

ZOMBIE BETRAYAL

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To the regulars hunched over coffee at the overheated Howard Johnson's in Portland, Maine who happened to look out past the silvery condensation on the cold windows as the red Jaguar swung into an ice-ridged slot, the couple who emerged, judging by their clothes-- he in an oversized silk suit that gusted in two directions, she in a short, hard skirt the sheen of insects-- must be a queer and a whore, respectively; in fact, the two were merely European.

The couple were in fact Roomy and Baboo Burda, husband and wife acting team who had appeared either singly or jointly in over fifty Italo-Spanish horror and supernatural movies, most of which could be rented in Blockbusters in edited versions deleting the "excessive gore" and "sexual unwholesomeness" their films' chief financial backers, the Spanish and Japanese, love.

Inside, the tall woman and short man were led by the hostess down an aisle flanked by the horrible garble of Maine accents, the overwhelming smell of cooked eggs.

Roomy sat on one side of the lime booth they were brought to, Baboo on the other. Roomy, after he was seated, propped himself up off the booth with soles and the back of his shoulders to yank his large, bright yellow suit more directly underneath him, so he did not appear, sitting, to be twice as wide as he was.

Baboo lit a cigarette, blowing greyness against the glossy cardboard pyramid of sundae photographs set on the table.

Her voice was musical and middle-aged. "When you are laying on top of this naked young co-ed, what will there be, one towel to separate both your genital areas?"

Roomy granted a condescending smile over the plastic-coated menu he had been reading like a tennis match, description to price, showing teeth nice and neat and expensive. "I have been assured there will be two. One towel on her before I ever lay down on her, another towel wrapped around me covering my genitals. Two thicknesses of towel."

"American towels or European?"

He gestured at the puzzles-for-kids placemats in front of each of them, upon which

their grey cigarette ashes were dropping in cylinders across the snub noses. "We are in America."

"Please, bring to me two slices of whole wheat toast with no butter, and half a peeled orange. Also, I would like some coffee."

"For myself two eggs face down, bacon, whole wheat toast with oleo, and a glass of freshly-squeezed tomato juice. Since I am not getting the hash browns that come with the eggs they should not make an appearance on the bill." With a magician's flourish he tugged the three white triangles from his suit's breast pocket, elongating them into a widening handkerchief into which he honked. Retracting his head further than necessary from the handkerchief, he stared in horror at the thick red splat covering the folds' convergence. "Oh no, the doctor was right and I was wrong; what is this?"

"That looks like ketchup, sir."

Roomy held up the small rectangular foil packet he had pocketed at McDonald's the night before. "I had you worried, but it is in fact only ketchup, a make-up trick we actors use. Make up is easy; emoting is, on the other hand, hard."

"You could double your towel up, fold it, or an assistant could fold it, and place it in front of your hip bones so that it would not be visible from the rear. That way they could show your buttocks, but there would still be that extra thickness there."

"We are lucky to be here. I cannot be shoving them all around about this towel thickness issue."

"But this girl will be bare breasted. Your chest will be brushing over her, your nipples getting her erect. Also, please bring my husband and myself some water glasses. We are both very thirsty."

"Oh, what a hypocrite! I wonder how Sergio felt when he was raping you and had your skirt all pulled up, which even he could do, the hem of your skirt being so short to start with."

"I still had all my clothes on, even though they were pushed up and down, and I was wearing underwear."

"Your legs were bare." He shut his menu, looking swarthy and small without his toupee. "What a pig he was. And no towels anywhere around."

"It was very brief, and one of his hands was occupied with the amulet. And anyway he was not concerned with being on top of me, he was concerned with showing his face's best profile. You're no better, drinking vinegar every day."

"What are you demanding, that I go back to being the beast, with so much makeup and prosthetic pieces my fans cannot recognize me?"

"Of course not."

"I would not be up for one of the villains in the latest James Bond adventure if I wore all this rubber on my face."

"Of course."

"If you are not playing the beast then you have a love scene if you are the star. I am not going to be in a picture without nudity. It would be like playing the Christ child without straw."

Baboo sat back, looking at the drippy condensation on the tall windows, the vanilla parking lot, the whiteness rising beyond. Her eye makeup crinkled concession. "No one is saying we are not going to do a picture with no nudity. They are shooting two, not one, co-eds washing themselves in the shower, but I understand that you would then say that is nudity but not a sex scene because there is no love-making, just the bodies and various sponges and product placements."

"When you make my point for me I don't need to add anything."

She put her hand on his. "It is my jealousy, you know. So many movies together, and I was always your lover in them, but now I play the centuries-old revived witch or even

worse your sister, and there you are with suitcases outside the castle or ski chateau with some young girl at your side in a mini-skirt and braless sweater playing the wife I used to play."

Roomy laughed embarrassedly, hunching his shoulders forward with a fly's white-winged back tingle to the lowering, can't-sail-out-from-under splat beneath plastic mesh. "Showbiz! It's showbiz! It's better I have the bigger role, as your husband. I don't say this to be frank, but of course you are in your late forties now-- I know, as I was-- but a man can be shown on the screen in a certain role longer than a woman. A woman must convey her sexuality with her body. A man can do it with a look." Roomy raised an eyebrow to a mirror-practiced arch. "As long as I can do that with the eyebrow, we will always be making movies with nudity not confined to the shower stalls."

"And I will never be seeing the money."

Roomy shook his head bitterly. "You see what you need to see. You are trying to get into everything, honey pie. Money, towels. Everything. Concentrate on your art."

A thin Japanese youth in a dark suit stopped at their booth, low winter sun glinting off eye glasses, grin. "Who is this?" he said in mock ignorance. He turned towards the other three suited Japanese who hung back shyly, blocking the aisle. "Who is this?" he said delightedly to them, both arms swooping towards the seated Roomy.

Roomy threw his arms wide, raising himself up enough to vigorously shake the youth's outstretched hand. "Peter? Peter Ky?"

Peter bowed his head. "Great honor. Greatest honor of my life. All of your pictures I have seen, and now this. To be standing here in America with the greatest master of them all sitting in front of me, buttering his toast as though he were in a magnificently appointed castle somewhere else. Great honor!" He gestured at the other three with him. "The staff of *Fang Glory*. All of us fly to see you."

Roomy chuckled heartily, bright eyes shooting at Baboo. "My friend," Roomy told Peter, "you do me an injustice to call me the greatest when my own idols, Peter Lorre and the great god Karloff are so much more deserving, but I accept your compliment by changing it to say greatest living master."

Peter leaned over Roomy and mock-confided, "Greatest master living or dead, sir." Straightening up, he addressed the three Japanese with him, as well as several Mainers irritably trying to get past the booth-shouldered aisle. "What a string! *Sausage Makers All*, *Danger Attacks the Boulevards*, *Package Full of Corpses*, *Now I Dance with the Dead*, and then the magnificent zombie series, *The Night of the Arrogant Zombies*, *Return of the Angry Zombies*, *Eaten by Zombies*, *Zombie City 2 AM*, and now the addition you are here to film, your first American production, *Zombie Betrayal!*"

Roomy scooted over, his large yellow silk suit making him appear twice his width. "Join us! Join us, my friend!"

Peter, seated, turned on a small Sony tape recorder and propped the microphone so that it was pointing up at Roomy. "So many questions, master! Do you have tofu? I eat only vegetarian. Okay, no problem. Orange juice please, toast no butter, whatever the others want. Mr. Burda--"

"--please. Roomy."

Peter turned to the three still standing, spitting excitedly to them in Japanese. One of them snapped a picture.

"Roomy, what is the greatest influence in your long and esteemed career so far?"

Roomy slumped back against the lime booth, fingers on his chin, elbow sticking out, ruminating. Peter, waiting, realized he was sitting on the unoccupied portion of Roomy's suit.

"My greatest influence. Good question! I say it is Poe, the great genius of the unsettling. The Pit and the Pendulum, The Tale-Tell Heart,

Comedy of Terrors-- he was my own master, much as you say I am the master to a new generation."

Peter consulted his list of questions, which were written, Roomy noticed, in Japanese, vertical rather than horizontal. "Roomy, you work with so many fine artists. I would like to ask you about some?"

"Of course."

"Dario Argento?"

"Great artist! So many thoughts he has when he makes a film. Each scene he wants a certain color. Make this one all blue, he'll say. Now we are going to have a scene shot all in red."

"Roman Polanski?"

"I work with him once, after he moved to Europe. Very funny man. So sad about his wife."

"Nei?"

Roomy crooked both arms in front of him, holding his left fist a foot from his nose, sliding his right hand back and forth towards and away from the space between left fist and nose. "Strings! I prefer Tom Savini, you know? Tom goes all the way with makeup, very grotesque stuff but very realistic. Nei...too unrealistic for me. We used him in a few films, but he was always looking at moths under microscopes, that kind of thing, to get his inspiration. Not the creativity of Savini, in my humble opinion."

"Mrs. Burda, you also worked with Nei, did you not? You appear in his film they never release, *The History of Blood*?"

"I worked with him, yes. He also did several other films of course, *Now I Dance with the Dead*, his director's debut, and *Flesh Full of Veins*."

Roomy started scooting towards Peter. "I must use the facilities for a moment. Sweetheart, tell them about *Zombie Betrayal* while I'm gone." To Peter he added, as he stood up, "This one will be my masterpiece." He hurried down the aisle towards the restrooms.

Baboo smiled across the table at the re-seated Peter. "Forgive my husband, he used a lot of mind drugs years ago including one I don't remember the name of that causes permanent intestinal distress. Ever since, his stools are always large and loose, and very frequent. He will be gone a while."

"A shame."

"He asks me to tell you about *Zombie Betrayal*. It is a comedy, did you know that? A horror comedy. Roomy does not understand humor so he thinks it is a serious film. I talked with Umberto Vin, who is our director, and he says the title will be changed to *Yeah, Go!* It will be a direct-to-video about these college teenagers who dare each other to spend the night in a mortuary. Roomy is this vampire who lives underneath the toilet bowl in the restroom in the mortuary. I do not think it is going to be a very good picture. The title he uses, *Zombie Betrayal*? That comes from a script Nei wrote for the zombie series, but it never got made. Lots of our movies have title changes. In New York City they added footage to our zombie series and distributed them to adult-rated video stores with the alternate titles-- alternative titles?-- *Great Fucking Balls of Fucking Fire*, *To Fuck or Not to Fuck*, *Fuck Goes the Weasel*, *Fuck the Drum Slowly*, *What the Fuck* and *Fuck It*, which is actually a lot of *The History of Blood* scenes Nei shot, with pornographic footage added around it, mostly hairy genitals meeting repeatedly."

Peter grinned up at the other three, who were still standing, hands crossed at the bottoms of their suit jackets. "We have heard of these versions. So Nei's lost film is on video?"

"Bits of it." She blew smoke, looking into its grey swirl, seeing in it a village on a coastline, a closet full of costumes.

"Did you know Nei, Mrs. Burda, before you knew Roomy?"

"No, first I knew Roomy, but only as an actor, not as a man. I grew up, as your special

Bare-Breasted Actresses of Horror issue of last year correctly stated, in Madrid. So poor the city was then! Empty doorways and dogs roaming everywhere. Everybody selling their bodies to the tourists, and the tourists are so happy, the big American men coming out of the bars laughing with three young Spanish girls on their arms, telling their companion, I get all three for only ten bucks for all night, Frank! Great bargains in that day, almost as good as Singapore. And the girls they all know to blow kisses instead of laughing when the American men make jokes, because their teeth are not so good, you know? And it would be so easy for the Americans to choose another one instead of them, with better teeth. So they blow kisses instead, showing only their lips and not the insides of their mouths. Two Americans riding up in the elevator say to each other, eyeing the six or seven girls they bought, pretending to be in the future back in the States talking to the man who paid for their business trip, Well boss, we sure ate a lot of sea food over there, and the girls all blow kisses at them in amusement. That's how we all learned English, to know when to blow kisses and to understand what they wanted us to do. I learned 'fish' and 'feels good' first. Then I learned the American denominations, all the Presidents.

"One time I am with this group of businessmen in their hotel room, by now there are also Europeans buying us, so these were Italian businessmen, here to build a dam or something, and they decide they will all make love to me one after the other. It becomes a game, you know? They go knocking on the doors down the hallway, talking to men inside the rooms who don't even speak Italian, telling them, Come on! We have a girl in our room and we are going to set a record on how many men fuck her!

"They had me lay on the carpet in the living room-- they gave me some pillows so the friction wouldn't redden the lowest part of my

back, and they get in a curving line behind me in their underpants, waiting their turn. One of them snapped a horrible picture of it that was to come back to me over the years like a bat, me on the floor smoking a cigarette with my legs spread while a man licked me and others were lined up behind, you could see their hairy, skinny legs up to their underpants in the picture. It was so ugly in the picture. Made me feel like a whore when I saw it.

"But there was one good thing about it, because a Frenchman staying in the same hotel saw the photograph while it was being passed around the bar that night, and he liked my face and contacted me through the hotel detective to find out if I would appear in an 8mm movie he was making. After that I made several more of these stag films for him, and then a Spaniard, Jess Blanco, who was also making pornographic films but who wanted to get more money by making horror sex films that could be shown in theaters, asked me to appear in his first legitimate production, *Bloody Eyes of a Witch*. Ursula Quinn, who was English and who later stabbed herself to death by deliberately falling on a big knife, played the witch. The story was that this old witch who had been burned centuries ago invaded the mind of this schoolgirl, me, and made me have sex with all these men because each time a man orgasmed in me it gave her more life. At the end the last man who makes love to me has his orgasm and opens his eyes afterwards and there, underneath him, instead of me is this ugly witch, who then rips his throat out with her teeth. The end. Jess Franco shoots it with a 1:1.2 ratio of film stock. The .2 is a man with a moustache whose penis would not harden, and so subsequently tries to have me to orgasm by blowing artistically on my cunt, like whistling.

"The movie was a big hit in Spain and Italy, because it was so bloody. Before that, horror movies were atmospheric only, but not that gory. Right away I am invited to all these

parties in Madrid, long tables full of decorations and food, because of course in addition to all the blood in the movies there was also me, all naked in most of the scenes and doing these wild sex things. Lots of men courted me at the parties, because they were the ones who had wives and respectable positions in the city, and so did not know how easy it was to get a girl here, they'd have to wait for business trips elsewhere in Europe, which weren't that common in those days because of poverty.

"I felt so lifted. All my life all I ever wanted was to be able to sit quietly in a chair, close my eyes, and not feel the emotional pain that lived in me with the power of a writhing soul, and that release did not happen at these parties, the bad soul was always floating behind my eyes like a blood-soaked tampon, behind my laugh, my thoughts, but with the alcohol and the flirtations at least I could pretend.

"One of the men was Roomy, who was an up and coming star back then. He had been in *Malevolent Castle of Dr. Otranto*, which was one of the old-fashioned horror movies of shadows and cobwebs, but no blood. The other men there, writers and directors, were all kidding him as they went down the buffet line that he and I should get together and do a film. And he is waving his empty plate at them good-naturedly, looking at me at the same time and wanting me I can tell, but not for his next movie, saying Oh no, her pictures are too bloody for me, I am a classically-trained actor, which of course he wasn't, he used to emcee at his father's nightclub outside Madrid until this homosexual patron asked to use the nightclub for scenes in a movie he was financing starring his young lover, who was prepared to leave him if he didn't get into pictures, and Roomy, in his vanity, said he could use the club only if there was a part for himself in the picture. I won't tell you the name of the young lover because he later became a famous rock and roll star in Europe, though not in America. But that's how Roomy got into

pictures. After that he wanted to be a movie star, but all he could get were horror roles, because most actors would not do them.

"At that party, while Roomy was looking me over from the buffet line, I must tell you that I did not find him attractive. He was short and even then balding, with ugly black hair that was very thin and unruly, and he had-- as he still does-- a very negative personality. If he is served a meal, he will eat it all but criticize the food afterwards. Always he tries to find fault with what he sees, to not be impressed by anything, living his life according to what his father decides.

"He asked me to go to his hotel room with him after the party-- asked me off to one side, where the other men couldn't hear-- calling me 'baby' and 'sweetheart' after first bringing me a glass of champagne he didn't have to pay for, which I knew would be the last nice thing he would do for me if I agreed to his pass, because at that point he would no longer consider niceness to be necessary, but I turned him down tactfully. It was not because I did not find him attractive physically-- I who, after all, had slept with plenty of unattractive men before that evening-- but because I did not like his personality.

"But at that same party I also met Umberto Vin, who was ready to make *Sausage Makers All*, but didn't want to use Ursula Quinn in it because of her instability. He was taken with me and offered me the leading female role. Of course, I accepted. Then he tells me, the leading man role, the pivotal role of the demented butcher, is to be played by Roomy. I act pleased, but of course I am not. Umberto tells me he chose Roomy because he can get him cheap. Roomy's films are the past, Umberto tells me. Mine are the future. Lots of blood, lots of naked bodies. Do you know what I am going to do in this film? Umberto asks me. I indicate with my eyebrows and my hands, holding a plate, that I have no idea. I am going

to show an eyeball being forced out of its socket by a knife. It will be my tribute to the great Dali.

"We shoot the film right in Madrid, most of it at Umberto's villa in the hills. Roomy gets one love scene with me, which makes sense because I play his wife in the film, and he is chuckling furiously the whole time during this scene, because of course while the camera is rolling he has permission to grab at my breasts, force kisses on me, everything. He was very rough during the scene. I showed him my bruises afterwards and he waved it away, saying the scene required agitation, but I know he was doing it that way because I had rejected him at the party three weeks ago. My consolation though is that during the scene I can feel his little pecker in his pants and it is short and thin, nothing like the size of what Umberto is putting in me each night after shooting stops and I stay over.

"Soon we are making several horror movies together, Roomy and I, because the Spanish public likes to see us together. Umberto by then does not want to direct anymore, his wife does not want him away so much from the children, so he becomes producer instead. Jess Blanco, who directed me in *Bloody Eyes of a Witch*, it seems so long ago, is hired to direct our next film, *Danger Attacks the Boulevards*. Umberto's wife comes up with the idea of us filming this one not in Madrid, but in the town of Como on the west coast of Spain, which is ridiculous because the town has no boulevards, just narrow dirt-packed lanes between the houses and leaning shops, but I think to this day she did that because she was angry at Umberto for fucking me so much each time he directed me in a movie.

"We get to this little village and set up in the only hotel in town, practically renting all the rooms, with me in one suite, Jesse in another, and Roomy in a double room-- in other words with the connecting door left unlocked--

because the hotel only had two suites. So Roomy has two beds, but no one to share them with. The first night we are in the hotel's dining room, all of us eating a local fish, which I remember was quite good, very moist and thick, like a bass, but garlicky from the preparation, when Jesse brings this tall, thin young man over to our table. He has longish black hair, a bony face but quite attractive, I thought, and a very diffident or deferring manner, I don't know which word is correct in English. I say he was young, but actually he was about my age then, about in his early twenties, but his tentativeness in our presence made him seem younger.

"Jesse says to me he is to work on the film with us, and I say, giving a bold look to this new man, and everyone knowing what type of films we make, all sex and blood, "work on the film or work on me?", and everybody laughs but the young man, who blushes. And Jesse says, This is Nei.

"We all sit at the same table, which Roomy also insisted sitting at, trying to run the conversation his way, with everyone ignoring him or making fun of him, putting their palms on top of their heads, and meanwhile I watched Nei eating. It is obvious to me immediately that this poor boy has never eaten in a restaurant before, not because he is at all boorish, but because he does not know what utensil to choose among the silverware, or whose wine glass is whose. Admittedly, a long time ago, several years, I hadn't either. I want to talk to him, so I ask him, So what do you do in this picture? Are you an actor? You're very handsome. He blushes, the poor boy, and tells me that no, he is to be our makeup artist. His voice is deep and masculine, with a Castilian lisp. He barely looks at me while he says this, looking at the knife and spoon he is holding instead. I lean back in my chair, my cigarette in a holder I used to sport in those days, looking at this man who probably had the same background in poverty that I did, but now here I am with a closet full of clothes,

sophisticated about restaurants and other public rituals, and with a full set of capped teeth. Our makeup artist! I exclaim. And do you think that I need much makeup to appear in this picture? I am trying to embarrass him, you see. You will need a great deal, miss, he tells me. Jesse hoots, lots of teeth, burying his long nose in his armpit in some metaphor I do not understand. I am devastated, that this would happen in front of the people who know me, and that the comment would come from a man below my present station who I had been flirting with. I can see my cigarette shaking in its holder, hoping the others won't notice that detail. I can think of nothing clever to say, so instead I ask, Why do you say that? Because this is a horror film, miss, and you are so beautiful.

"I blush all over, even under my clothes. My face is hot, I have a low-cut blouse on and my throat and the tops of my breasts are blushing too, even my bare arms. Oh. That's better, I say. He dares to look up at me then, giving me a shy crooked smile. His teeth are bad. But I fall in love then anyway, you know? So odd.

"My husband will be back in a short while, so please do not remove his plate. He has a stomach condition which frequently produces large, loose bowels. I will have another cup of coffee while we wait.

"Back to Como. The next morning is to be our first day of shooting, so I am up early to go to the trailer where I am to be made up. I will have a period costume in the movie over my regular clothes so it does not matter what I wear to the makeup session. For this reason, I choose a skimpy cotton top that is so small my breasts pull it up showing my belly button, with no bra underneath, and a pair of American short-shorts. I sit in the chair and Nei begins brushing my face. While I am talking to him I stretch occasionally as if I am still waking up, lifting my breasts by my stretches, and also keep crossing my legs, jiggling the top one. In other

words, guys, I am going all out. When I catch his eyes in conversation I hold them, then arch an eyebrow and slowly lower my look to let him know I am checking out his body. He swallows a lot, very nervous, but I can see in his crotch that he is very excited by me, his cock poking against his loose pants and sliding stiffly whenever he moves his body this way or that. It makes me feel very sad because I am not his lover, and very excited that maybe soon I will be, and we will be in a hotel room naked together, both thinking the other's body bizarre because it is still so unfamiliar, even after fucking it.

"He is wearing a short-sleeve shirt, a very plain one, probably because he cannot afford a better-designed one. I can see his forearms and, if I lower my head a certain way while he works on my hair, I can peek up into the sleeve holes at his biceps. His arms are thin but well-muscled, with smooth, light-colored skin and fine, black hair across the backs of his forearms. I had had sex with many men up to that point, but honestly I had never desired a man before, even Umberto, until Nei. Before, sex was something I had to harden myself for first, for money or a part in a movie. Now, I saw how sex could be a way of softening. I was ready to be swept away.

"Our stay in Como was scheduled for three weeks, after which we would return to Madrid for some special effects with windows. I played it carefully with Nei, always dressing provocatively when he was around, teasing him, tossing hair, standing close enough to him between scenes when he'd retouch my makeup to let him be able to smell my perfume, and me. I could feel the desire rise in him day by day. I was afraid to give myself too quickly to him, fearing he'd have me once and then think he had solved the mystery. Only one other woman there was as attractive as myself, the continuity girl, and she was actually a bit younger, such a horrible thing to realize and worry about, that for

the rest of your life your main competition will be youth. She was somebody's girlfriend who had landed the job, but I saw from observation that Nei had no interest in her and that her boyfriend, the A.D., who was much older, kept an eagle eye on her anyway, always three steps behind with his hands in his pockets.

"I started lightly stroking his forearms while I talked to him, so often that he finally did what it is hardest for shy men to do with desirable women: he started touching me as well, fingers on my shoulder, a pat on the top of my hand; once, after the end of the day's shoot, a playful mussing of my hair.

"The end of the second week, bidding Nei goodnight, I waited until I was behind him and then cupped my right hand between the seat of his pants, feeling the curve of his cheeks on either side of my palm, the hard root of his cock with my middle fingertip. He did not know what had happened until it was over, so innocent he was. I quickly ran giggling up the stairs before he could respond, locked myself in my bedroom, and masturbated with that same hand, three times. Those were the days.

"The next day I asked him during the morning break if he would have a drink with me after dinner in my room. Of course, he agreed. Neither of us would be needed the following day, a Wednesday, until early afternoon, which meant we could make love all night long, then lay in bed in each other's arms until makeup time at ten o'clock.

"We ate dinner as usual in the hotel dining room with the gang. As I let Nei lead me towards the staircase Roomy came up to us, looking nasty and sure of himself. "Have you seen this?" he asked Nei. Obviously, the bastard hadn't even bothered to rehearse what he was going to say, he was so unimaginative. Nei looked at the piece of paper. It was a copy of the photograph of me being fucked by the long line of men in their underwear.

"I remember Nei's black eyebrows, up

on his forehead. What? What is this, Baboo? He couldn't take his eyes away from that ugly photograph.

"I tried in a panic to feign ignorance, but no words came out. And it was obvious from the photo that it was me.

"That's what she used to do, Roomy told Nei. He put on fake concern. You didn't know?

"Nei, flustered, still stared at the picture. Is this you? Is it a trick photograph, or is this you here, Baboo?

"I told him it was me.

Roomy spoke again from our shoulders. What is this here, one, two, three...I count eight men here, but maybe there are even more, beyond the edge of the photograph?

"I am hot and dying.

"Roomy, that bastard, smirked and walked away. Nei handed me the picture. You do this in the past.

I start to cry, you know?

Embarrassment, regret that I cannot cut off my past like a tail, to let him know I am a one-guy woman looking for the guy. Yes, this is what I did, I confess to Nei.

No, he says softly. I am saying, this was before you know me. His wide black eyebrows raise, very sincere. I don't like, you know? But you are not doing this now, right? Now that we are getting to know each other.

But I cannot continue, I know that now if we go to bed he will be thinking of that photograph, so will I, and it will not be love, it will be one-time, and pornographic. I want so much to be with him, but I cannot bear afterwards, with his cock long and wet and out of me, when he will start to ask me questions about this photograph.

"So I walk away. Nei calls Hey! but I keep walking. The magic moment is over.

"The remaining week Nei made my face up in silence. The first morning was the worse, him trying to talk to me, but I told him to shut up and sat with my face expressionless like

something heavy with a nose and eye hollows discovered with paint brushes under the sands of Egypt. Finally he gave up and touched his wet make-up brush to the stone without any words, and that was how it was the rest of the week. It is easier to intimidate the shy ones. He stayed on at Como after the rest of us left.

"Back in Madrid, I felt vulnerable for the first time in my life. Before that, I had youth first, and then alcohol, to make me carefree, walking the stone streets after midnight naked under a white dress to my ankles, not worrying that I would be raped or robbed or made fun of. But now, you see, I had something to live for, for Nei, but I was a jewel that had been made garbage.

"Through Lumberton I learned of Nei that he had stayed on in Como, directing his first film, called *Now I Dance With The Dead*, which includes the scene where the heroine vampire, played by the continuity girl who he started fucking during the shoot, I have it on good authority from Roomy, has sex scenes with all kinds of men she barely knows. Sounds familiar?

"A year passes, and I find I am to be in another film that Nei is to direct, he is a big director star now because of the dancing with the dead film. This new movie is to be called *Blue Heart* or *Blown Heart*, there is a confusion about adjectives, but anyway it is released as *Flesh Full of Veins*. I play an anthropological professor who has a vampire appendage in her vagina, which naturally calls for make-up and prosthetics to be applied internally. Nei is director, but also make-up man, which means that each morning I am put on a table on my back with my legs spread apart, while he dickers around inside positioning the appendage, held in place with vaseline diluted with an adhering paste.

"What a well-traveled highway I am painting, he tells me while he manipulates his toothpicks up inside me, but even though over

my mound of venus, as the novels say, I can only see the backward sweep of his hair, his broad forehead and his wide, black eyebrows, I can hear the hurt in his words.

"One scene employs Nada, the esteemed Mexican comedian we have flown over the ocean in an airplane, who is to snuff a cigarette inside my vagina, using the fake red-tipped cigarettes with smoke-imitating talcum placed in the red 'burning' end that children are no longer permitted to buy here in America because of the fanaticism.

"Nei steps forward, touching Nada on the back of his shoulder. I will do this one myself, my friend. Nada arches an eyebrow in humor, looking Nei up and down, then backs off. So it is Nei crouching between my legs instead, pretending to smoke.

"We do endless retakes, like Hitchcock having the technicians continuously throw birds at Tippi Hedron.

"Finally, he says, Print! The crew goes to their homes, so it is me left alone with my legs spread apart, and Nei. He stands between my bare legs, in a more expensive short-sleeve shirt than when I first met him. Did you enjoy burning my cunt with your own hand, I ask, still laying on my back, instead of just watching Nada do it? He laughs, carefree. But it was not a real cigarette, Baboo. It was a movie cigarette. We are both deliberately silent then, like eyes looking into each other longer than is polite. So, he says finally. The way he says 'so', so casual while he is standing between my legs, I know that Roomy was right, he did fuck that continuity girl. I ask him. He bobs his head. I am no longer a virgin, he says. I pull my knees up, snap my legs shut, get off the brace I laid on for the close-ups and hurry to my dressing room. It was the final shot, I do not have to see him again. Five minutes later he is at the door, knocking and asking to come in. I tell him no, by then I am rapidly dressed, I push past him and leave through the tall doorway of the

airplane hanger where we were shooting. I do not see him again for five years.

"By now Nei is an internationally famous star in cults for both his directing and his make-up artistry. Sometimes American writers make allusions to him in their articles. He does amazing things on low budgets. For example, often in these films there is a scene where a character vomits blood. In all other movies, the camera would cut suddenly to the actor and he would vomit the blood. This quick cut to the actor just before he vomits is done as a courtesy to the actor, so that he does not have to hold the make believe blood in his mouth for long. But with Nei, he leaves the actor with the blood in his mouth in the scene for a minute or several minutes, sometimes even have them say simple dialogue, then boom! after all this time, with no warning by doing a separate shot, suddenly the actor vomits the blood. The audience jumps in its seat every time, popcorn on the lap.

"Roomy and I are married, because I am getting older and it is better for tax shelters. Roomy finally gets to fuck me, during the 1970 Cannes festival, our honeymoon between interviews and bare-breasted starlets jumping into pools, but he is totally incompetent, beholden to the instructions of his father. I lift my blouse off, jumping up off the lip of a cement fountain into the air, arms spread to try to make my breasts appear younger for the popping flashbulbs, thinking, I am thirty-one and I don't care, nobody cares about me. I see Nei in the light-popping crowd around the fountain, his bony black-haired head, his dark genius eyes, wonder if the blonde bimbo standing next to him is a part of him or a part of the crowd, and splash!

"We have dinner together after I am dry, in a small bistro outside Cannes not frequented by movie folk, going over old times. He is mellow, I am nervous as a schoolgirl. He is banging, I use the term pejoratively, an American blonde who is not even that young or

intelligent or any longer pretty, but who has these advantages: she is 'fun', she drinks a lot at parties, she has natural hair, which is attractive-looking, she has big breasts that are also natural, no scalpel half circle underneath the breasts and lifting up the stringy meat and sliding a big silicon bag underneath, and she is very aggressive sexually. The blonde who was standing next to him.

"She is what I am up against, guys. He tells me that he now has grown to prefer the smell of Americans to the smell of his fellow Spanish. Their bodies especially and also their breath, all of it influenced by the food they eat, of course. No more enchiladas for him when he can have cheeseburgers and fries. It is the romance of it and so I am not angered by his rudeness. I know that's what he would have wanted, even more than his art: to grow up in a suburban town in California where the boys spend their Saturday afternoons at the car wash polishing their fenders and singing risquely to each other over the spray and the soap while the blonde surf girls they are going to fuck that night are flopped down on their beds in their parents' house with their bare legs straight up in the air, trying on different knee-length socks like Ann Margret in *Bye, Bye Birdie*. But that was not his past, however much he may desire that it was.

"After dinner he takes me to a drugstore in the small town of the bistro. Even here, they sell American goods. He buys a roll of Reynolds Aluminum Wrap very mysteriously, then parks his car on a bluff overlooking the Mediterranean, the waters phosphorous like they are filled with drowned ghosts. I am in the front passenger seat, trying to be young, trying not to be foolish in trying to be young. There should be a word for that feeling, *Si?*

"He can do anything at this point as far as I am concerned. Kiss me, insult me. Instead, he yanks off a length of the Reynolds Wrap and triumphantly stuffs it into his mouth, starting to chew. At first I am puzzled, right? But then as

he continues to triumphantly chew, I understand. He opens his mouth to me, like a bad child at a picnic. I see the spittle-covered aluminum foil on his tongue, but also I see that he is in no pain. No fillings! His teeth are no longer bad. Capped, all of them!

"You have made it, I tell him.

"I have made it the American way, he replies. But I am not happy. I have no nostalgia for my poverty-- I am paraphrasing what is difficult to translate from the Spanish-- but I cannot show the bloody, torn flesh that is in my heart to show. Is it so wrong for me to want to make a film where flesh is the fabric that is so often torn, like an opera curtain coming down by a trembling white hand? I want to show the destruction of flesh by a knife, but I want that knife to be sex. I want to make a film called *The History of Blood*. It is from my own script. I want you to star in it. I want your hand to be the hand that wields that ripping knife.

"I put my hand out on the dashboard above the lighted car radio dial. The American Negro disco queen, Donna Summer, is singing 'I Feel Love', which we are all so proud and hyped up over, because the man behind the music is the European, Giorgio Mirodor. But my hands are so big, like a man's, Roomy tells me.

"He places his pianist's hand over mine, the hand that molded so many sores and gaping wounds covering mine. I feel his palm's heaviness on the tendons on the back of my hand and I swoon. His index finger slips between my ring and middle fingers, stroking the web there like my fingers were my bare legs, and his jointed index finger was a disproportionate cock.

"Will you come to my room with me?"

"Of course, I cannot, I tell him. I am married now. To be carefree again would be acting like my young self again, with no values, like in the photograph. Only if I have morals now will he continue to desire me, I am certain, and then it is only a question of waiting, because I am certain our attraction for each other will

cause something to happen to Roomy, death or divorce, to where Nei and myself can finally be together in bed.

"And then he kisses me. He leans over inside the car, I see it coming, the moon goes behind the clouds, his chest blocks the light from the radio, I could stop it, but my heart is pounding and growing younger, a teenage heart again in my body, I thought that was gone forever, you forget what you need to, and as his lips touch on mine we both moan like it was genitals touching. We are finally kissing, years after we first wanted to. I feel hot tears rolling down the sides of my face, ticklish and reassuring that there is still that kind of tears inside me, and in the dimness inside the car of no moon or radio light I touch his tender face with my fingertips as he touches my bare nipples, his hidden knuckles rising like little ghosts under the fabric of my blouse. I close my eyes and think in my deepest heart: somewhere, somehow, sometime, there is a town we enter with someone destined at our side, where we all walk tall and proud down the sidewalks, without fear or pain or chains.

"Roomy will be out late, restauranting with reporters, and I can always use the same excuse about hotel doctors he does for his commercial infidelities.

"We get to Nei's room after some comedy on the elevator where this dignified old couple is staring straight ahead while he fingers me from behind, looking straight ahead, and I burst through the double doors of his suite, already wet between my legs and with my nipples hard and my mouth in a big, happy grin, and there is his American blonde, Regina, laying in his bed in a teddy nightgown, finger under the white hem that barely covers her crotch, masturbating herself with one hand while she watches a Negro male perform oral sex to a Swedish woman on the pornographic tape she has put on television, other hand holding up a jazzy martini glass.

"I turn back to Nei. I thought this would be you and me, alone, I tell him.

"Regina, he says, you must leave, please.

"But she has her teddy off now, so easily, looking at me, putting her jazzy martini glass down, spreading her legs apart, looking at me over her big, sticky breasts. Threesome! she shouts.

"I have no dignity here, but I try with my face to pretend I do, uplifting everything, pretending I am not pierced. I will be going, I say. I do not want to look at him or her when I say it, so I say it to the bureau instead. One of those old world cherry-wood jobs with convex drawers swelling out curvy as women's parts, with fancy pull rings. I look at his painful face. I know there is only one chance for us to be lovers, and it must be without corruption, without the extra people his genius has immersed him in.

"So I go. In bed with Roomy he wakes up, bald-headed and irritable. Why is the bed shaking? What are you doing? I am masturbating, I lie to him. Go back to sleep.

"Six months later I appear on the set for *The History of Blood*. Regina is gone, leaving him for a Japanese martial arts actress. Nei is alone once again. The backers do not believe in what Nei is doing for this feature, so it will be more low-budget than most of his films. Everyone in the movie will be dead from the get-go, so we start each morning lining up naked, with Nei banging a large feather boa dipped in talcum over our bodies, front and back, to get the dead look.

"At first he does not glance at me any differently than he does his other actors, but one day, in the afternoon, all of us are at lunch and because I am the star he is going over with me a difficult scene to be shot next if it does not rain as it appears it might.

"His instructions to me are so detailed we must concentrate on each other to be sure we

are in tune. The others drift off and it is him and I at the round outdoor table. He is explaining to me how the woman of his film brings a young man to her all-red room, biting his body while she caresses his cock, until there is only bones and cock left, a skeleton capable, for the first time in film, of fucking, and we concentrate so much that we are looking into each other's eyes, directly looking in, to where you actually see the eyes, the mineral patterns in the iris, the changing size of the pupils, and I feel cool dots on the backs of my hands. The rain we feared because of its economic impact on this low budget film has started falling.

"He stands in the center of the town square, grandly calling off the rest of the day's shoot, an extravagance the others wonder about, and he and I go up alone to his suite.

"Our clothes are wet by now from the fat rain, thinner and tighter on our bodies, the rain which continues to bang and slide down against our windows. Such a thrill to say 'our', a room Nei and I share in privacy, in the middle of the afternoon, where there can be room service later that night, little wheels bouncing over the hallway carpet, in wet blackness and the electrical storm.

"He strips off his black pants, his white shirt, so handsome and thin, walking naked over to the night table, red makeup still on his chest for his now-canceled scene in the movie this afternoon, pulling open the drawer, coughing into the side of his fist, then into the handkerchief he has pulled out of the drawer.

"With my trembling hands I widen the top of my dress by expanding sideways the neck hole to both shoulders, letting the material slip over the tops of my arms and then down them, the top edge of the material flipping my nipples as I pull the dress down, until I can step out of the circular material showing I have underneath only panties.

"What's this? Nei says, looking into his handkerchief. I shall never forget it. What's

this? He unfolds the white handkerchief, looking into it. I walk over, curious about the handkerchief and anxious to resolve the question so that we can continue.

"I see that in the center of his handkerchief is this big clot of blood, a very dark blood, almost as purple as organs. And the hand he coughed against the side of? I see bright red speckles there. He coughs again, sagging, and the handkerchief is heavy with his internal blood, so heavy the cloth slips out of his hand and plops onto the carpet. The doctor was right, he says. I was wrong to ignore his warnings.

"We get dressed again and I take him to his doctor, in the rain that should have belonged to us, not his illness. The doctor takes Nei's shirt off for him, Nei by this time is too weak to do it himself, sitting off the edge of the examination table, his face having that loose, splotchy look that comes after vomiting, although he hasn't. My God! the doctor exclaims, it is one of the few times the word 'exclaims' is used accurately, I think. Your chest is a great open sore! This is much worse than last week. The doctor's hands wipe his hips, stalling because it is clear he has no experience with handling such a calamity.

"Nei is too weak, so I must be the one to explain to the doctor that the chest is only make-up. I rub at it with my palm. See? Purple and red grease on my palm. A great relief to the doctor.

"The doctor, rubbing off some of the make-up himself to be sure, is then in charge again, grinning with head lowered, glasses glinting, at his earlier alarm. He examines Nei thoroughly, asking me as he pulls Nei's pants off if I wish to leave, but I stay. Nei coughs through the undressing, spilling blood on his naked, made-up chest, on his shrunken cock I get to see for the first time.

"I have only cautious theories, the Doctor tells me afterwards while Nei sleeps in the two-bed infirmary. The problem is

respiratory. I believe it may be that it was caused by him inhaling so much make-up over the years. He and I discussed this the first time he came here-- the pigments that he uses to imitate flesh and blood, they are his own concoction and several elements are toxic when breathed in, because inside the body they are corrosive.

"I ask what I can do to cure him. The doctor tells me that Nei could be flown to Madrid for an expensive examination by the nation's best doctors, which may or not help, the illness is mysterious, or he could be treated here. We will fly him out tomorrow, I say. It is expensive to follow that course, the doctor says, and as I prepare to say spare no expense, the doctor names a figure that I and Nei and everyone we know could not raise.

"So instead Nei spends the night in the two-bed infirmary, while I sleep alone in his hotel suite, in the sheets that have an odor I am sure is his bare body.

"I go back early the next morning to the doctor's, before breakfast, nothing yet in the town square but the sun, up the stairs to the frosted glass door and lo and behold, Nei is his old self again. What a reassurance! A little paler, but so much blood coughed out, this is to be expected, we are not talking vinegar, folks. So he is cured, I ask the doctor? He is not out of the woods yet, the doctor answers.

"We go back to Nei's suite and fuck. His cock is big and bony. I can feel it inside my cunt, it feels really good. His hips, so bony! Finally the allowance to feel them, bare under my palms, my palms feeling the mechanisms of his muscles as he descends and ascends his fuck inside me. His face above me, so bony, grinning, straining.

"We talk and fuck and eat all day, many days, ordering roast beef sandwiches on buttered bread from room service, that is what we live on besides our love, and there is always Bowie playing in the background during this period, the

chronicler of our physical love, the corner of the bed we lived on, the make-up woven on the edge of the pillow, the bodies on the screen starting to bleed, sorrow all the beautiful transvestite left the singer with. I am so happy outside, truly happy, although I must admit to myself, in the quiet moments on the toilet late at night under a bare bulb, fearful of insects, or early in the morning, when Nei is sprawled on his back in the big bed sleeping and spreading his legs apart, recharging like a dog, that inside me is still the emotional pain.

"And it comes again that Nei turns his back to me, one ordinary afternoon, sitting on the edge of the mattress in disengaged mid-fuck, back to me, such a tall, narrow back, and vomits off the edge of that bed, all blood and syrupy brown sliding off his lower lip to the white carpet with a realism we never thought to achieve in movies.

"Back to the frosted glass door, the doctor. I am anxious, assured by the doctor's gentleness in pronouncing Latin words to me. Latin suggests such authority, awareness, classification, competence. But I see Nei's bent body, too many ribs, the doctor's averting eyes. I want to hear it in Spanish. There is material Nei has coughed up. Material in the white bed pan. Lung material. But he will get better?

"He is not out of the woods yet.

"I take Nei home, to our suite. It is not 'home', but we have no other home, we who travel over the globe's curve for years, to fulfill our dreams. I hold Nei in bed. His cock is big in its slackness, but not capable of hardening. I caress him, holding his face to my breasts, and in my caresses I feel the knobiness of his spine and get alarmed. I should not be able to feel these bones. He coughs blood on my breasts but that's okay. He falls asleep, hands in my hair, fingers kneading my scalp. It must relax him, I am glad that I have a scalp he can knead. We will get better and sail somewhere ancient, somewhere exciting and carefree, like Greece.

We will eat spanakopitta, moussaka, pasticcio, taramosalata and dolmas. He will sit opposite me at the outdoor table on the white, lye-washed terrace above the distant sea, dark-haired and bony-faced, sipping retsina, my poor, frightened, brilliant, shy, handsome, guilty, twisted, ambitious Nei.

"Soon a routine settled in. At first, each day I awoke hoping he was cured. The old Nei, spreading his hands apart, grinning, ready to fuck and order roast beef sandwiches again! After many weeks when this did not happen, after many more visits to the doctor's, I awoke each morning just hoping he was still alive. Laying next to him I'd stay still, noticing if his eyes were closed, so blessed a sign, waiting to see if his chest finally rose. Still in the woods, but looking for that path through labored breath.

"The shoot got called off. Everyone left town, except us. Us in the hotel suite, Nei sleeping ashen-faced, as they say, on my bare breasts, like I was a mother instead of a lover, while I looked out our-- 'our'-- window at the rain falling, gathering, percolating on the flat roof next door, wishing there was an equivalent of 'God bless you' to say when someone coughs, especially when there are so many, damaging coughs and the soul gets closer and closer to the mouth.

"Many times we went to the doctor. Always the same. Not out yet. Many times Nei has to stay over in the infirmary. They will try this new drug, this ancient cure with herbs. Always I get him back thinner, weaker. You have no idea. You have no idea what it's like. You can imagine it, you can hear the words, but you have no idea what it's like to get him back, thinner, weaker, the knobs on his spine bigger, his eyelids heavier, little white pustules all over his lips, then inside the cavity of his mouth too, then down the throat as far as the flashlight will show, then finally, I see one frightening day in the bathroom, all around and up into his anus. You have no idea.

"By now even I understand about the woods he cannot find his weak way out of. Now I no longer mishear what the doctor is telling me about the woods, his way of saying it.

"So young. Those evenings in the suite with him sleeping on me, I touch his hands, seeing how big they are, they are a symbol of his potential when he grows up and gets over this thing about putting fake cigarettes up women's cunts, or cleaving co-eds. What might he have evolved into?

"He stayed polite, almost 'fastidious' in his illness. Never did he pass water, or move his bowels, in 'our' bed. I would wake up from dreams of dead or distant relatives with stress in my forehead, clouds in my blue eyes, and he would be passed out belly down on the bathroom floor, having gone through the painful process of leaving the bed to hobble to the bathroom, to lower himself down on the toilet seat to piss or shit, fastidiously wiping himself afterwards. There was a man who had honor. He was born with it, the easy part, yes? But also, he kept it, certainly the hard part.

"Late one summer night I lay in bed with Nei, all the windows in the suite open, letting in the sound and the smell of the rain, and I was amazed to discover that because of the lateness and the rain we were getting reception on the television in our suite all the way from Ireland! And on channel 67 was an African! I was holding him to me while he coughed in his sleep, pink bubbles popping between his lips like little bubble gums, and I wanted to wake him to share this discovery with him, the romance of the far away places appearing at this late hour in this pouring rain, but I knew I shouldn't, and so instead I projected myself into the future. A foolish thing to do, but there I was at a picnic in 1985 or 1990, sitting at a park bench looking down at an ant hill between my sandals, a soft pyramid darker than the dirt it rose above, and lo and behold, there was no Nei there in that future. No Nei by my side, no Nei

anywhere in the world.

"I remember sitting on the bed each day, holding Nei's head in my lap while he slept, watching the walls as the natural light from the windows gradually darkened the room. One day as I did that I noticed a black spot towards a corner of the ceiling. Having nothing else to do, I stared at it. Was it a black bit of nothing, or a bug? I watched for a long time, and finally it moved, walking upside down an inch or so before stopping again. It must be a spider, I thought. An hour or so later, still holding Nei's head while he slept, I glanced over at the spot and it was gone. Where had it moved to? I located it clear across on the other side of the ceiling, once again motionless. Each day after that, as I sat on the mattress cradling Nei's head in my lap, I would track my gaze across the ceiling to see where my spider was, and each time I would think, sometime when I do not have Nei's head in my lap I should stand under the spider to see what kind of spider it is, out of curiosity, but this is one of those thoughts you think intermittently, but never when you are able to take action, like thinking while you are walking in the city that tonight when you are home you should clip your nails. It was while thinking this domestic thought one time that, on a hunch, I closed my eyes in our twilight-filled hotel suite, the weight of Nei's head still in my lap, and in me there was, surprisingly, peace. For once, there was no emotional pain inside. It felt like wine.

"It snowed the day Nei died. He was at the infirmary. He was back there because he had stopped eating again. I had tried smearing a peanut butter-like mixture up against the roof of his mouth, a very adhesive substance that contained all kinds of vitamins and came in a tube like toothpaste, something the doctor had given to me, but Nei kept gagging and resisting my laden finger to where I feared I might dislocate his jaw. So horrible, with someone you looked up to, to now half-nelson their head

in your arm, locking the jaws apart by the TMJ joints, ignoring their whimpers and spit-ups while you spread your finger over the bumpy pustules. Ignoring in the eyes you once looked up to the panic and the humiliation, the widening pupils. At the infirmary they were less apprehensive about that, and so more useful to his nutrition.

"I got the call while I was laying in bed in our suite, the television on but I was not watching television. As soon as I picked up the telephone I glanced at the clock, and as soon as I glanced at the clock I knew he must be dead, or why would I be recording the time? The nurse said, the doctor came in this morning, unlocked his office, and found Nei on the floor. And Nei was dead. Nei was found out of his bed in the infirmary, apparently headed towards the toilet. He died alone.

"After his death, I decided I couldn't talk about him. I went back to making movies, but now coincidentally, no longer was I the leading lady. Death, like a magnet, had pulled me into middle age, through knowledge. My name became third or fourth in the credits, or special appearance by. Out of this pushing back of my name in the credits came my own series, independent of Roomy, the *Intestines Out* series.

"My purposes were suited. No longer did I run around naked with a towel. To others, this honor. Instead now I was the comforter, the elbow into which cradle the hero laid the crown of his head, looking up dramatically with dried blood crusting his lips as he dies, abdomen slashed, cow tripe piled on his belly as his mouth moves with white words at the bottom of the screen providing translation. These moments I cherish, these moments I live for, and in that hush of expensiveness, the camera rolling, lights bright, no mistakes allowed, crew watching, I relive, film by film, in the quiet inside me that is separated from my scripted comforting words, the silence of comforting Nei. I relive 'our' suite, Bowie songs, the sad quiet

afternoons of helping him die. It is happiness and sadness, these private moments. Happiness with sadness curled within it, like an ear."

Baboo glanced around at the four Japanese who had settled into the lime booth, listening to her as they awaited the opposite of Roomy's absence. Pens had stopped. Vertical columns of Japanese characters had been folded.

"Roomy will soon be back. He will talk some more to you, and then I will take him back to our motel room and perform oral sex on him until he experiences his orgasm, so that he will not be aroused when he lays on top of a towel on top of a co-ed later tonight.

"These are happy times for me, when he leaves for the shoot. I stay in the room, in a chair, smoking. I go back in time. I relive the spider."