his shoulders, leaning back. I hadn't thought about how good you must look under that suit, Bryan said. He set the report down on the desk and left.

Walking uphill through the fog, shards of glass scattering before his feet, he thought about the drawing he wanted to make of Bryan's face. A three-quarter view, to take advantage of the swell, the arch, the sudden hollowing of the cheek and the hard stroke, hard as a fracture, of the jaw. He tried to place the angular volume of the nose, the overflowing curve of the lower lip, but without the model before him they slipped about, competing, he couldn't make anatomical sense of them. He thought of the ear, the immaculate nautilus curve of its helix marred yet justified by the thin gold wire through the cartilage, high up on the curve.

When a car turned the corner at the top of the block its headlamps dragged through the fog and swept over him before opening out into the cavernous space of the fenced-in playing field below the sidewalk. The field caught the light and seemed to echo with it, and echoed the car's unmuffled engine as it accelerated out of the intersection. The engine and the echo were too loud for him to be sure he heard the voice, the three clipped syllables: Hey, fag-got! His leading foot struck the pavement, slid an inch on sharp pebbles of glass, then stopped, and for a moment he could not bring the other foot forward and past. If only it were true. Why was he going to Bryan's apartment if not to prove that it was true, in hope of proving it was true.

The driver cut his engine. In the silence glass ground between the soles of his shoes and the concrete sidewalk. What does *gay* mean? asked the voice of a young woman, light and cool and almost loving. Got AIDS yet, he murmured to himself, turning his foot and hearing the glass and hearing the answer to the second question. Got AIDS yet? Hey faggot, you got AIDS yet? Their voices were so young, so

bright, like strokes of undilute colored inks on glossy paper. The answer was How could he? The answer was How could he have not allowed himself the opportunity? How could they know?

The driver opened his door and the map light lit the interior of the car. There were five of them, two young women, three young men. Hey, faggot, you suck cock good? You don't got AIDS, maybe I let you suck my cock. A real man's cock. The driver. He wore no shirt. His chest was smooth and shallow, a boy's chest. He lifted the beer bottle from between his thighs to his lips, tipped it back. Liquid spilled from the corners of his mouth. The girl next to him leaned on his shoulder and said something to him. His teeth caught the light. He wiped the beer over his chest. Hey, faggot, you want it? The bottle defined a precise parabola interrupted by the chainlink fence. Beer spattered his face, stung his eyes. The girl in the front laughed and pressed her palm against the boy's shoulder, pushing him out of the car. The back door swung open. One of them waved a knife. One of them, holding his bottle by the neck, cracked it on the pavement. Their shoulders were hunched forward, their knees bowed, they moved like wrestlers. They were so young. How could they be so young and so sure.

Remember this. You have taken your vacation and have flown with it to a tropic resort, white stucco and white beaches, blue sky and a sea blue as the tiles around a vast swimming pool. You know no-one and no-one knows you. You recline by the pool every day, your skin oiled and turning brown, watching through silvered sunglasses and half-closed eyes the other brown bodies around and in the pool. The one you watch most closely is the one nearest you. Every morning, after you have chosen your chaise longue, he will come out of the hotel carrying a white towel over his arm and wearing white cotton shorts. He will walk across the terrazzo paving, leather sandals flapping, to a position strategically near yours, spread out his white towel, scuff off the sandals, push the shorts down his hips to reveal the brief swimsuit underneath, the warm yellow of the paint encasing a N° 2 pencil. He will spend time

and close attention anointing himself with oil whose coconut scent reaches you across five or ten feet, then, as though it were a ritual, will smoke one cigarette with professional detachment, staring into the glassy blue water of the pool, before lying back and giving himself over to the sun. You imagine his breath must taste of the smoke of that single cigarette, and of gin and guava or tamarind. You imagine that his skin would taste of coconut oil and chlorine, and would radiate the warmth it absorbs from the cloudless blue sky. After two hours he will rise from his chaise, dive with negligent, confident grace into the pool and swim twenty laps at a fast crawl. The water rolls over his shoulders and flanks into a wake that demonstrates patterns of turbulence and light across the blank white concrete floor.

One day you will bring your sketchbook and a N° 2 pencil with you to the pool. As he oils himself, as he smokes his cigarette, as he lies back in the chaise, you will draw him again and again, charting the extension of muscles in thigh and calf and upper arm, the definitive curves of his chest and the gradient declension of his belly, the growth patterns of his dark body hair glinting with oil. In one of your drawings the lenses of his glasses will reflect you, minute, drawing him. When he rises to dive he will pause moments longer than usual, poised on the coping, so that you may map the pinioned reach of shoulder blades and define the way the taut fabric of his swimsuit stretches across the hollows below the hips.

Completing his laps, he will stroke lazily over to the edge of the pool facing you, will prop his elbows on the tile, and will stare at you. His eyelids will be puffy and pink, the whites of his eyes bloodshot from the chlorine, and he will be breathing, hard, through his mouth. It will be the first time he has looked at you without equivocation.

At length, in one continuous, extended movement, he will pull himself from the water, stride to the chaise, wrap himself in his towel, and then he will cover the distance between you faster than you're ready to deal with, hunker down beside you, and say something like You might let me see the drawings I've been sitting for. Hostile, confrontational though the words might be, his voice, deep, slow, still labored, will bear a complicit acknowledgment of conspiracy, and you, wanting to rear-

range his damp hair, to brush it back from his brow away from the glittering eyes whose blue is heightened by the darkness of the skin and the watershed-mapping of pink veins in the whites, will hand him your sketchbook.

He will admire your drawings, he will tell you his name (what will his name be?), and you will tell him yours. He will drag his chaise over next to yours, spread out his towel again, and ask you to oil his back. The muscles, the bones, the expertly-placed panels of flesh will be, for you, a tactile confirmation of an anatomy you know only by eye and from within your own skin. After an hour or more of conversation essentially pointless during which you learn that he hails from a city you have never visited, that his profession is as meaningless to you as yours to him, you will suggest, ready at any moment to stammer, that the two of you have lunch together. He will counter with the observation that he ought to take a shower first, and invite you to join him. The nonchalance, the ease with which he extends the offer will disarm you, will allow you the option of accepting without thought.

Will you accept? Will you go with him to his hotel room, identical to yours, where he will first remove his own sunglasses and then yours, where he will place his hand on your chest, stroke his fingers down the trellis of your ribcage, then draw you close and enfold you in his arms and cover your mouth with his? Will his mouth taste of cigarette smoke and gin, his skin of chlorine and coconut oil and sweat? Will you wash each other under a spray of cool water, amazed by the heat and solidity of his flesh, the dense volumes of his torso, the smoothness of his skin and the unimaginable texture of the hair on chest and belly and thighs, the light down in the small of his back (will there be a heavier down of fine dark hair over the swells of his buttocks?), will he lift the insistent weight of your testicles, your erect penis, stroke it with his large, soft, expert hands, and ask you to do the same for him? Will you tell him, before or after you have turned off the water and dried yourselves with lush hotel towels and gone to the bedroom, to crisp hotel sheets, to open yourselves out for discovery like the pages of a new atlas, that this is your first time?

Or will you hear a car door close, quietly, considerately, and the engine turn over, know that your mother is leaving, as every morning, for her swim, feel the strain and the familiar, friendly discomfort of your wounds, and trail your fingers through the pool of semen on your belly, lift them to your nose, and smell the acrid, penetrating fragrance so like the smell of your sweat?

Cartography

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