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A HO'S HIEROGLYPHIC

by Darieck Scott

In the glam times, the good times, when I knew I was a god . . .

The lights of a City. Lights in the windows of the tall buildings, lights that glow like tiles on a vertical path to the lowermost clouds; lights from the cars that cruise by, that glow like animal eyes or like UFOs coming to land; the lights of convenience marts spilling out onto the littered walks; the lights of signs and of planes and of the bay reflecting the lights of the buildings and the few stars and the shifting moonlight limpid as a spring or oily, oily like the surface of a minestrone soup . . .

In these lights his face and his body make their appearance, the arrival of a beast or a god. I'm into the simple things. Like the bit of gel in his hair that blackens its blackness and makes the short-cropped crown over his forehead erect, and his pupils as black as his hair and as large as nickels. Oh, I always talk about lips—but, yes, his lips: the lower one, that's where I'll focus, like a cutting from the cup of a tulip, thickened and protruding: a gorgeous pout. Tuft of black hair beneath the lip, beatnik style. Big ears, strong jaw. And the clothes—here's where simplicity does all the trick for me: a t-shirt, red, with thick white piping from the v-neck to the edge of the short sleeves. Hangs off solid, worked pecs, and as he walks the shirt sways slightly below and sometimes just above the navel circled by a hedge of black bristles. Cargo pants hug thick thighs and open sandals show his big feet and big toes that I beg to kiss.

Whenever I see Darius, I wish to become a slave. Some part of who I am, an important, vital part, unnamed because we are not to know (or if we do know, then we are not to encourage) this thing in us, but truly some part of who I have always been, wishes for this and wishes for it almost more than it wishes for love or fame or money or power or peace or joy: to surrender, to bow down, to do obeisance, to be a slave to the physical glory of a man whom I would, in the moment, for the sexual and emotional thrill of it, call my superior.

Is it all about power?

How does it begin?

Far, far back. But I'll begin recently, with John.

WASPY type, big groin stuffed in black slacks, corporate slave: John the poet. He has small ears and gray-tipped brown hair neatly trimmed at the neck and along the back of his head, thick and brushed into a suave and conservatively flamboyant curve across his forehead. Nice lips. Very nice: surprisingly rotund and shapely, a rich, slightly-short-of-purple color. Pretty eyes—can't remember the color: possibly hazel or light brown. He wears a suit and a tie and he makes a lot of money and may be, probably is, a Jack Kemp Republican. Married, repressed.

We meet at a dinner party hosted by a mutual friend. John remembers me from some other party more than a year ago. "Caine!" He smiles as his fingertips graze my upper arm. I do not remember him, but he has my attention now. I fancy there is a flow of energy, a charge of the god Eros like a gunpowder trail simmering between us. But this cannot be; it is only the ache of the god Need that I feel, a peeling from His aura shimmering across my line of sight so that nothing else registers. John and I talk of politics, and art, and money, and barely agree, though somehow agreement and a meeting of minds seem altogether inconsequential. He shakes my hand. I leave the party. I walk back to my car and the air is heavy with a deep-bone chill and the stars are naked in the broad, black sky: Mars is high, showing a faint scandalous scarlet. Scandalous? The night is quiet, and echoes with emptiness, with lack of meaning.

John the poet. He calls me. At school, in the office I share with two other students. I am grading papers. I do not know what he is doing; I do not know what they do in those huge glass buildings when they get behind their desks and make phone calls and plan meetings. "John," I say whipping up a froth of phone-enthusiasm though I don't quite yet recognize which John he is. "Oh. How are you?" He is chatting about nothing really. I think: he wishes to attach himself to academia, to literature and the remembered thrill of learning, in his youth he dreamed of writing poetry.

We are to meet for lunch.

At lunch, during lunch, there comes a point when he reaches across—across underneath, underneath the top of the table, the top of the table where the whole world exists in our conversation, the only world I would ever imagine existing between us: the world of words, only faintly inspiring, largely dull; and food, much the same. He reaches, moves, below this world, in the underneath, in the darkness. His hand falls upon my knee. A light touch.

I register this below, but not above. I keep talking, and perhaps my eyes flicker away from his for a moment, less than a moment, as if my attention might go elsewhere. This, it would seem, is exactly what I ought to do, for his hand does not retreat. It takes up residence. It moves, slowly but with iceberg inexorability, higher up my thigh, until it comes to rest near the marsupial pouch of my crotch. Rests there. Warm. Unwavering. John the poet.

At length the meal is over. I have eaten all I can eat. He is not eating. We sit there. I would signal for the check, but I cannot. Our positions are reversed. Free-flowing me, forever-student me, irresponsible me: I stand (sit) repressed.

His eyes have grown bolder as his hand has become more familiar, and his gaze is now undaunted as he locks my attention on him. "I have an apartment south of Market," he says.

There is nothing more that need be articulated. I feel that I'm in a Henry James version of a porn story or something.

I notice: he pays the check.

In the apartment: He is quiet as he performs his strip tease. A tight smile on his nice lips, as if he must hold back words I won't accept. There is something at once poetic and clichéd about the unzipping of the pants: the movement of his fingers and of the gray slacks falling below the waist of his silk boxer shorts—like oil moistening a well-worn groove in my brain, like the pleasure that reading the same story aloud each night gives to a child.

It's a big red number. Thick, very hard. I think: he brings his mistresses here. This is a place he's purchased for his mistresses. I am one of these. They're mostly women? All women? He likes his butt licked and the hairy skin between his balls and his muscled thighs lacquered with my spit. He likes to kiss in a hard, probing, untender way, and he likes pinching my nipples.

A flood of dirty talk—or, as he says when he shyly warns me of what he likes, “heavy verbal abuse.” “Suck all the cum outta my balls, eat it, go down on it so my pubic hair’s in your nose, bitch, yeah you bitch, suck me, suck me, bitch, bitch, slut, cunt.”

John the poet.

After, he is happy to have my nose in his armpit, until he’s ready to go back to the real world.

At the end of it, which I dread and long for, I am lying wet under the sheets of the four-poster bed in a room heavy with draperies, fit for a vampire’s domicile. I want it up my ass. I’m waiting for it: ass up in the air, waving for him to stick it. But today he only uses my mouth, my face, my tongue. He slaps my ass and the wedding band on his middle finger slides forward because of the sweat on his hands. But he doesn’t fuck me. Not today.

He graciously gives me the keys so that I can depart at my leisure, he says. This reasoning makes no sense, but he tosses the keys at the pillow where my head reclines at the same time that he notches the semi-lucent belt (alligator?) around his waist. His arm jerks, his hand, which has been inside me, flicks forward, and from my vantage his hand and the protuberance of his genital package in his gray slacks are level: I see his hand and his bulge together, and the keys appear. I imagine that the keys are the largess of his penis. His penis as the giver of gifts. The penis that I imagine I am falling in love with. (It is a strange thing, the love of the phallus. Rooted in the material, it is nonetheless all smoke, all ephemerality.)

I consider his presumption and his feeble attempt to conceal his presumption a condescending affront, and so I do not say Thank You. But I do smile, for I am amused. John the poet amuses me.

When I hear the door close (and lock—proving the fallacy of his logic), I rise. His “apartment” is no coldwater walk-up, of course, but a mansion-like loft. High high ceilings and sparkling pine floors, tall wide windows that show the uppermost story and rooftop of a blue building across the street, over which stoop the lower heavens. Today the lower heavens are like the smoke of a great fire in a rain-forest, shifting and thick. The apartment is sparsely furnished. The black gleam of granite counters makes for a cold kitchen, their emptiness echoed by the lone carton of expired milk and two corked and sealed bottles of white wine too long chilled in the voluminous refrigerator. The bedroom’s bed is whorish luxury, but the living area is best suited for dance rehearsals, not living. A couch, an endtable, a coffee table, two lanky lamps, an entertainment armoire. Tasteful, admittedly. A desk: serpentine, sectioned, with a computer and printer and fax machine on one link, empty dust-free surfaces on the others, with shelves and cabinets above and below. Cherry wood.

Does a fuck-toy need a desk? Ours is not to reason and write, but to lounge upon the couch-cushions swigging champagne and nibbling cheese whilst drumming indentations into the tasteful endtable with our just-painted fingernails as we impatiently await the arrival of Him, who will arrive brimming with appetites, with desires and demands.

No, the desk is his, not for us mistresses. For when he finds work too confining at “the office” (again, an abstraction, for I do not understand his office, it is an empty signifier: men and women in suits are there, I gather, and some of them have sexual drives, though none so inspiring, I suspect, as my John’s). I sit in the chair, lean into the high back, rock and let the springs of the chair prevent me from pitching too far one way or another. It holds me like a hand.

I rifle the desk drawers. There is a leather checkbook, with no checks inside (damn). In the ledger there are some hundred or so checks recorded in amounts ranging from a couple thousand to several times a couple thousand. Each to women.

Asha, Sarah, Tanya, Kendra. Clearly he likes women whose names end in *ah*. *Ah*: the sound of satisfied ecstasy, of passion fulfilled and come to rest. Or, depending on your pronunciation key, *uh*—the sound of a grunt, the sound of his push inside you below, though you hear it above your face or behind your head. The sound of thrust and conquest. What then should John seek in me, whose name does not open at the end? *Nnn*. Not the sound of legs spreading or lifting to gird his shoulders, but a sound that struggles to enunciate a refusal. Or a sound of teeth gritting, of bearing down to endure pain. Perhaps that—the will to make it happen as I lower myself onto the fencepost of his cock.

Is that what he desires? To bend another man to his will, to perform literally what he and his business cronies lust to do figuratively to their competitors day in and day out? My friend Jason works as a bike messenger in the Financial District, and frequently he overhears conversations or pieces of conversations: “We’re going in balls out,” some gray-haired great-grandfather in Saville Row’s best will say; “He’s fucked” “I’m gonna tear him a new asshole” “We fucked him” “Let’s fuck ‘em!” and other such rallying cries. Must build up a lot of juice, listening to all that, saying all that. A man could work up a thirst.

In another drawer there are files. Most are empty. One, only slightly thicker and perhaps slightly more nondescript than the others, is not empty. In it on thin paper are drawings: Broad-shouldered, well-muscled men and big-bosomed, wide-hipped gals, demonstrating in elaborate, carefully rendered pencil-shades and ink, from a number of perspectives, variations on positions in the Kama Sutra. Long looping lines like oil well explosions, that evoke nothing in my thoughts so much as the image of a cornpone feller in a ten-gallon hat leant back in his chair on a dusty porchfront, striking his knee and yelling out over the sound of the wind tumbling the tumbleweeds: “Lots o’ heaping cum!” My favorite etching shows a well-endowed gentleman surrounded by seven women overbalanced by their breasts, who kneel at his crotch and each offer tongue service to his inflated balls. There is a broad smile of the Charlie Brown comic strip variety on the man’s face. Below in somewhat hieroglyphic lettering is the legend FUCK ME.

I don’t know whether this is a title for the picture, and if so, who is supposed to be speaking, the women or the happy happy man, or whether this is the artist’s expression of frustration at his inability to capture on paper what his thoughts, his whims and needs, compel him to try to create.

My John the poet.

We know that silence is its own species of language, the refusal to speak an act of enunciation. The absence of words denotes the presence of defiance. Silence says, at minimum, You can’t make me.

Is there language in the ringing of the telephone? Ring ring ring ring ring. I dial the number John gave me and these are the only words I hear. Surely if this is an office number there ought to be a secretary who answers, or a voice-mail account that’s activated? Ring ring ring. Only now do I realize that it was he who always called me. (Which seemed thoroughly appropriate. He was only a stuffed shirt, a suit, it was for him to want me, because I, I was . . .)

I could ask our mutual friend, Nancy, but she’s a friend of John’s wife Kitty, only incidentally a friend of John’s. Kitty, once incidentally my sort-of friend, has now become my kind-sorta enemy. The more so with each passing day of pressing the receiver to my ear and listening; the ringing, somewhere in a room or an office in a house or a building I may or may not have

ever seen (it could be one I pass by now, with the cell-phone's signal vaulting up beyond the atmosphere to a satellite and falling down again almost precisely where my foot lands), stokes my desire to speak to Kitty's husband until it becomes a ravening. Of course this is nonsense; I raven in a vacuum, without context or cause. It's an affectation I've acquired, due to a weakness for fantasies. (I don't want him for a husband, I could tell Kitty, I just want him as a . . .)

Ring ring ring ring. Each trill is an island in an archipelago, and somewhere, at the end of its elongated trail, lies a mainland—or a salt, unplumbed, estranging sea (Matthew Arnold).

So I return to John's apartment south of Market, though I'd vowed I wouldn't without an invitation (but I'd kept the key). It's been chilly all week, our indifferent and unpredictable winter rolling in, but the apartment is unheated, its wood floors cold. In the refrigerator I find two bottles of Irish beer in a carton with four empty slots. I figure I'll hang out a bit, watch some tube, fiddle around with his computer and his desk, and when he walks in and finds me here—perhaps he'll have a slender woman on his arm, Natasha by name, I'd like that, what a scene that would be—when he walks in . . .

I spend the night. At three a.m. I gather the courage to get from under the sheets and find the thermostat to turn up the heat. (As if there were a miniature electronic security panel John carries in the false bottom of his pocket watch that lights up when one of his possessions is used without his consent, I'd waited, fearing, oh, this will increase his heating bill.)

The next night I order in pizza.

The next I bring clothes from my apartment, and, once settled on the couch in boxer briefs and a robe, start dialing my friends (but not Nancy). At two in the morning I dial John's number, shaking as I punch in the numbers, for now, surely, he will be awakened from sleep and the number in the caller-ID box will warn him that he'd better answer quickly so that Kitty won't get up. The phone rings and rings.

But the next day as I half-watch *The Young and the Restless* and half-read for class that afternoon, someone rings the doorbell. I hurry over to the intercom, scattering my pens (highlighters of two colors, and a felt-tip) and notebook in my wake. "Yes?" I cry, and choke back John? It's only a messenger. Special delivery, from the Board of Directors at Macy's, an invitation to an AIDS benefit fashion and music gala, where for the favor of seeing big name models like Tyra Banks and Joel West sidle down the runway while Elton John bounces up and down near his piano on one of the runway wings, the wealthy and would-be wealthy can pay a few hundred dollars. John, evidently, has already paid, or has been invited to attend gratis.

Two tickets.

I leave one on the granite kitchen counter, gather up my shit, and scoot out of there with the other safely in my jacket's breast pocket.

I go over to this guy's apartment. I meet him at the fashion show. Well, more precisely in the bathroom at the fashion show. This guy is in the restroom during the middle of the thing, and I have to run out to pee because I've been drinking water like a fiend all afternoon to try to flush the psychic toxins from the last couple of days out of my system. So I bump and stumble and apologize my way over a phalanx of knees and past a line of very annoyed faces feeling terribly embarrassed, since, like, who leaves a show in the middle during the best part unless they're a hotshot industry type in the back or the front row, and I scamper to the restroom thinking I should take a look at my face and see if my eye-sockets are all bulged out and if I look like some haggard witch (this is not one of my finer moments in terms of self-esteem, etc.).

Of course, I don't see John anywhere.

Anyway there's this dude in the restroom, when I expect to be alone, when I expect and look forward to and need the luxury of an entire bathroom all alone to look and feel terrible in just like I could in John's apartment. He's at the urinal. About my height, jet black hair, stocky build, in a purity-clean ribbed white long-sleeve t-shirt and silky-textured coal-black jeans, with a silver chain looping from the left back pocket. The chain is vaguely suggestive of a weapon, I think. I think perhaps a sharp silvery knife is attached to the clip at the chain's end, and the blade rests at a slant across the globe of this brown boy's ass, grinning in the darkness of the pocket. Nice ass, too. And he knows it.

The stocky guy looks over his shoulder at me as I enter. His eyes are a magnificent black, under black brows and above a black mustache and a sleek triangle of black hair below his lips, which are both round and long. And wet, as if he's been licking them. I can see one forearm peek from the urinal into the light as his head turns, and long, wispy dark hairs stand out along the nutmeg-colored muscular cords. I plan to make it to the mirror, but I don't make it there, because a few steps later he's turned to show me the whole package, a lotioned-up shiny thick johnson hanging low with a prominent vein running from the foreskin-hooded head down to the base sprouting from a heavy mass of black pubic hair. And if it's him that I smell, that's nice, too: sharp and soft like the mingling of a perfumed candle's burning carbon and sweet jasmine.

He figured only the real hos would come trolling the restroom in the middle of the show, he told me.

"You're looking for a real ho, huh?" I half-laugh, staring at his dick.

Staring makes it thicken very quickly. "You know how to hook me up," Darius says softly.

"This is what you want," he says.

What is it about me that makes men know they can use me?

"It was good," I whisper, but I'm not really there; I'm off, somewhere, just trying to remember the sensation, stay in it, live it. "But the deep-throating. I don't get much out of deep-throats."

"I do," Darius says, and pushes me down to the floor.

I tell him about John, and find that I focus, for some reason, on describing the apartment: the ceilings three basketball players high, the walls like sheer, bare mountainsides. Darius listens, pulling my fingers through the hair that twists along his flat stomach. He has taken my lap for a pillow.

"So what do you think?" I ask when he doesn't say anything.

Darius declines to comment.

"Do you know John Lennox?"

Darius kisses me.

He has me between the legs, and I think, this is just what Plato would want us to do, no real violation of the body's orifices, no compromise of seals and barriers, just a fierce and passionate simulation of coitus that goes further than mere copying to become an end in itself, compulsively pleasurable enactment of pure desire: It is for us the act that reproduces the state of wanting, desiring, needing, that pretends to satisfy, but doesn't quite, never quite delivers—it leaves us wishing, imagining more. Not that we ever stop there. The intracural fuck is like a foyer

leading into the many rooms of a mansion, because Darius is not going to stop with this between the legs shit, oh no, he's gonna take that big Puerto Rican anaconda and let me know how it feels slithering up inside me boom boom boom.

The room is dark, so dark that I could almost convince myself that it is no longer as I remember it, that the rumpled, always unmade, always faintly musky bed is not in the center, dominating the room's uses and its pleasures, that the desk and the large black PC and its dark screen is gone, done away with, the dresser drawer and corner bookshelf with trade paperbacks piled horizontally and an economy-sized round tub of lube on its top rung have been packed up and spirited away. Darius likes darkness. He likes the way darkness plays with the minds of his seducees, his victims: they might imagine themselves held captive in a basement, their only meals a bowl of pasty gruel and a smelly dick slipped between the cell bars for sucking, 8:16 a.m sharp everyday. They might suppose they were in another realm, in the maw of a black hole spinning away into the depths of the universe, far from the judgment or censure of any prudish deity's watching eyes, far from the constraints and comfort of inhibitions. The door is shut, and it is locked, and I am incarcerated and he is free to do with me whatever he pleases.

I don't need to be told to strip. It's hot in there. He's turned up the heat. Likes his hos to sweat, he says. He likes, too, I suspect, as I do, the smell of his body as it warms in the contained, limited space that grows smaller when the door is locked and the light is banished; like a flower in a hothouse, Darius blooms in the heat—his aroma is funkier, spicier, his saliva is hotter and wetter, his dick is thicker and stronger.

While kneeling before me, as his breathing becomes more ragged, he slips his many rings from his fingers. So that he can manhandle me freely, without scarring the smooth body he so likes to plunder.

One night Darius is at hapkido practice and I sneak back to John's apartment. I consider it sneaking because I don't tell Darius about it, though doubtless he would view my action as less than noteworthy, perhaps give me a lazy spanking just because I have that look in my eyes that says I need one. In the apartment I find the two beers I never touched still untouched, the sheets in the disarray in which I left them, the doors of the entertainment armoire wide open, the TV still thrust out into the midst of the room on its train-rails.

I get to cleaning. I want every trace of me, every molecule of Caine Monroe, removed, banished from the premises. I scrub and mop in the nude, with the heat turned up high, and keep my erection throughout.

As I make my way down the hall, I think I hear the trill of a ringing phone. (But this time I locked the keys in behind me.)

This is one of the things he likes me to do, and what we did today. First he pulls down the shades; the shades have black construction paper taped to the inside of them. I get tied up, loosely, on a very comfortable ergonomic chair he has next to the drafting table. My arms are bound behind the chair's back, and my mouth is gagged, and my shoelaces are tied together because he keeps forgetting to buy more twine or electrical tape to secure my feet to the trunk of the chair. He turns out the light. I wait. Soon he enters from a side-door. I turn sharply. He waves his hand in front of my eyes. There is a ring on his finger with a prominent faux-emerald

set in duller army green metal. He removes the gag from my mouth. "Green Lantern!" I cry. "Thank Minerva you've saved me!" Whereupon he yanks the drawstring of his army-green sweats and lets them fall to midway down his hefty thighs, grabs hold of the back of my head, and pushes me down to suck him so that I'm straining against my bonds. "You like that, huh?" he says hotly. "You want more, huh? Don't worry. I'll use my power-ring to make my dick so big in your throat it'll reach down to your stomach." And pumping more and more urgently, he comes, spraying down my throat and across my lips. Then he kisses me, sets me free, and walks over to turn on the light. This is the part I like best: In the darkness, I see a phosphorescent prick-shape like a snubbed version of a traffic light's glowing green left-turn arrow gently bouncing as it moves toward the wall.

(Never have figured out how he does that trick.)

Something is happening now that I've met Darius. Now that I belong to Darius. Last night around nine we were playing the 50s Housewife and Biker Stud game—just a simple lay-there-and-take-it-like-a-good-bitch fuck, where Mr. Schindler the middle level executive at IBM or whatever is gone away for a business trip (and probably porking some hooker in a Holiday Inn room), and I, Mrs. Schindler, get all hot and bothered watching a gang of bikers revving up in the parking lot of the grocery store and one of them, a dark-eyed fiend with a fiendish goatee, sees me, grins lewdly and says something to his fellow hard n' hairy, chain-around-his-neck-between-his-pecs gangsta guy and they both snicker, so that I lock my 4door sedan down tight like strapping in Frankenstein and cut out for home—with two motorcycles trailing me at a none-too-discreet distance. Of course they bust up in the house and I scream and I get chased, and then while hard n' hairy jiggles his big belt buckle in front of my face and I can smell the heat-baked flesh of his hairy stomach as his dirty t-shirt rides up over his navel just before he unzips and lets it all roll out over my nose and lips and he squeezes my cheeks with a rough hand and says, "Do it till I come on your face, you hot bitch," Darius the dark-eyed fiend dressed all in leather presses his cold black soft-metallic body across my back and grabs hold of my tits from behind and rapes my ass. All of this is in my apartment in student housing, and somewhere in my mind I do try to remind myself of this—at least at the beginning—that there are guys out there in the hallway playing rollerball with hockey sticks and their roller-blades creaking on the old floors and a pissed-off RA who keeps yelling at them, and I don't even have any tits that you can grab onto from behind like that and tweak, and there is no one here in this room except me and My Man. It's all words, words we speak together that don't make sense before we do it, words he says in my ear, that he traces in some old language across my chest with his saliva and an old quill pen that tickles and bites, like nipple clamps. Whatever: it works. There is another guy here and he's making me suck his big slobbering precum-loaded dick and I have tits and a pussy and somehow I am getting a royal clitoral orgasm.

(Sometimes when we play this particular game we do the other version: I'm no longer Mrs. Schindler, but Darius is Mr. Schindler, and he's this big, lanky, pale Germanic type very much like Liam Neeson and very hung very much like Liam Neeson heh heh heh. It is 1942, I happen to be a Czech Communist refugee, we are in a hidden lair waiting for the arrival of my false identity papers, and Herr Schindler likes to pump me a good one while I lie perfectly still, because he's sort of evil even though he's doing the right thing, you know, and it gets him off to know that I really don't want it but he does and he gets to take it, and he smells like a German in winter, all musky, and the hair under his arms when he smothers my face in his pits as he

hunches across me driving toward the last deep-dicking thrust tastes like salt, and the sweat from his pits runs across my face like tears.)

I am drunk. On what, I don't know. Darius, the devil—yes, he is the Devil Himself—he fed me something. The salty taste of his long, thick fingers as he pushed it into my mouth is still with me, still a residue on my lips. I smell it, right beneath my nose. I smell him, my Lord and Master, Darius Lucifer Morningstar, Baal, Angel of Lust and Decadence. I lay upon my stomach on the floor and his feet used my back for a stool; when he wished I kissed his toes, licked between their knobs like a dog, like a fool. It gave me such pleasure. He wasn't wearing underwear. He looked down at me from on high, and it was like staring into the eyes of an irresistible demon god. I knew his desires and it gave me such pleasure, such indescribable pleasure, to comply. Hair by hair I licked up along his ankles, his strong calves, the backs of his knees, the muscular inner rings of his thighs. He slid forward in his chair and I slavered for him, cleaned the hairs of his dark and dominant ass for him and then he rewarded me by raping my mouth. There was a madness, an insanity in him. I felt amazed to see it, felt a deep reverence for the rapaciousness that seemed suddenly to seize him and make him rabid, and oh, it gave me such a thrill, when he pulled at my head and impaled my lips on his dick and thrust so hard into my throat. Oh, the pleasure of that pain, it was—ecstasy. His cum was hot and acidic and burned my throat sweetly. I lay upon my back, spent. I had orgasmed when he gave me his cum; the taste of it, the feel of it was enough to send me over the edge, destroy me, uplift and transfix and transmute me. I lay upon my back and he bent over me, a terrible smile upon his face. "Take these," he said quietly, and pushed something—a pill? a pellet? a vitamin? a communion wafer?—he pushed it into my mouth and I tasted him on his fingers. "Go dance," he told me.

In my apartment I fling open the window above the street. The lights are out, the music is low—five CDs at random: free jazz, circuit party anthems, top of the pops—so low that it is a whisper in my ears, a stream of sound more shallow than streams of thought, a tiny thump thump thump I strain to hear and to which I leash the movement of my body, following the faint rhythm as it beckons, obeying as if it were the very words of all mastery.

"You are an apsara."

"What does that mean?"

"It means . . . It's a Hindu nymph. A sex angel for the Hindu gods. I been looking for some legends about them."

"Hm."

Darius touches me lightly on the shoulder. He bends down to me so that our lips almost touch. "Just think of an apsara as a politically correct name for Sex Slave. Cause that's what you are, baby."

Grabbing me by the chin, Darius squeezes my cheeks so that my lips pucker, and invades my mouth with his rough, insistent tongue.

On my back. My neck follows the soft contour of the bed's edge, the top of my head dangles toward the floor. Above, Darius's torso, shaped from the living clay of red earth, webbed with vines and moss, like a cave-wall lit by fire. My mouth is open. It is full. It is empty. Full; empty; full. Blood collects in my temples. I feel that I'm drowning and drawing down breath from heaven.

If I open my eyes again I know it will be there: white columns, the high sun, waxy magnolia leaves, and the thumb-screws. A different game.

Darius is my plantation master, I his house-Negro concubine. Missus don't know what's going on, she up in the nursery playing with the little sickly pale white runts, but massa loves me more than any of 'em, he sneak me upstairs and lock the door and strips off his shirt and make me lick the smelly hairy pits beneath his arms and kiss his navel and wash between his balls and his thighs with my tongue. He calls me "darkie" and shoves his fingers up my butt to see if I been keeping it tight and because he likes to see me squirm. "That wince, I like the wince on your face when you feel pain and lust at the same time," he says to me, pushes the words out from his lungs like dragon's steam (okay, okay, so where does a plantation concubine find out anything about dragons? give me a break, we're play-acting). "Yes, massa," I says and tries to smile. Ass to lick now: it's hairy and dark and I push my nose all up in it to get the full flavor, the whole taste of him and his dirt and his stuff. This is all of him, his ass, and I want it, want to take all of it in me and down my throat. "Ahh, slaaaayyvvh," he says, and it sounds like love to me, don't nobody in the fields believe it, but I say 'tis love true and through. Massa gives my ass a slap so that it burns and then has me bend down with my face in the soft hug of those big white pillows. "Does slavey-boy want his Master's cock in his slave butt?" he says. "Oh, yessa, massa, sah," I says. "Wiggle it, then, and show me how much you want it." So I do, and then he grabs hold to keep me still so's he can get down to what he likes to call raping me. "Uhh uhh huh huh hu hu hu uuuuuuyyesssss mah swweetbllack boodie!"

Malcom X wouldn't like it, but goddam I do come good when he talks like that.

Like a shackling of my wrists?

Like a scythe across my scrotum?

Like a bride crossing the threshold?

Like a long-broken circle, mended?

In my office I have another round of freshman essays scattered across my desk. The ones closest to the phone vibrate when it rings.

"May I speak to Caine Monroe, please?"

"John!"

He tells me that he has been on business in Hong Kong for several weeks. His voice is soft as he talks about how much he enjoys his visits there, describing for me the voyages of the Star Ferries across Victoria Harbor, the forest of cranes on the skyline, the armadas of ships, the mayhem of neon at night, the melange of temples and shrines. Have I ever been, he asks. I tell him that I have been calling him constantly, but the number never picks up. "Oh!" he says. "I must have misspoken," he says—but offers no correction. He wonders if I'll be attending Thanksgiving dinner at his house with Nancy. I tell him I'm sure that I will. "When we see each other," he says—and I'm thinking again: how soft, how mild is the tone of authority, both he and Darius are the same this way—"When we see each other," he repeats (or perhaps he merely pauses; the words echo in my thoughts, they tell me he does not mean Thanksgiving dinner)—"I'd appreciate it if you'd bring me my drawing back."

I pause only slightly before promising him I will, and so our conversation ends. He asks nothing about the fashion gala ticket, but then perhaps he knows nothing about it.

(I won't give him the drawing back, not unless he sends some thugs to beat it out of me. I keep it in a large envelope in the bottom drawer of my desk, under a pile of books. I want it as a keepsake, yes, and more than that. It is not beautiful, it has no appealing aesthetic, it is not, on its own terms, arousing to me. I think of it as something an archaeologist might find in the silt and rubble of some long-deceased buried city—as if it were a polished stone in the shape of a phallus, maybe, with a sinuous loop like a serpent's tail carved along its shaft. It reads to me like a puzzle, a code, in which, perhaps, are encrypted the attributes of my god Need. Extravagant, my god is; do you really need *seven* women to get you off? Reciprocal, my god is, for he gives his gift to them as they give their mouths and the sight of their breasts like panting animals to him; he serves as they service. Profound is his lesson, for isn't the riddle of service the riddle all gods pose? To surrender the ego, and throw open your arms to something Other.)

In this phase of our relationship Darius and I meet in coffee shops, in bookstore cafés. He wears glasses sometimes. They ride high over his crooked Puerto Rican nose—is the crook Indian, African, or Mediterranean? (Tonight it favors Mediterranean. Do you like Mediterranean dick? I imagine I do. I think of being a boy trussed in the boudoir of an Umayyad caliph, my beauty sung by court poets, my virtue plundered and plundered again by a hairy, masterful man who is the servant of God and my absolute monarch. I think of being the slender, ephobic eromenos of a burly, hirsute Athenian citizen whose hot breath bathes my face like the steam of a Turkish bath.) Darius pushes the glasses up over his nose as we discuss Fanon and Stuart Hall. We also discuss piercing: I want a new look to better accord with the true me, and so am considering a ring through my navel. Darius avows that he thinks this a fruitless quest, but the ring's not a bad idea. There is wind in the air about a trip to Mykonos. I've entered a contest and expect to win. He will accompany me? Yes; I'll feel his thick dick pushing into my ass as I lower myself down, relax, relax, as he fills me, the heat of him ah the thickness, it's not comfortable but it's magnificent—and oh the sound of his gasp as the pleasure of violating me flows over and through him, and overcome with it he begins to spear me, and now, now, now baby, don't it feel good as it goes in and out, as he goes in and out of me faster faster faster. That's what makes it feel good: the speed. The speed and the thickness together with the heat and the way I've trained the muscles of my canal to flex around the shaft of his dick like biceps announcing their power.

It is all about power.

And it's about the lights, too, through the open window (it is a cool night), and the sounds of traffic, and the little bursts of laughter that climb up the steps of the fire escape and come to peek at us from the outer edge of the wooden windowsill where the paint has flaked away to watch, bemused, my face slack and moist in the throes of the experience of power, as I rise and plunge, rise and plunge, and then hold on while I'm savagely pounded.

The sound of the cars is soothing: wheels, rubber turning as it passes over asphalt is like the sound of waves stroking the pebbles of the beach at night: like an exhalation of the sky. I listen to it, and I listen to his moans and the dirty words *uhh you like getting fucked you like taking it up the ass taking my fat cock you always like it you like it when I hurt you too don't you don't you don't you* and hear my own moans burst from me in answer. And I listen to the cars pass by below, and I see the lights below and above, and I feel the thickness of him stretching me (I relax, I flex, I grip—such a charge, like a surge of fever, a spike in the temperature). And I know: I love life in the Big City. I love My Man.

The glam times, the good times, when I know that I am a god in a human body and why a god would choose to live that way.

Will we go dancing later tonight? He doesn't have to work tonight. (He's a screenwriter-actor wanna-direct-someday, in school, in productions, working for a computer company at odd hours. I study theories of how representation in literature, film, television and comic books shape the ways we think of the world—I am a perpetual student, the inheritor of a cache of ill-gotten money from a mean uncle I was forced to visit frequently as a child. I have nothing truly to do in life but enjoy. I am a god. Was it that big British blowhard Waugh who said, "To know and love one other person is the root of all wisdom"? I believe it.)

We will go dancing. We leave the bookstore café hand in hand. His palm is warm and large and callused at the bottom of his fingers because he keeps forgetting to buy gloves for lifting weights. Tongue. I want his tongue in my mouth, asserting his possession of me. To feel his body pressed hard over mine, exactly when and how I want it (that is, pretending that only he wants it, and I only serve his need).

In the club I slide against his naked torso, and our sweat runs together, down the cages of our abdominal muscles, through the valley ridges along the center of our backs. I'm not even looking at him, really, though I'm always feeling him. We're both looking around, at the flushed faces and the sweating men and the pumped bodies, while the running throb of the music makes happy puppets of us, yanking and twirling our hips and shoulders and feet. Have I ever been happier?

Afterwards I slake myself with a plastic bottle of cold water, pour it down my throat and then pass the wet bottle across my nipples and over my forehead in the air outside, as if it were an ice cube and the midday equatorial sun were beating down on me. We stagger a bit as we walk, our bodies still moving to the rhythm that even now shakes the floors and the rafters of the warehouse. He is not working tonight, but he must report to work by at least noon tomorrow, so we should probably be abed by the time dawn breaks.

In bed I let him fall asleep before I run my finger lightly through the hair nestled between the mounds of his chest and then the hair nestled between the mounds of his ass. I hear him moan, just slightly, and I move quickly, seamlessly, so that I can place my nose near the parting of his lips and just—inhalé.

And listen to the sounds through the open window, and look to the lights through the window that hovers in darkness as if afloat, the guardian angel that witnesses our love and my irrepressible lust, the unblinking Eye of My City.