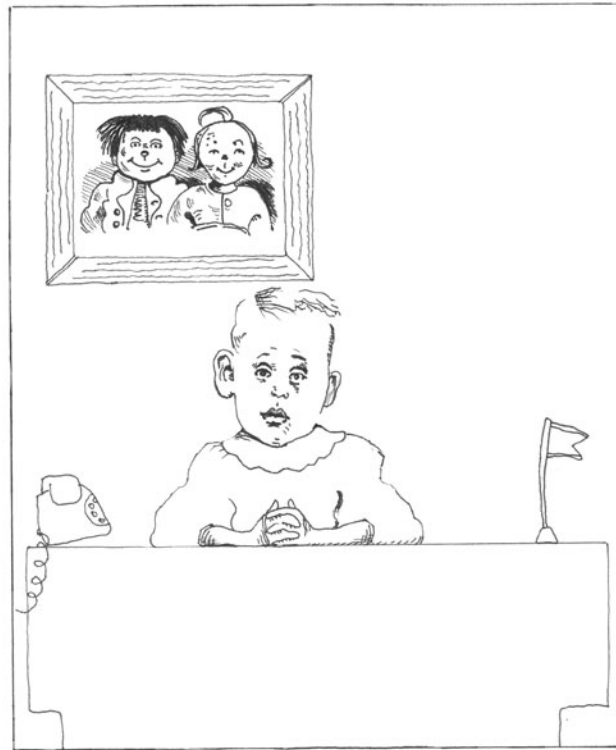


LUCY

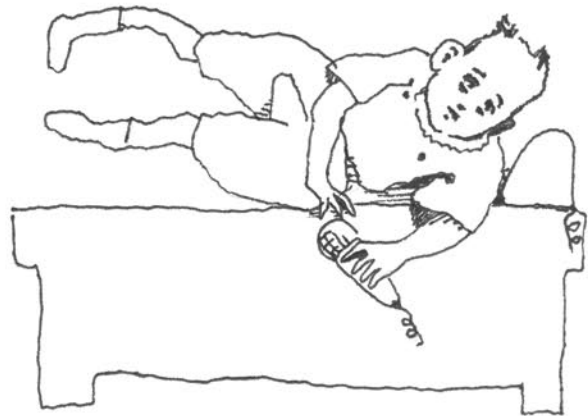
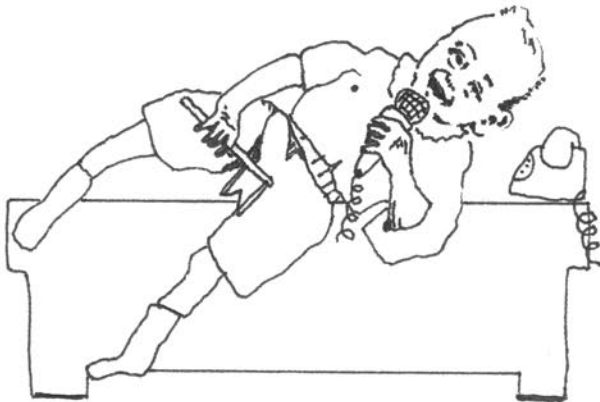
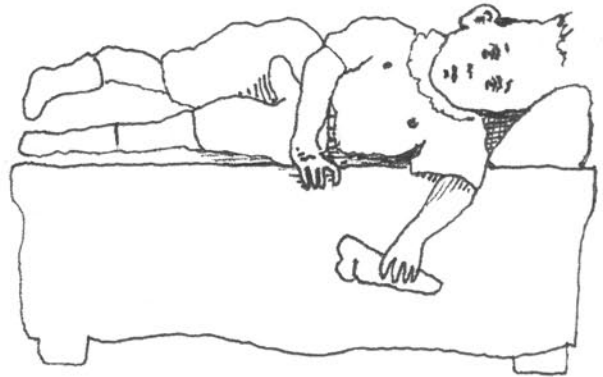
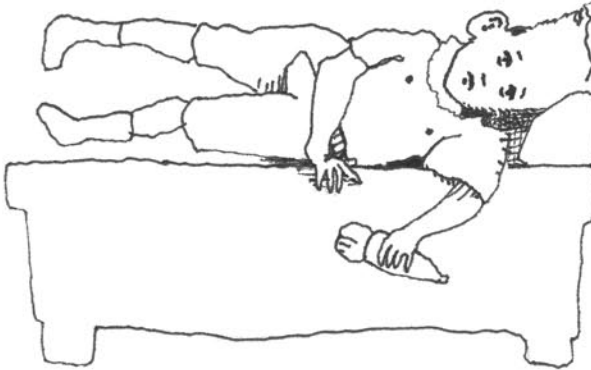
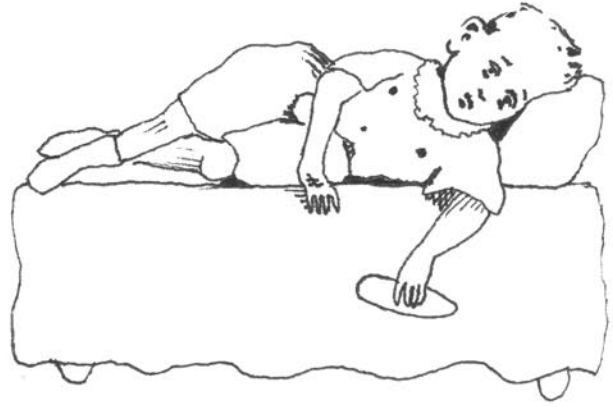
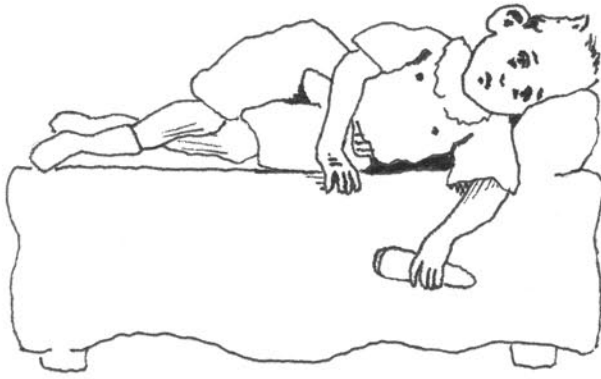


Roe Rosen

1991 - 1992

1

The Author Wakes Up



2

The Author Thanks The Reader

Thank you, thank you so much for being here! Welcome! I love you! Yes! Your very presence makes me cheerful—thanks to you I feel like laughing, and laughter means life, this much is clear, laughter means life and it is also a fairly reliable indication of a sense of humor, and humor means wisdom, as someone might have said, yes, and Razon means Reason in Spanish and Meagerness in Hebrew, and a Fish means the same as a Snake, provided you ignore certain traits and adjust your picture, by which I don't mean anything offensive, in fact, if you prefer, I'm willing to mean nothing, and nothing means nothing, oh yes, thank you, thank you, as you can see I'll gladly give all I have: Mosaics, Support-system, Anchors, Breaches, Vindication, Ravenna, Evasion, everything to show my gratitude—thank you again, and please make yourself comfortable.



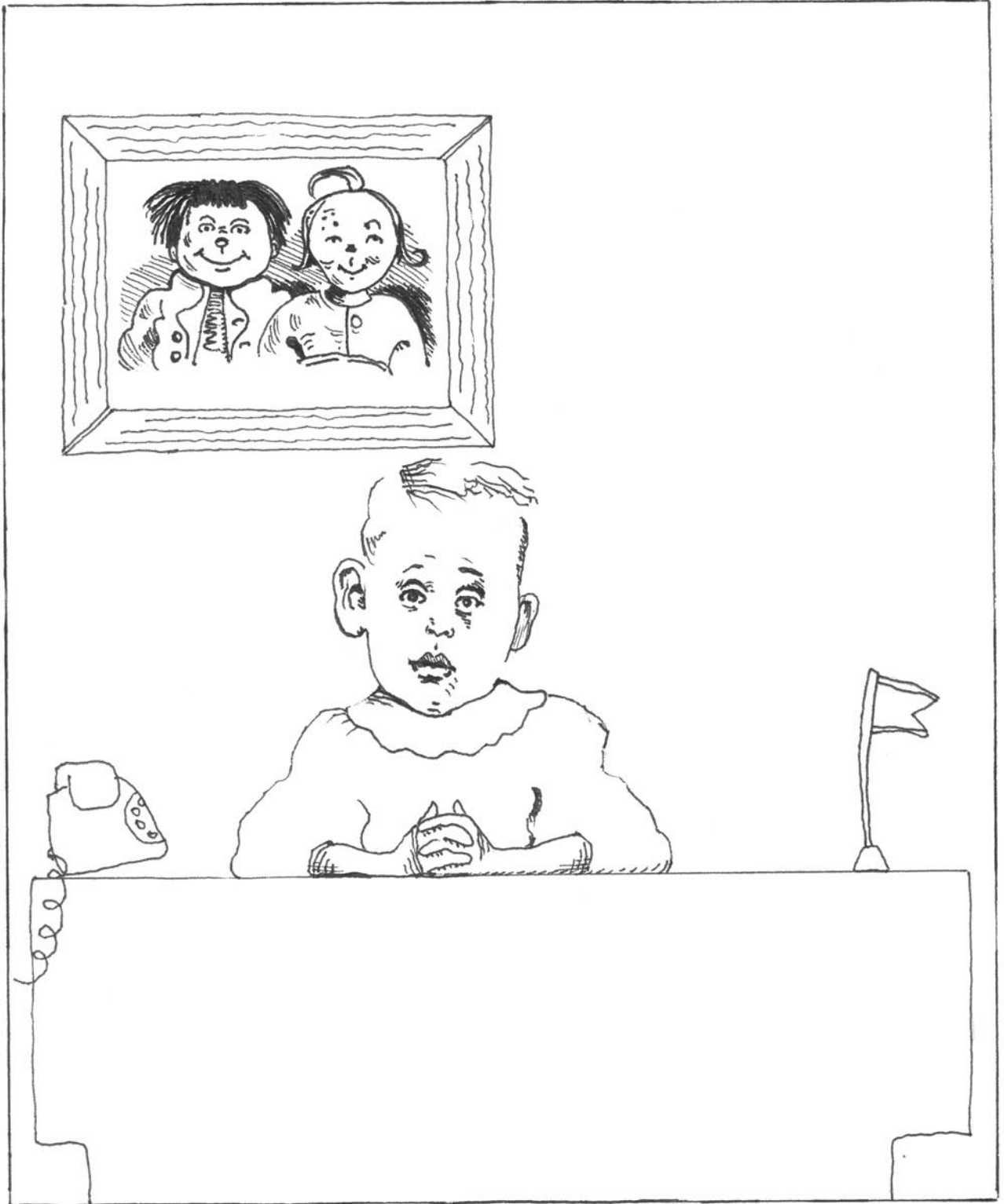
The Author Apologizes and Claims to Know The Reader

Dear Friend!

We didn't really begin yet, I've already wasted precious time, and yet I would like to have one more word with you. I beg you to forgive me the preceding page (by which I mean the one before this one). I am sorry. I tend sometimes to chat idiotically, and I know someone of your stature is all too tired of the clamorous clowning and cloning of the literary circus. So, I'm sorry. It was neither amusing, nor did it help develop any flow of familiarity between us, a flow so crucial to establish early on. I should also beg you to forgive the intimate manner with which I approach you. It must seem highly obtrusive and inappropriate. But you see, I think of you so often, that I feel as if a bond already exists between us; I feel as if I know a thing or two about you. No, no, this is false modesty on my part, and I should be as honest as I can: the truth is I know a lot about you.

I can sense you are skeptical. In fact, you are not even willing to consider my statement seriously. You see—I know you well enough to fathom you wouldn't. But why, really?! Just because we haven't met tête-à-tête yet? Merely since I am confined in pages, leafable back and forth, while you are out there, free to do with me what you will? In spite of all, I still insist I know you. I know all too well how sensitive you are, for instance, and I know for a fact that certain people do not recognize you for whom you really are. But it's really disrespectful of me to demonstrate my knowledge of you this way, like a defendant waving an alibi. I wish our relationship to be beyond all that. I'll even be bald enough to suggest that I merit your affection. I'm not always so repulsively talkative, and your affection and trust mean so much to me. Trust means love, and love means desire, and I can hardly suppress my desire for you. I wish I could leap out from the book and cling to your body, just to relax for a while, underneath your clothes, nestled on your warm belly, or below your armpit.

Please feel free to turn the page when it suits you.



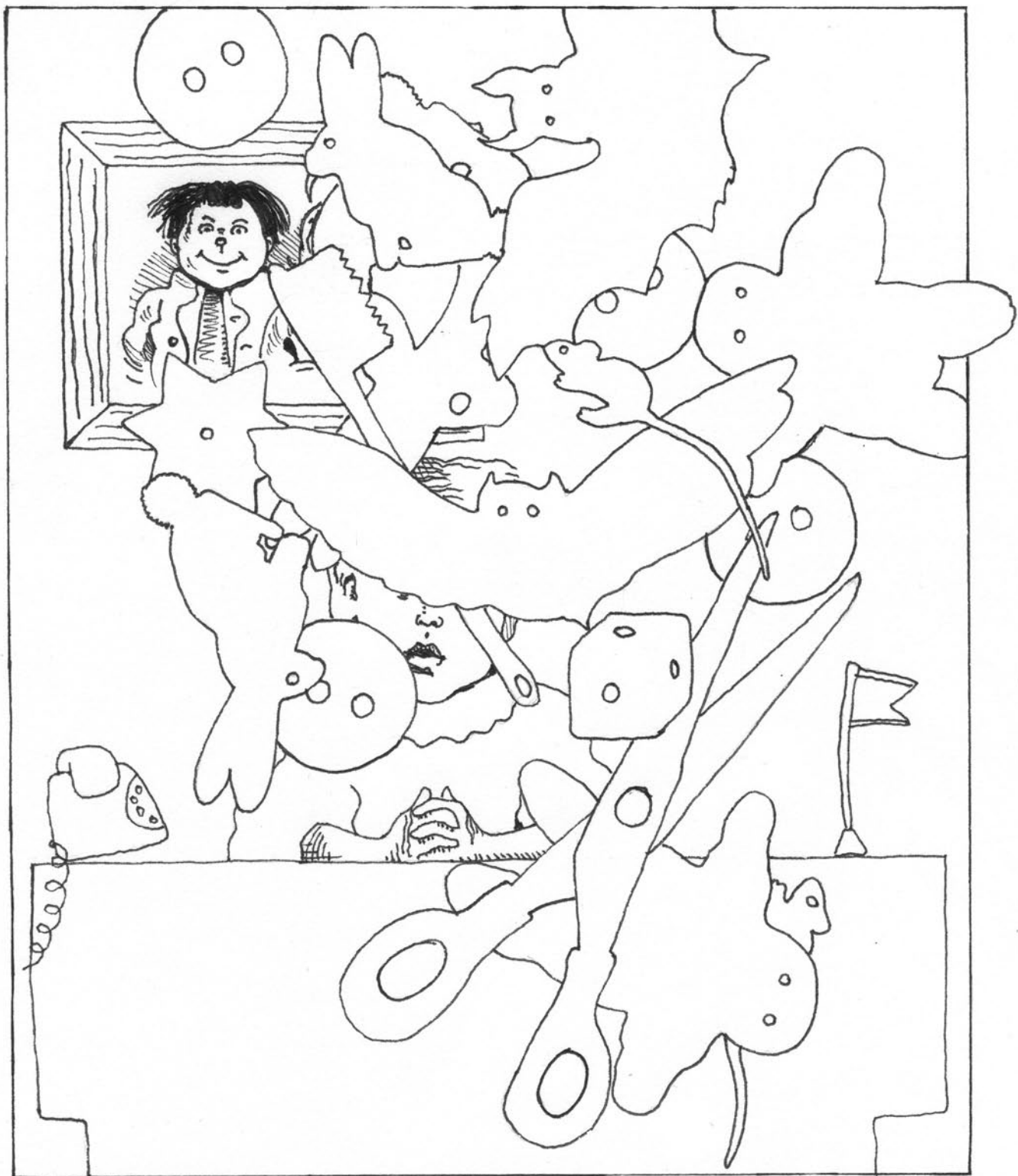
4

The Author Is Meager

I should say immediately that I have little to offer—an inconsequential love story. Even I am hard-pressed to milk any relevance, value or insight from this story. Not only is it a clumsy, graceless story, it doesn't want to be told. The thought of myself stitching words together is nauseating. Words mean pretension and noise—and I have asthma and migraines. Therefore, I promise to be as quick as possible, and spare you the trivial details.

What will remain, I'm afraid, will be just as trivial, but its one advantage, perhaps, is that it will soon be forgotten, leaving no trace, leaving your brain as pure as it was before the story.

And, as I've said, it is a story about forgetting.



The Name of Our Hero Is Lucy

The name of our hero might sound inappropriate and rather silly. Not only is our Lucy masculine, and "Lucy" a feminine name—our Lucy is Jewish, and "Lucy" is the name of a Christian martyr.

It is, of course, a pseudonym, chosen because the symbol of Saint Lucy is a pair of eyes. She was often depicted presenting her big eyes on a tray, like a waitress, which makes the name proper for our Lucy, because he had big, bulging eyes, and was living, quite literally, on the verge of crying.

I will not attempt to explain why he was living on the verge of crying. I am neither a psychologist nor a pedagogue. But I will try to give a plain, factual description.

He did not actually cry all that often: once a week, more or less, in front of the television, and even then in bashful, hushed sniffs and whimpers, as if he were being watched. But, somewhat like an allergy, tears always seemed to be tickling the insides of his eye sockets, making him wear a rather baffled expression, one that made people feel queasy.

Occasionally, the tickle will disappear, and then Lucy would tend to stare piercingly at the world, as if to compensate for his regularly defected, wet sight, by bulimic visual suction. Certain men and women found him attractive because of his eyes, both in their allergic state, and in their suction mode.



6

Lucy's Engagements at That Time

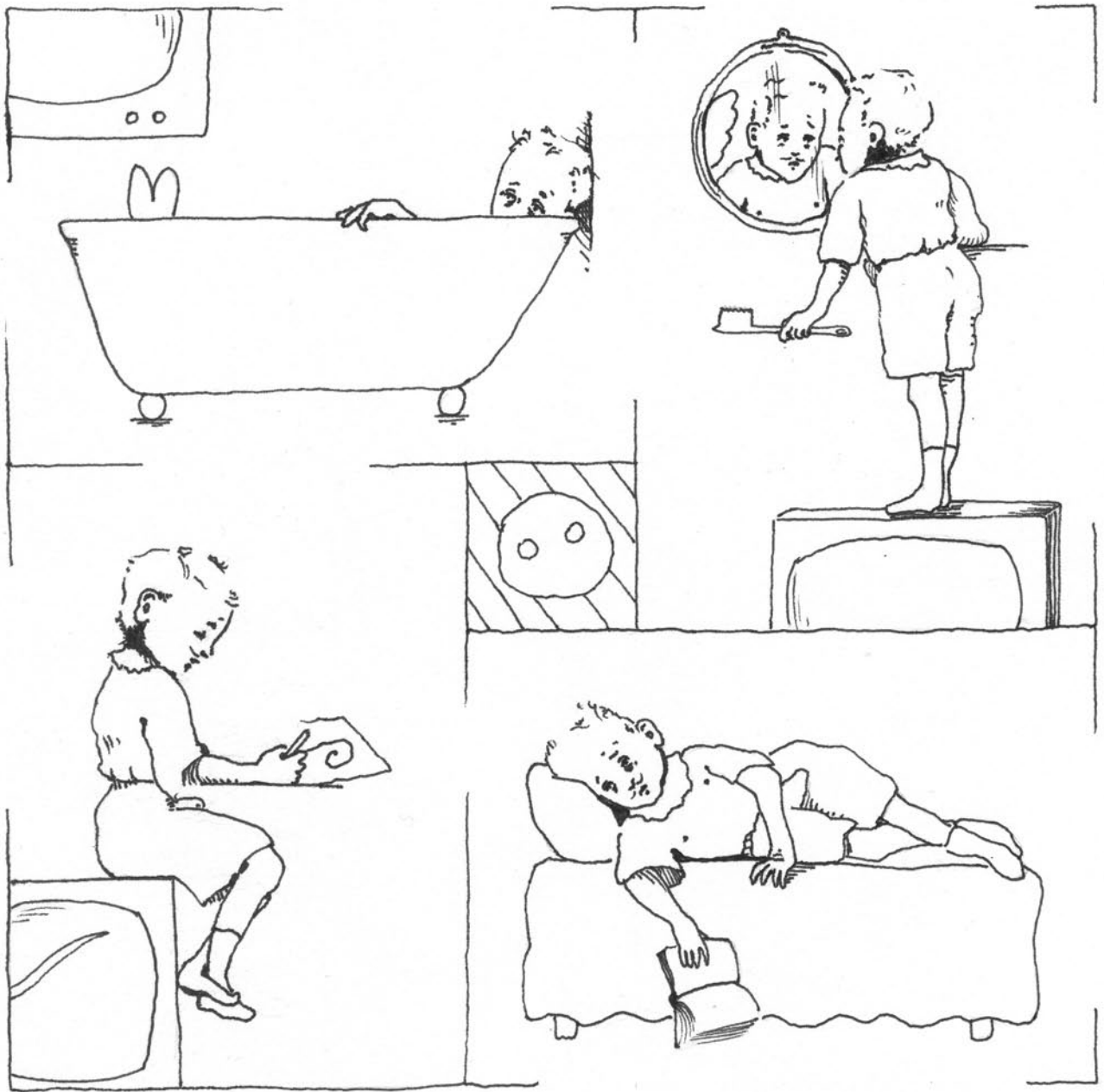
Three years after he immigrated to America, a year after the Palestinian uprising erupted, Lucy dropped out of law school and landed in a part-time program (one course per semester) of cultural studies at an ultraliberal college downtown. In his first semester he chose a seminar entitled *Reconsidering (Con)figuration and the Demise of Authority: the Hermeneutics of Fabergé Eggs During the Fin de Siècle*. This was preferred over the more predetermined *Cultural Repercussions in Context: the Dialectics of the Response to the Response to the Response to Late Modernist Abstraction*, and the too-ambitious *Freud, Popular Art, and the Death of the Bible: From Doré to Dora*.

Lucy did freelance proofreading at Frenkl, Unger, Cahill and Katz. While it can't be said that his English was broken, it was quite seriously cracked. His wages were dismal. The temptation to linger at home was yielded to with the aid of a bimonthly allotment sent by his father, who was still receiving compensatory payments from the German government.

Lucy was a gifted musician. At the time, he was composing an operetta based on the true life story of a friend of his, an apprentice hair-stylist who was murdered in a grizzly manner, and who, while still alive, wrote letters to the dead.

Lucy leased a piano, but its presence in his tiny apartment was so oppressive, and the sound so loud, that he seldom made progress.

In short, Lucy did little, and still was anxiously awaiting the weekend, a time when he did not feel obliged to do the things he did not do during the week.



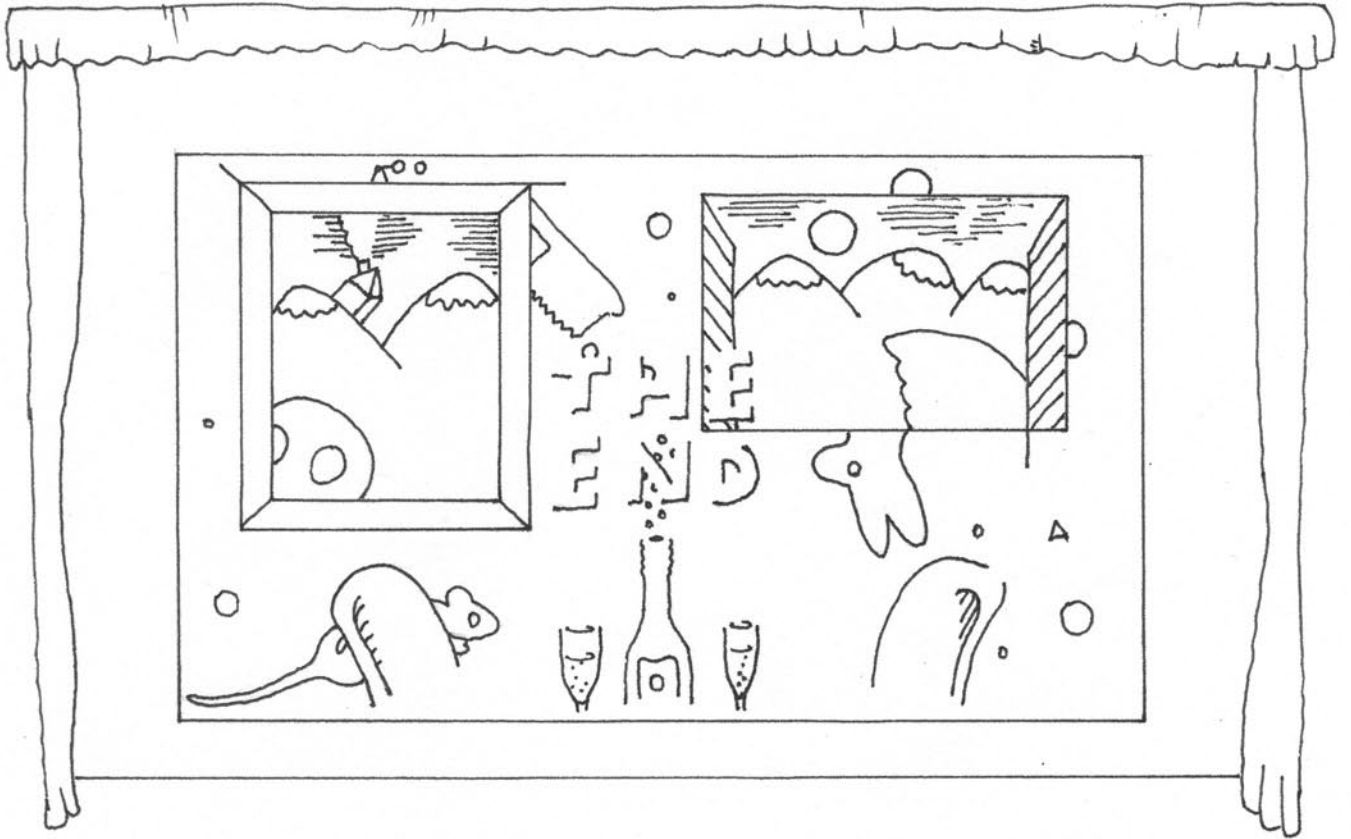
Dream Machine

It was summer. Lucy found pleasure in lingering over the details of the legal documents he was supposed to correct. His favorite case at the time, neatly xeroxed and filed in his apartment, and the one through which he was to meet his lover, was the copyright case of Dream Machine Vrs. Dream Machine.

The latter Dream Machine was a nasty fantasy phone line ("Ooh, Ooh, hammer and screw, my shit-hole has a gift for you, dial 970-DRIM"). The former Dream Machine was a brandname for a fake-fur-coated radio-alarm-clock (Circa. 1970), equipped with a "dream bar." Pressing the bar produced an array of synthesized ambient sounds, which were supposed to embrace the slumberer with subliminal, positive vigilance vibrations, thus avoiding the unwholesome aftermaths of the sudden slicing of dreams. Although the midget company was dwarfed to bankruptcy by Korean tycoons, its executive manager, who was also the owner and chief inventor, didn't lose hope. He witnessed new age blossoming in the 80's, foresaw 70's retro-hype in the 90's, and believed in the collector's cult potential of his clock. He refused to drop charges.

The legal plot thickened when Dream Machine turned out to be the title of three movies. Two of them were science-fiction fiascoes: Dream Machine (1955), and Dream Machine (1964). Oddly, both films were produced by the same company, somewhat tritely named West Coast. In West Coast Vrs. Etobnik, the defendant was the independent creator of the third movie. Vaçlav Etobnik himself described his film in Curtain Magazine as a "post-Lacanian fable," entitled Dream Machine, and subtitled The Other, The Reel, The Nipple (1985, re-released after the trial hit the media (1988) to a remarkable critical and popular acclaim, lasting well over two weeks, at the Post Appropriation Anti Museum (initials PAAM (which means, as Lucy noted, "once" in Hebrew))).

On Tuesday, Lucy left his girlfriend.



8

Love

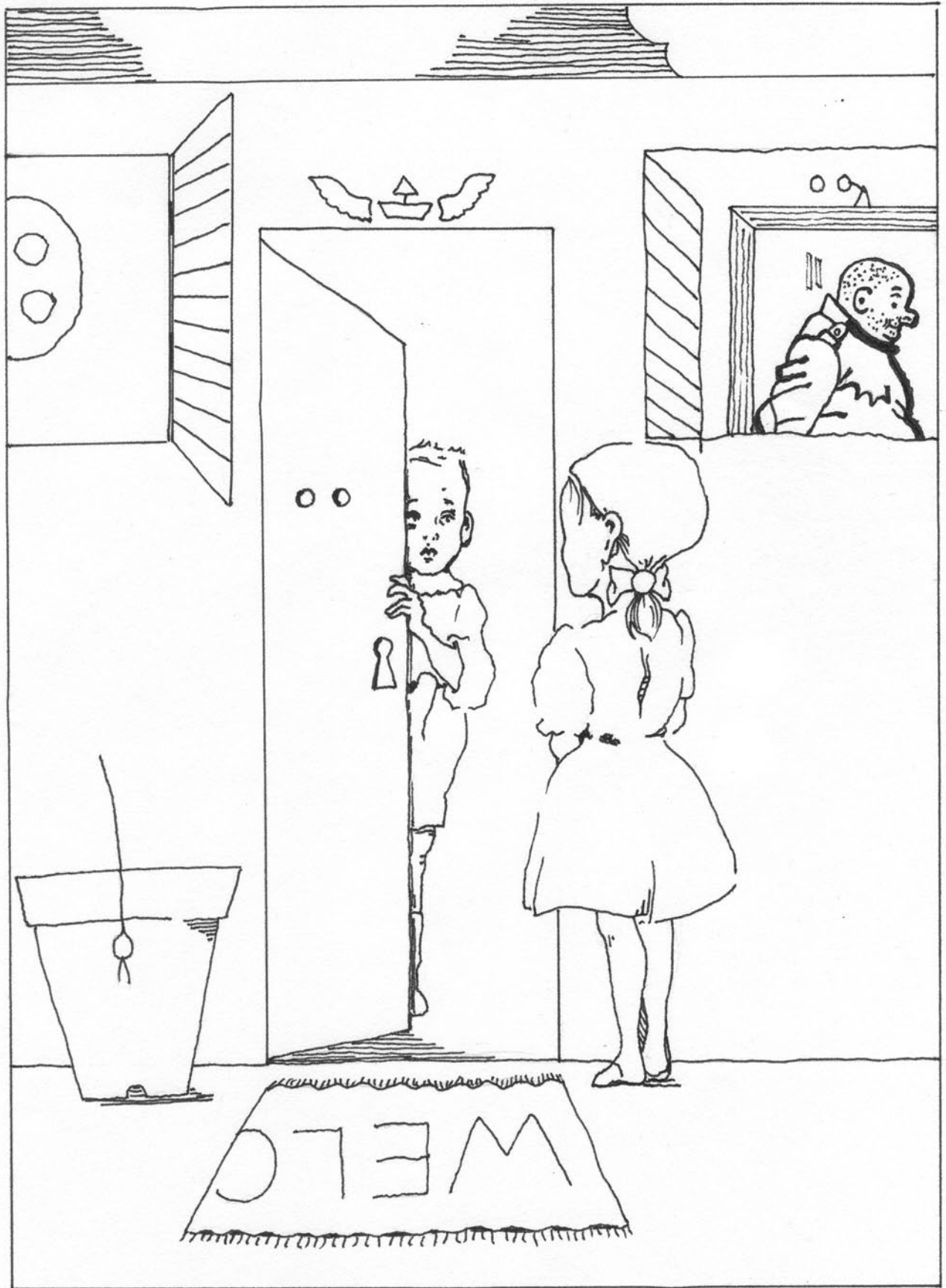
There's a bird in an unlikely place, say next to a homeless cripple at an entrance to a bank on the upper-west-side. Its chirps draw your attention, and you discover, right there on the pavement, a twenty dollar bill!

Things like that happen to Lucy, like tiny, incomprehensible miracles, someone else's private jokes. A friend who wrote letters to the dead—dies! One day Lucy sees eight people in different locations around town—and each has on his forehead a spot of charcoal!

But a miracle as astonishing as the swift appearance of his love never occurred before. How can such a thing happen? At the Public Library he sees a woman and feels inferior, unworthy, greedy. A couple of days later, the same woman enters Frenkl, Unger, Cahill and Katz. More details are available now. She is slightly too erect, and her marvelous, bare arms are muscular. She marches into Mr. Unger's office. It turns out she came on behalf of Etobnik, the Polish director. She shouts terrifically at Mr. Unger. She shouts about legal matters, but the language has qualities of epic poetry, and the passion is wholehearted and cleansing. There is no trace of aggression or weakness in the shouts, simply the bravura of real involvement. Grand, crisp shouts, exquisite shouts. As she leaves, Mr. Unger looks after her with what may either be admiration, or jealousy.

On the same evening, Lucy goes to a symposium with his good friend, Radical Lawrence. The woman sits at the second row. When the event is over, she and Lawrence speak at length. It so happens that they know each other well, from one of the numerous political organizations in which Lawrence is active. Because Lucy tries to veil his excitement, demonstrate liveliness, not be imposing, and yet stand out, his movements become a very intricate, stylized dance of messages. On the way home, Lawrence provides details and promises to see to it.

The following day, the woman calls, and on the very same night, she comes and stays forever. And this woman is the love of his life.



Smell Defies Description

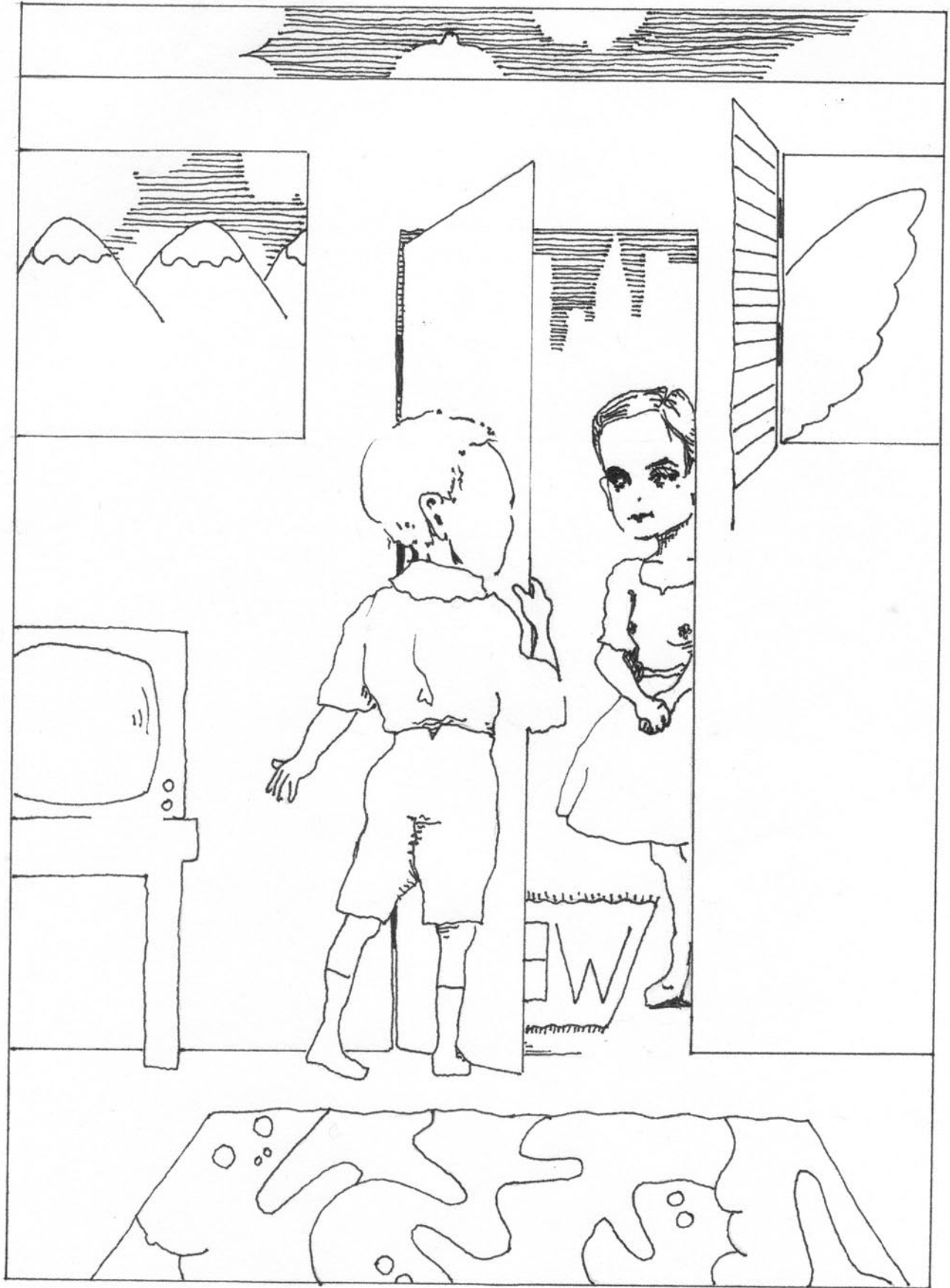
Isn't it humiliating, to always resort to the same phlegmatic abstractions: sour, spicy, sweet, salty?

Doesn't language have any sense of shame, to use the same inane compartments for taste and smell?

And what does language do, when it feels its incompetence to sniff? It hordes its dyslectic battalion of groggy metaphors, senile similitudes and silly substitutions. Smell defies description and makes a laughingstock of language, which claims for itself the reign of communication, and is flustered time and again by smell, that supreme binder of people, this wordless ocean of fine knowledge, this divine affirmation of true love.

Isn't the sound defeat of language enough to suggest that the story of civilization was told backwards? Sniffers turned seers perceived as progress?! What price, verticality? What price, vision?

When Lucy smells his lover, he is swept by the polyphonic music of the nostril, by the complex wealth emanating from armpits, vagina, rectum, neck. He is overwhelmed by the certainty that her smells, with their minute particulars, positively prove their love.



10

Her Name

Her name was Annie, which means in Hebrew, when pronounced with a French accent: "I."

And even an American poet once claimed: "I am Her" (which would read in Hebrew: "Annie He." They were that much together).



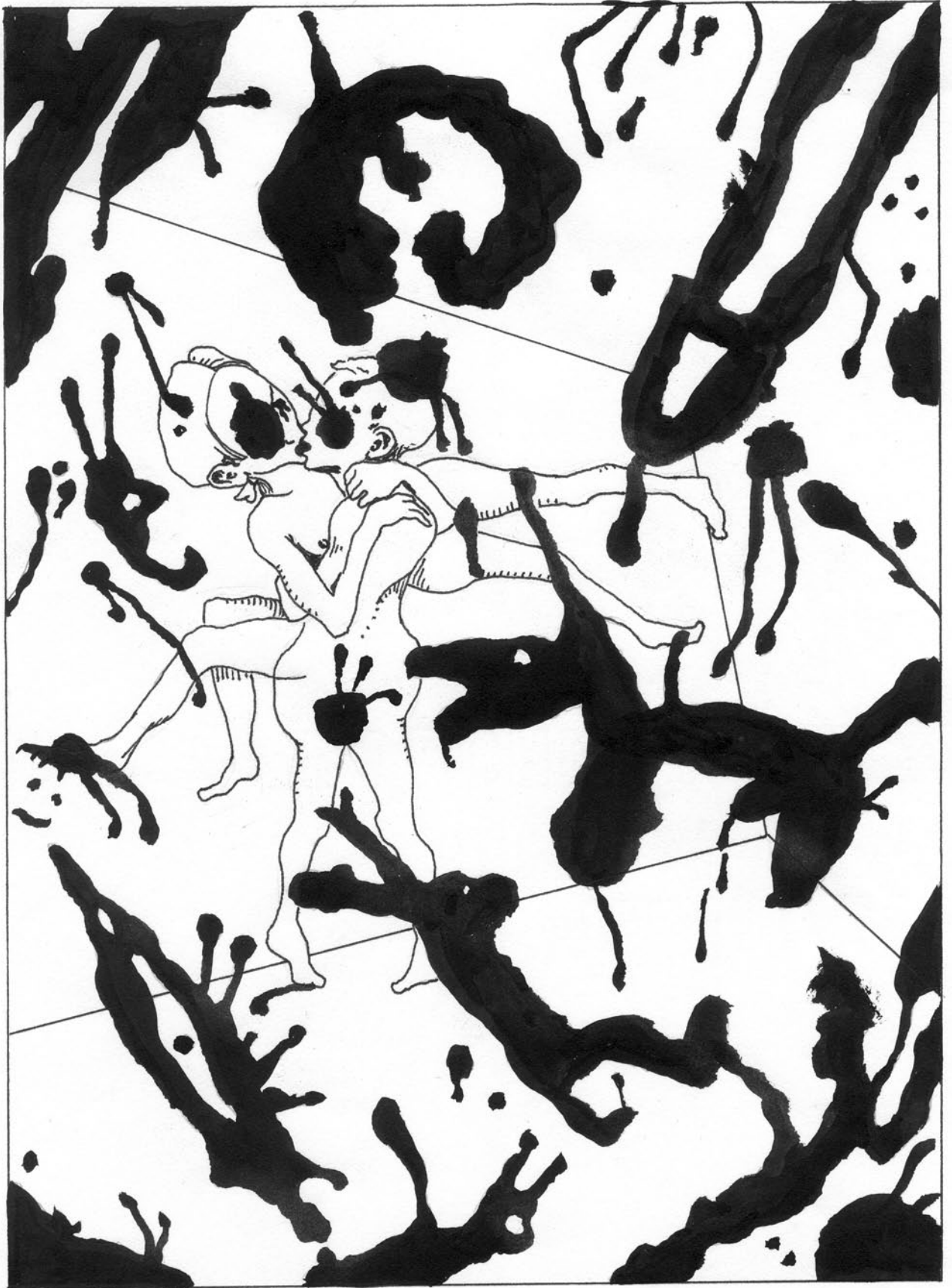
11

Size

Lucy's ex-girlfriend had two Ph.D.'s, Nordic, heavy bones, an almost transparent blond tuft on her cleft. She was kind and beautiful. Annie called her "bovine," but Lucy knew that her martyr expression and clumsy movements were simply results of an emotional mistake. She misplaced her desire to love and to give when she applied them to Lucy.

His ex-girlfriend was very tall. Annie is much smaller. Since Annie, all other people became larger, cruder. People on the street seem shaken by the change in their size. Lucy wants to comfort them. Don't feel ashamed or guilty because you are too big. He wants to speak to his ex-girlfriend. Don't worry. You'll find a new dwarf. I didn't mean to be so cruel.

As for Lucy, after hosting a host of denominations and genders in bed, true love itself taught him that sizes are unstable and fluid. Thanks to Annie, he realized the capacity of his body to shrink and expand. He realized she determined, by some unknown but effective power, the size of the world, and his own size.



12

Liquids, I

Whence so many liquids when Annie and Lucy fuck?

Even as they still sit opposite each other, a thin layer of fluids enfolds them. As they sit on top of each other, their tongues and fingers probe orifices, bringing forth an array of perfumed secretions. Their tongues and fingers soften and swell, assuming the consistency of custard, swayed to melt by the rule of liquids.

As Lucy and Annie thrust into each other more aggressively, as the fluids bubble forth, thinner and hotter now, steam emerge from their bodies, and the television screen becomes foggy.

As they mix, liquids gush forth in fervent jets, and a titillating sound can be heard, like the stirring of a thick tomato sauce.

The sheets are soaked, the floor is flooded, the pillows are heavy, and still Lucy is gulping. His thirst grows as his belly swells.



Liquids, II

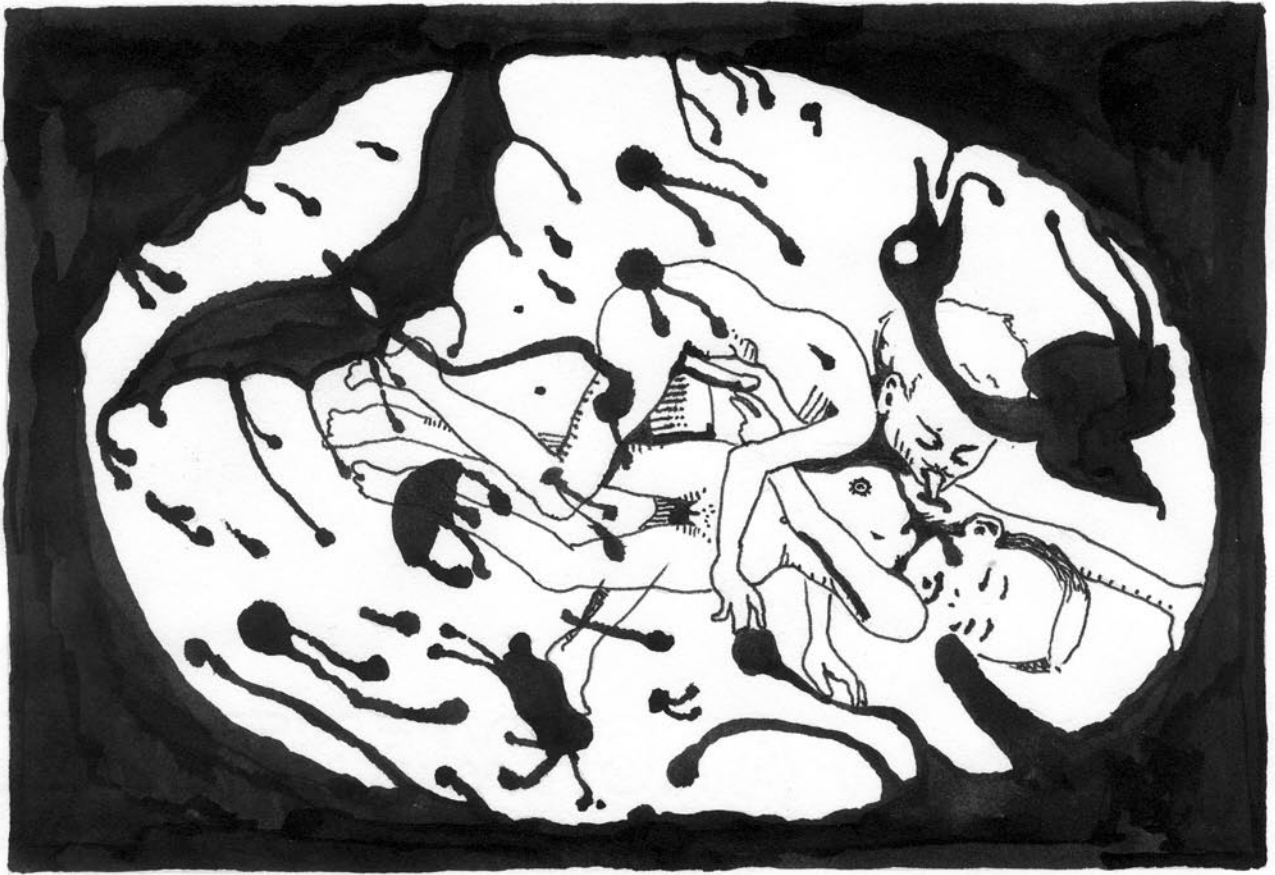
Even as his lips are glued to Annie's anus, Lucy, like everyone else, is struggling with his father's memories.

Like all fathers, Lucy's father starved for years in a frozen forest. As a child, like all fathers, he squeaked fluently in foreign languages to avoid being slain. Father's mother (Lucy's monster grandmother) wanted him (his father) dead. Like all fathers, he survived childhood only thanks to divine coincidence.

Such fatherly memories seem unsuitable for a child as happy and gregarious as Lucy. Perhaps this is why they were never told. His father was a gifted orator of the future, but kept the past jealously to himself, in silence. But the fact that those memories were never told, hence never known, didn't lessen them. They were still Lucy's memories, made more immense by their shrewd virtuality. They are his memories. But still, it's a fact Lucy did not stay in the cabin, behind the closet, silent, for three months. Lucy does not remember wanting to lick blood from a warm corpse of a soldier, and then crying when he realized the soldier's stillness was not sleep. Forgetting things like that is clearly his failure and fault. His forgetfulness can only mean he is deceiving or disavowing. This is how memories Lucy never had became his guilt.

Forgetting means happiness. Lucy knows he is unfit to face the horrific details. Yet no recipe for happiness is mistake-proof. His father was able to turn all his memories into prevented-memories, lacking shape or smell, and so they wore all shapes and smells. Lucy's memories are freaks. They rape him whenever they get the chance. Other children are the same way.

Annie studies Lucy and his father systematically.



14

Playing

One evening, long, long afterwards, there was nothing to watch on TV. Lucy reluctantly agreed to play Annie from his operetta. His neck and fingers stiff, sweat trickling down his arms in serpentine, itchy trails, he felt the piano was hostile and his music obscene. He was waltzing a dead friend through a web of musical ironies and sophistries. He was resentful when he saw tears glazing her eyes. He was depressed when later on she was romantic and passionate. She asked for a cassette and put it in her bag.





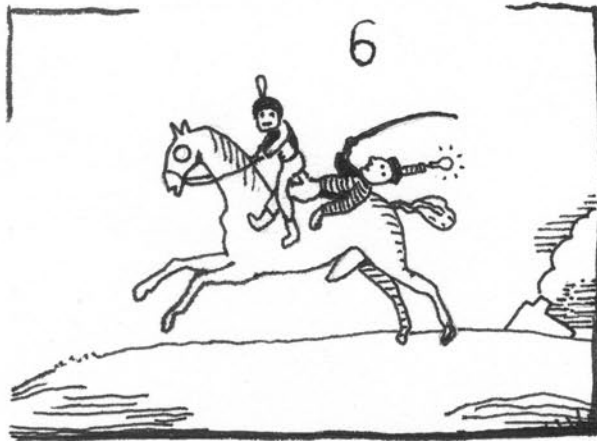
16

Circus

Lucy finally met Etobnik at a private party celebrating a limited edition in a famous club. Annie navigated him towards the obese auteur like a little boat towards a royal ship. Etobnik's trilling bass, his heavy accent and speech-mentored diction, the dense aroma of musk and bacon that surrounded him like an aura, the grandiose and studied effeminate gestures of his arms and buttocks—in short—his charisma, overshadowed the room. He was circled by a number of paler people. But he insisted to talk to Lucy alone, looming over him, performing affection.

"I hate music, which is why I loved your operetta," said Etobnik, "and I know exactly what you're trying to do. You are just like me—taking your revenge on America. Don't pretend to be stunned. You know what I mean. Just look around you. Look at those WASPS showing us perfect hospitality, admiration and teeth. The meeker they act the more superior they feel. And why shouldn't they? The world is a body, America is the world, New York is the center of the American body, the loins, as it were, and this room is, more or less, right underneath the right testicle. And we are here, here we are, you and I, a parasitic invasion. Us others are us others, and only an American can say "we" and mean "us" as well. You want a universal metaphor? Think of something American, like baseball. But you are taking your little revenge, aren't you? You take the most pretentious of arts, and you humiliate it by reviving its most decayed genre, and then—this is so clever— you mortify these Puritans with your Jewish melancholy and Middle-Eastern libido and death at their backyard. You pervert, you! You poisoned their soup! You spoiled the rest of the meal! You're just like me—funny accent, deconstruction, hemorrhoids, asthma, Annie—I can read the signs!"

"I hate music," said Etobnik, "music is like America. Total, autonomous, aggressive. But you and I will put the arts in order, like a pyramid. At the bottom, music: purity smothered in mud. And at the very top, the real mother of all arts, the real expression of what's human, transient, concrete, gay, generous, humble, selfless—the circus."



Unicorn



Life and Death, I

"Please, honey," said Annie, "stop crying."

It was the first time Lucy cried in her presence. But this was not just crying. His eyes were crazed sprinklers. He was wriggling like an epileptic. He produced an astounding variety of guttural sounds and falsetto chirps.

"Howc- howc- how could you do that? How could you play him the tape?"

"He loved your music."

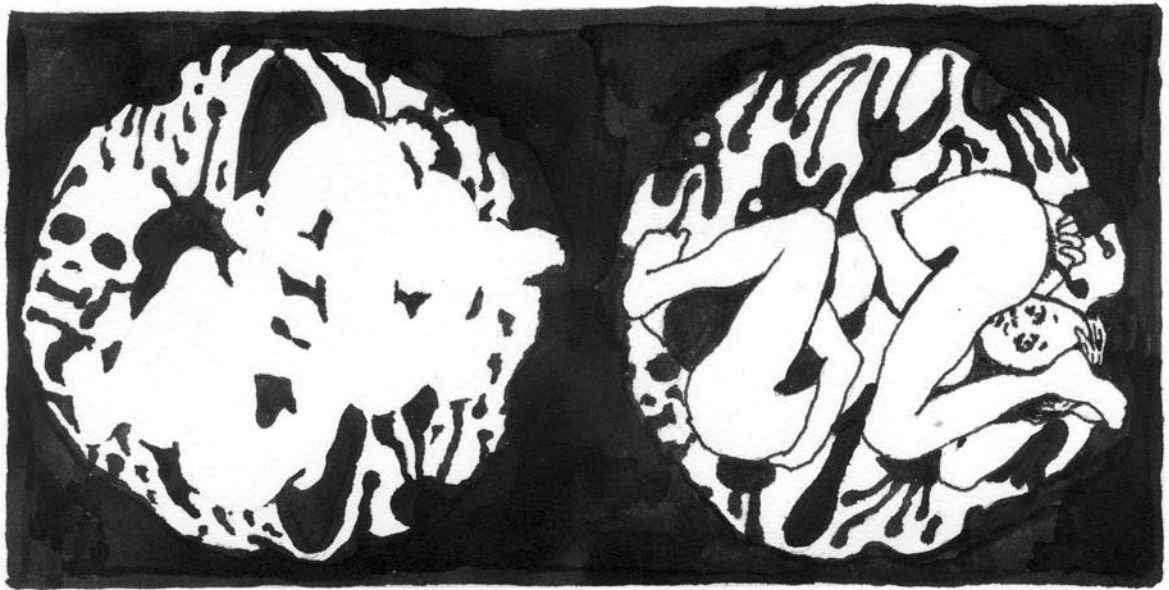
"He hates music! He's an anti-American of the imbecilic kind! He's Anti-Semitic, for heaven's sake! He knew what he was doing. He was torturing me. How could you fuck him? Did you fuck him? I still can't believe he did it in public! He is ... he is evil! He even smells evil!"

"What's with you?! Vaçlav is a brilliant, gentle person. You just had one too many. He likes you. He didn't say what you heard him say. Perhaps I made a mistake. Please stop crying. I just thought you two have so much in common."

Lucy is hysterical with self pity. The entire congregation in Lucy's head is enraged. Punitively, Lucy becomes a stiff frozen drumstick. Punitively, he tries to ignore her. He thinks of his dead friend, and tries hard to keep limp.

Etobnik belongs to those who look patronizingly at the dead. This much he shares with the Mormons, who deny the dead the right to chose their own religion. But the dead friend didn't think of the dead as mute, gullible or detached. He addressed them with intimacy and reverence. And his own death, oh—what a death!

The friend was strolling alone in the square, and then death comes, swift and sudden. Shudder to think—he is clubbed from behind! Clubbed eight times with a monkey-wrench!



Life and Death, II

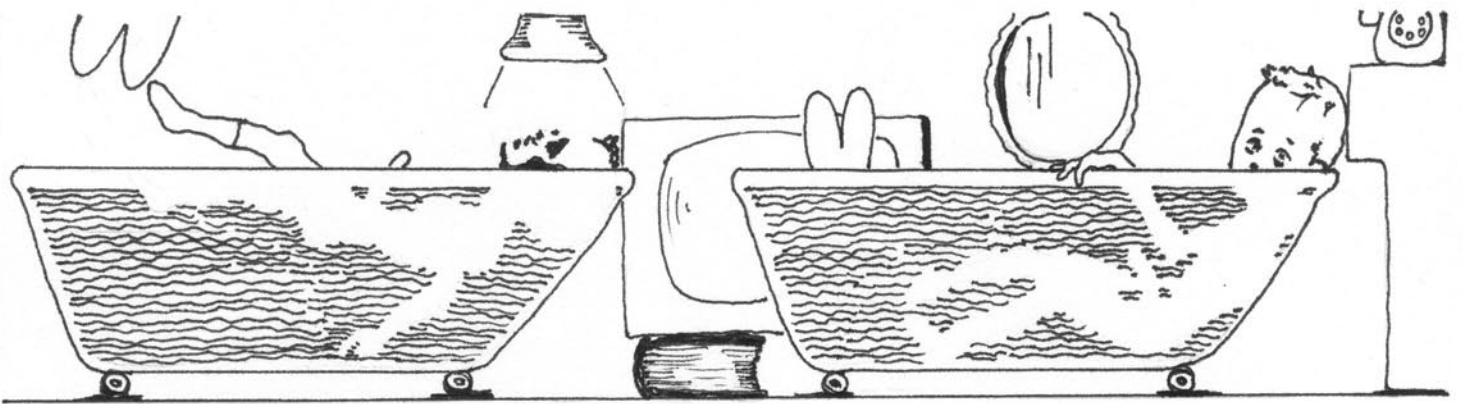
The dead friend approached his hair-studies with vigor and zeal. The vocation seems incommensurate with his epistolary escapades to the graveyard. Why would the dead be concerned with style? Do worms prefer Armani? Yet Lucy admired his friend, and didn't doubt his choices. In any case, don't be distracted by abstract questions; stay with the picture of death. Lucy sees his friend from the back. Saturday, just before sunset, which is, distinctly, death-time. Lucy feels Annie's pulse through the thin sheet. She throbs as she heaves, and every beat sends a wave of warmth. The friend is walking down Union-Square, but Lucy's picture has the place hazy, incoherent, deserted, rather like the State-Square in Tel Aviv, a deathly place if there ever was one, especially on Saturdays.

The camera is now quick to glide towards the friend. He paces awkwardly, with those measured, hesitant movement of his, as if he were carrying his own body in his arms, trying not to wake himself.

The killer, on the other hand, is a killer: agile with intention. We see the friend from the back, from the killer's viewpoint, but can the friend see us, through his back, as if in a movie, or in a dream? And if so—does he see Lucy, or the killer, or us?

The monkey-wrench is firmly gripped and raised by the muscular arm, preposterous in its social-realistic connotations. The tool may be prosaic, but killing kills. The skull cracks. The blood sprouts. Splatters splatter. Barber Slain By Monkey Wrench, it will read. Or Monkey Wrench Gore. Killer Strikes at Union Square. My erection, as hard as rigor mortis, my one imperative. Cartilage, flow, blood, brain.

He finally collapses, delivered from verticality, kissing the pavement.



Life and Death, III

You slice your fresh, dead trout, and let it rest open, two entities now, two halves that will never reunite, while you chop parsley for the salad. Then, when you salt your sliced fish, it responds. It reacts to the salt with a vigorous ballet of vibrating nerves, energetic jitters denying death. It goes on and on. The two halves, each gazing downwards, to the plate, each with its half-mouth ajar with a trout shout. The power of life is so awesome it makes your nipples shrink. The power of life is so obscene, you forget about dinner, and run away.

But when the friend falls—there is no dance of dying. No persistence of reflexes or reflection. In fact, he sinks to the ground as if life left long ago. As if underneath his fine skin was just a disinterested emptiness. We touch now, tentatively, where there was no friction a moment ago. The tip of my member already gropes your cleft. I love you.



Lucy's Birthday

Annie left town to attend a four day long convention on aiding illegal immigrants. On the third day, Lucy was summoned by Mr. Frenkl to his office. He was gently told his services were no longer required. It was not much of an event, but still unprecedented – to fire a free-lancer.

Lucy was somewhat vexed. He was never fired before. On the other hand, he sided with Mr. Frenkl, and felt the decision was justified.

It so happened that it was his thirty third birthday. As he left the building, he was swept by dubious joy.

He bought four books, a generous salmon steak, an imported tomato.

At night, while leafing through the channels, he longed for his sister. He tried to remember her face but couldn't. He almost cried before falling asleep.



ANDY

21

Success

The celebrated underground musician Bug, who bedazzled critics with his electric cello and eclectic compositions, listened to the tape Annie gave him, and couldn't wait to start working on the operetta himself. He would arrange it for his band, The End, which features two drummers, an electric keyboard player, DJ Ph.D.—a rapper from Spanish Harlem, Bug himself on all string instruments, and a host of cream-of-the-crop guest-musicians from downtown. The text was a problem, some still un-translated, most impenetrable, but Bug, hyperactive and resourceful, was overflowing with ideas. Snippets in Hebrew were fine, he thought, and gave the piece a disturbing edge. Go further. Translate parts of the libretto to Arabic and political resonance will stir things up even more. Better yet—add Bavarian German and couple Ph.D.'s lingo with the eerie voice of Chin, the Chinese noise singer. Bricolage. In any case, the text can be dealt with later.

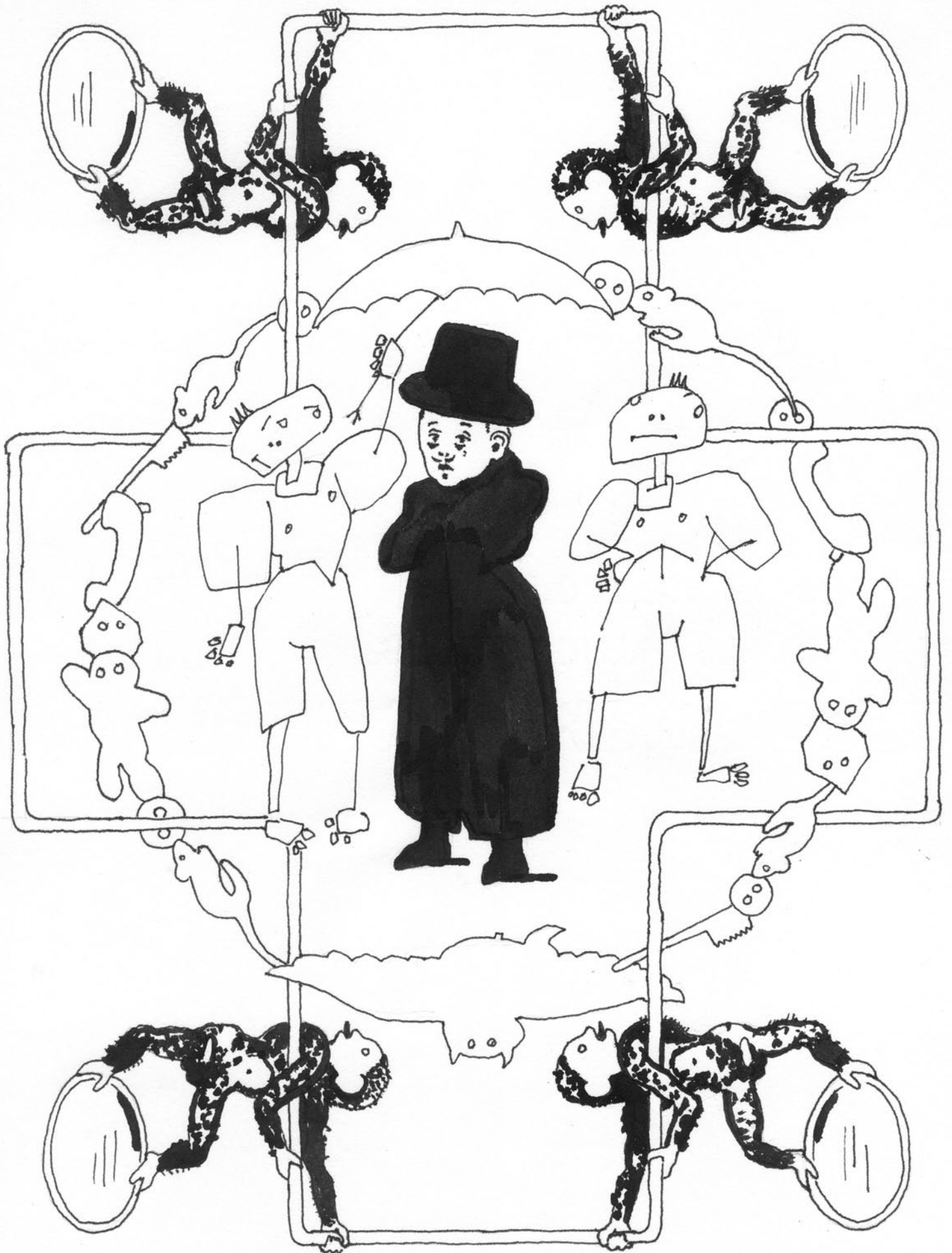
In no time, Lucy's operetta was twice commissioned—by the hyped Cold Heat festival, and by a Japanese investor who wanted it performed at the festive gala opening of his private museum, housing the world's second largest collection of Nabis paintings.

A related paying-job offer came in a matter of days. Teresa Brother, talent hunter and vice CEO of Doomschord records, herself a patron of Cold Heat, assigned Lucy as non-generic-music-and-multimedia special-events senior consultant. She was striking, affluent, informed. Lucy was assigned two assistants. They were tall, attentive, ambitious. Lucy asks: "Do you think German is a good idea?"—And they immediately send a fax. Lucy says: "would you like some coffee?"—And they say "yes." Lucy says: "This proposal seems overripe," and they think painstakingly. Lucy says: "Scriabin," and they run frantically around the room. In fact, Lucy is suspicious. His two assistants are so abundantly familiar as a literary motif. Could it be that Ms. Brother, Teresa, was actually molding real-life into a series of ironic allusions? He tried to counter this troubling thought by reminding himself that his assistants probably hate him. Besides, one of them wasn't funny at all, and the other was a much better pianist than Lucy.

All was one web. Annie was legal advisor for Doomschord, owned by the Japanese who paid for Letters to the Dead. Etobnik was directing an eight-hour-long version of Paradise Lost for Cold Heat (and—his version had Spanish Harlem as hell). Bug, it turned out, heard of Lucy before Annie's intro: Etobnik sprinkled superlatives. And not only Bug. Teresa heard of him from seven different people, of which any combination of two would suffice to engender quick action.

Success in art demands two conditions: mediation (between power and you), and classification (of what you do and how it fits). Lucy knew for a fact he will never meet these condition, and learned to live with it. Now, the conditions were inexplicably met. He was let in by the scene makers. He watch them speak to each other with business like efficiency, but he can tell they're infested with enthusiasm and fear simultaneously. Each choice they make is a new religion, each choice, a potential collapse.

Lucy was astonished when success caught him, but he found himself to be fluent. Lucy accepts laurels with the natural indifference and grace of a flowerpot.



The End of History

Once a week Lucy's friend, Radical Lawrence, comes over for coffee and cigarettes. Lucy smokes even more than Lucy, but unlike Lucy, he is not inclined to whine.

His body is compact and strong. It is stuffed to the brim with top quality goodness and beauty, goodness and beauty almost spill out. This is why, like the dead friend, Lawrence moves cautiously—but unlike the dead friend, his movement is smooth and lovely to watch.

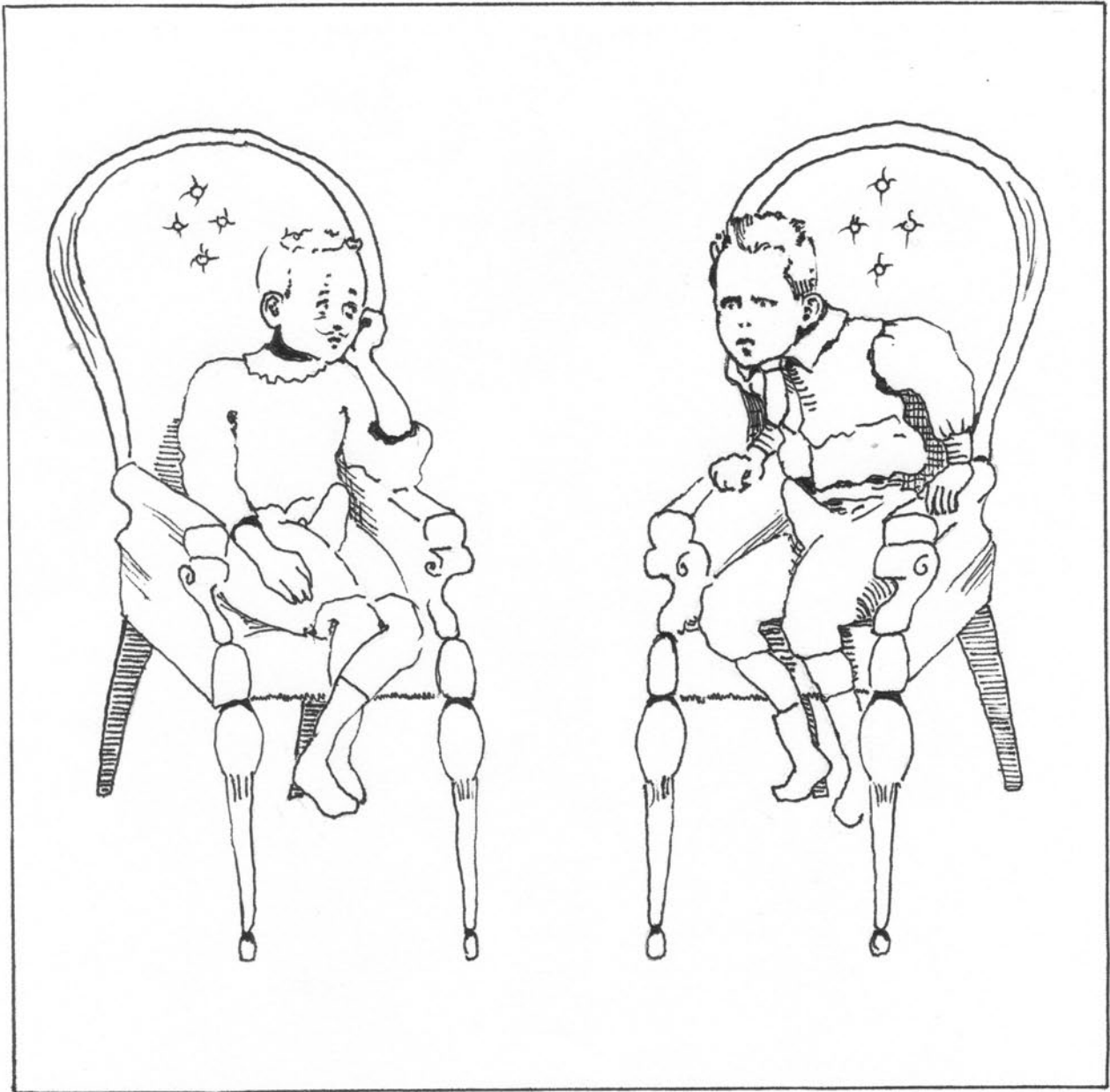
Harsh realities set Lawrence in fire. He is ablaze, and seeks solutions in books, some of which speak of the end of history. His books are negative, critical, lean, harsh. They decipher codes of suffering. They translate the world to the language of models. Some of them are intentionally disagreeable. Most of them quarrel. Lawrence and his books have their own rites, and a structural beauty unattainable to Lucy.

Lawrence struggles to eke out praxis from his books. His books call for revolutionary steps—but the times hardly agree with minuscule tremors. He labors to stay foot, but his books push and shove him from all directions; his leap of faith becomes plural, an intricate series of hurdles and hops, and still he is hot.

Lucy's ideological numbness is often expressed through sardonic questions. He strains to attempt a global view, to enfold abstract concepts and political insights, to deny his inclination to waver. But not only wavering stands in his way. Attempts to circumscribe reality make him anxious and desperate. Secretly, he envies his friend's flaming ambitions. He wishes he were Lawrence. Grilling Lawrence with questions is repugnantly cynical. On the other hand, Lawrence, a missionary martyr, is eager to be grilled.

In the excitement of tackling Lucy's queries, Lawrence inadvertently nods a prayer-like yes-yes-yes-yes-yes-yes. When his emotions overflow, his long eyelashes flicker at a tremendous speed. His eyes are transparent-blue, extra-sharp. The flickers and the light hues remind Lucy of dragonflies. Lucy is fascinated by this ocular drama. He is immersed with warmth and affection. He is unable to follow the words.

The windows are open, but there is no wind to counter the humidity. August air is so heavy with slimy liquids, it stains your clothes yellow, brown and gray. Matter is so sticky it seems to melt. Heat, stench, exhaustion and familiarity make them feel calm and content. After a short silence, Lawrence asks Lucy what he feels about the horrendous news from the Middle-East.



23

Slap

At Nine AM that Friday, Annie slapped Lucy. It was a snappy, sharp, forceful slap, that landed on his cheek and lingered there. He reacted with laughter, in a voice not quite his own, and for some reason immediately turned the TV off. He kept apologizing as she was preparing to leave. When she left, he could not contain his nervous energy. He almost went jogging! His thoughts were too rapid to watch television or read, but he did manage to watch television.

Sleep took him by force. In his dream, Annie threw a cantaloupe on the wall. Then it got more complicated. There was an outside, a river, two squirrels carrying a corpse on a stretcher.



Liquids, III

Asthma, Etobnik once said, is a tuberculosis substitute for disillusioned times, an inane, ironic remanent of Romanticism. If so, Lucy himself is a degenerated, post-Romantic mutation: the de-blooded vampire. An immortal freak, during daytime he is absent minded, drained and apathetic. He wakes up at night longing for liquids. He may dip his face in Annie's liquids, shoving his tongue in like a suction-nozzle, pressing his thick lips tight, shamelessly thrusting his tongue. A liquid therapy. In that pool of liquids he summons from her, his invalid body marvels in transformations.

Now he is an elegant fish, silver-mauve, muscular.

Now he is plural, a swarm of tipsy insects.

Now he is a frog, smugly still in a mossy well, hidden like a treasure.

Better yet, sometimes he liquidates.

Often, a mere drop will quench his thirst, sometimes not even that, only smelling, sniffing the liquids, not even touching, not even that, not even seeing, just sensing the liquids, and happiness blurs his brain.

Yet evidently, Lucy is not a vampire. Lucy is waiting, hence he is dying, hence not an immortal. His joy is dictated by death. This makes his vampire condition painful and misguided. He cannot escape the fallacy of his malformed zoological status.

Is Annie more important than her liquids? What is it he cannot live without? Who is unwilling to help him die? These are the questions that fill Lucy with resentment.

It is at those moments of uncertainty that television, that often vilified friend, manifests its true power to heal and let forget.



The End

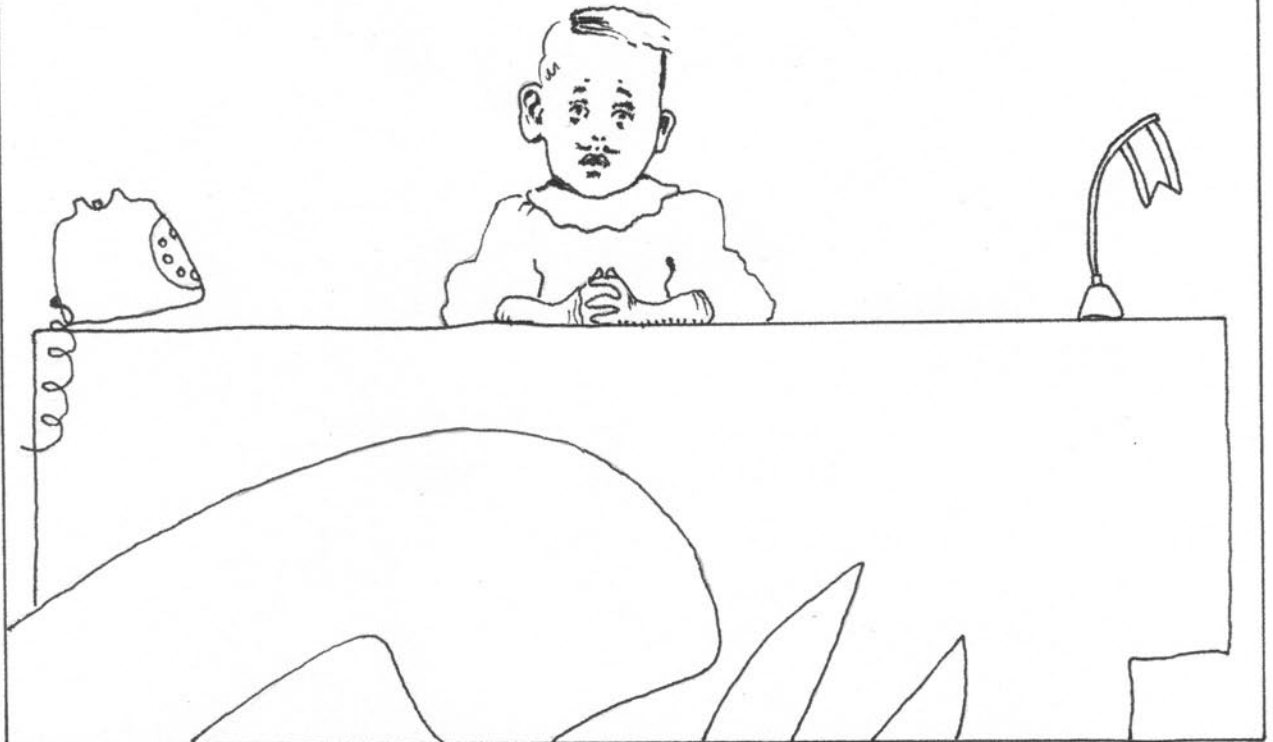
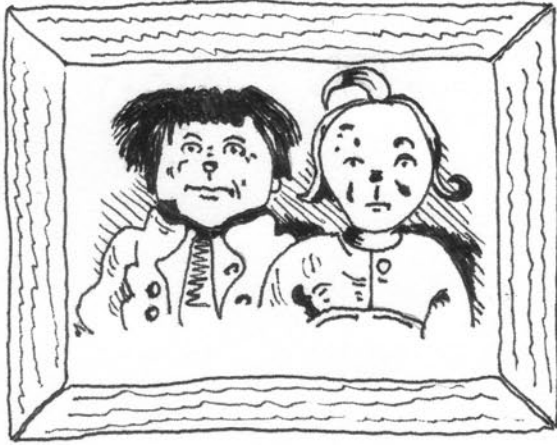
Dear reader. You, with your keen intuition, you saw it coming, but Lucy was dumbstruck when Annie told him, icily, over the phone, that it was over between them.

His silence led her to a gentler tone. When he regained his tongue, he spoke quickly, his voice grating. "For Heaven's sake, Lucy," she retorted, "How can you say 'the love of my life,' and 'after all this time' when we've only been together for six weeks!"

The way she said 'six weeks' implied that six weeks always equal six weeks! As if time was unified and measurements trustworthy! Setting loose this monstrosity, 'six weeks,' was an unfair assault by means of science.

'Six weeks' shriveled Lucy to the size of a toddler. His mouth was still drooling accusations long after the conversation was over.

As for 'six weeks' itself, it quickly solidified to the size and shape of a hedgehog. It infiltrated Lucy and settled in the abdomen, underneath the ribcage. It sucked Lucy's humors, regurgitating and spewing only the white phlegm. As a result, he suffered aphasia. If not for the pain exerted by the heavy tumor in his belly, he would fall asleep forever. Besides the pain, his only other sensation was a wailing soprano siren that buzzed inside his left auditory tube for an immeasurable spell.

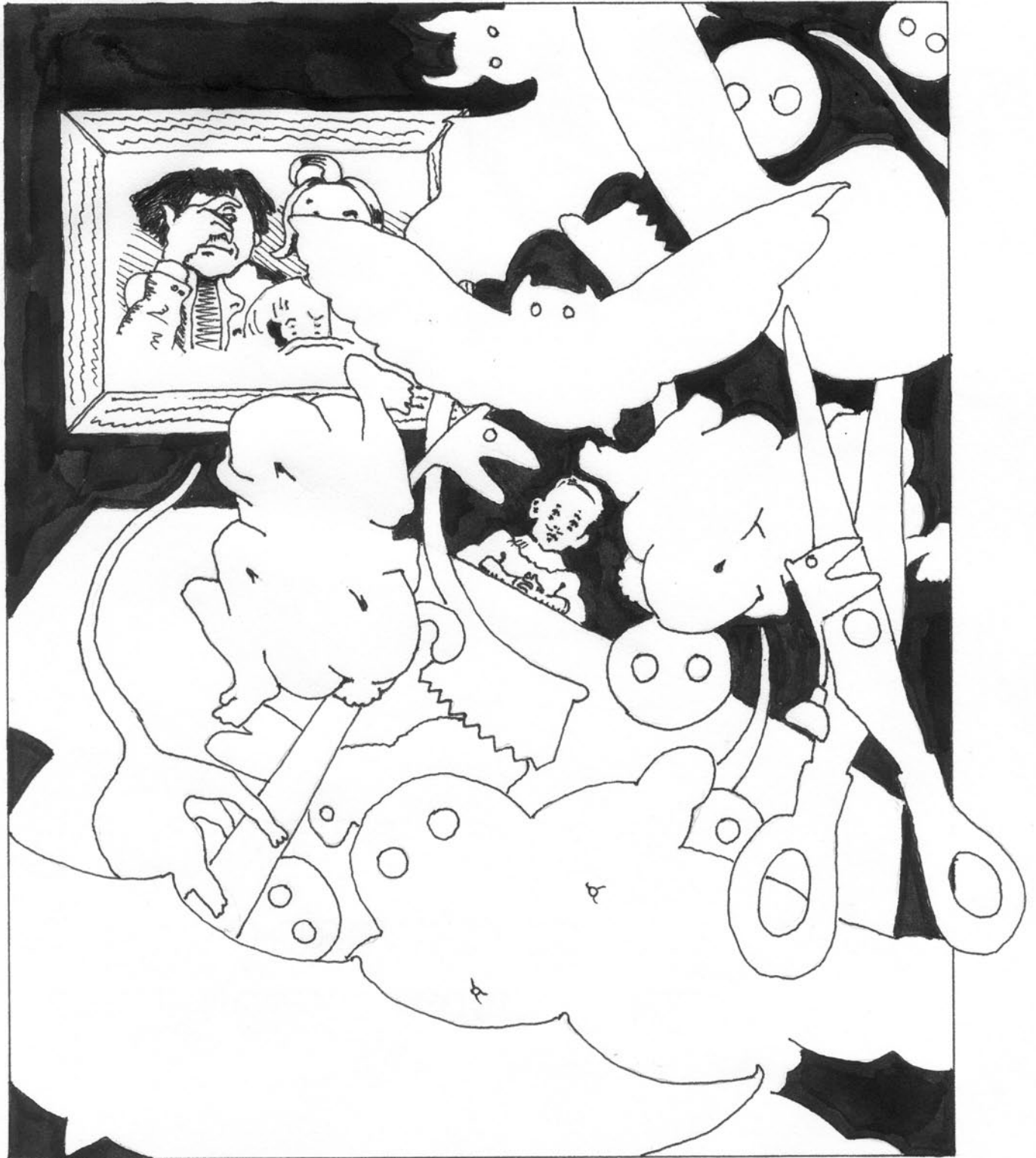


All Is Lost

When he woke up, an eery silence could be heard underneath the street noise. His skin was covered in acidic summer syrup. Where was everybody? Where was the phone? He must avoid sheets, cushions, little spiteful objects that still retain her smell. How can it still be morning? Nasty morning. Nasty morning. Nasty noon.

Finally the phone rang. Teresa Brother was thanking him in an ominous tone for his fascinating suggestions. He knew it meant she wished him dead. Much later, the phone rang again. Bug was saying the operetta was submitted. We can only wait. Ten percent is guaranteed in any case. They wished each other dead, and said good-bye.

While he slept, the semester ended. He knew the politeness of Ivy-league teachers was just their way of telling him he didn't stand a chance, but he missed their complacency and lies. With a tinge of panic he remembered that Lawrence flew to San Francisco, to nurse a friend who only just started dying. Lucy was left alone in his hostile, foreign home with his awful liberty.



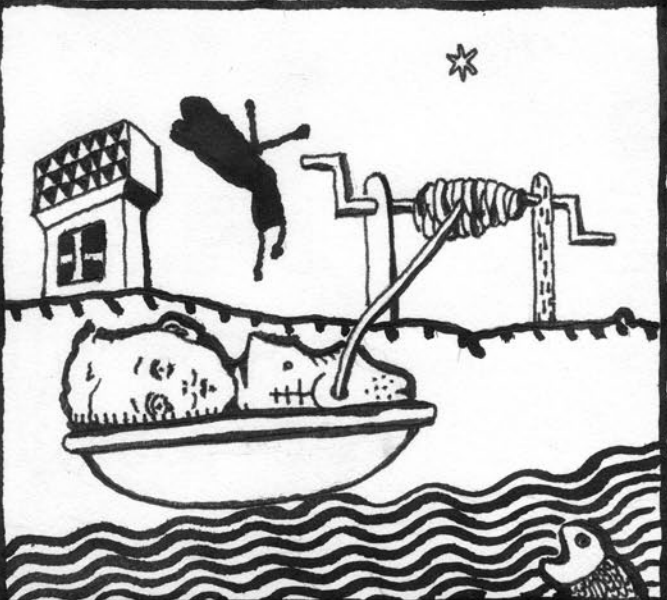
Liquids, IV

He could sense the excess of yellow bile as soon as he woke up. 'Six weeks,' his tumor of facts, became a member of his body. He turned the television on. As he was identifying with fictitious women, gulping coffee and shedding tiny tears, he was overheated. His yellow bile boiled and blackened. He was palpitating and belching fumes of sulphur. Even as his body was loosing the battle against its humor-imbalance, his limbs grew strong with the fantastic power of rage and vengeance. Manic anger translated to testosterone. He was a deadly, avenging Lucy. He was deceived, and steps will be taken. His legs carried him, as quick as a quick machine, to Annie's loft.

Etobnik was there, wearing his black rubber robe. Lucy's strength was supernatural—but Etobnik was stronger. After a short and ugly fight, Lucy's legs were removed and locked in the cupboard. He was laid on a stainless steel plate, padded with cotton wool, facing Annie's king-size bed. His penis was purple and stiff. It was held in place by a scientific device, securing Lucy's upright posture. Although separated from his legs, he could feel their straining, aching, constricted muscles. Seeing Annie naked on the bed, seeing Etobnik disrobing, seeing what was about to happen, feeling the burning pain in his engorged cock, feeling the weight of his body on his fresh lower stumps, he was sweating viscous fluids and secreting heavy drops of sour semen, damping his cradle.

Annie looked obscenely prepubescent as she grazed Etobnik's humongous valleys and hills. Her swollen anal ring was turned to Lucy, as if it meant to speak. Her ass was rising and falling, inhaling air and exhaling gas, foam and liquids, as if it were the head of an Olympic swimmer. Her pink flesh was iridescent against Etobnik's black fur. They were making a lot of noise. Lucy's biles were pounding hotter and hotter at his body's narrowed borders. When Etobnik ejaculated, she couldn't have enough. She milked the last drops of his dark sperm as if it were an expensive delicacy. Then, she positioned herself an inch from the Lucy-torso, her nether lips flanking his nose like pincers, so that he would sniff the offense, so that he would recognize the orange blemish on her right labium, that private, magnificent stain he held so dear, now publicly turned against him. Lucy's humors receded at once. He was not well. He should be excused. He should be put to bed. But they were not done with him. Class was not over.

A door opened. There was a four day long convention. Men were lined along the corridors, wearing only glasses and ties. Each erection was drawn to her, a line of quivering, fleshy feelers, and she celebrated each. She showered in sprees of fortified goo. And, could it be, down the line, lined up along with her executive stags, her libertine lawyers, her literati lovers, her bohemian flirts, waiting for his turn, was Radical Lawrence? Would Lucy ever be allowed to leave? Don't make him swallow any more fluids. Please don't push anything else into his holes. Lucy isn't angry anymore. Lucy is not well.



Lucy Sees a World

When he woke up and saw Etobnik, he didn't hesitate for a second. Decisive and eager he leaped upwards and held fast to the heavy man, like a little legless monkey, like a word leaping out of a page, and rested his head on the soft, obese shoulder. The room was empty now, but still reeked of urine and semen. Etobnik was taking him home.

Lower lip drooping in amazement, he watched the world expanding backwards over Etobnik's shoulder. The closing door, the corridor ending, the elevator's door closing, the pavements supporting many people, each moving towards something concrete.

They headed to the subway. Lucy, still a baby, didn't need a token. On the platform, they stood next to three homeless uncles. They were gulping beer and eating raw eggs, throwing the empty shells on the tracks. One of them affectionately pinched Lucy's nose. Etobnik, crass but still a mother, spat on Lucy's nose and wiped it with his wooly sleeve. Nothing was said during the ride. The car was familiar. It was the car that had the ad for people with torn earlobes and nostrils. It had the ad for people with painful warts. It had the AZT ad. There was another ad in Spanish, for Hispanics in pain, with pictures of people in pain. But his room was waiting for him. A real mother was likely to write him soon.

As Etobnik laid him down and had him cuddled, he said: "I know you learned a lot. You thought the uncles were slime. You thought you were clean. But you realize now it's only a question of time. I disgusted you because you thought I was dirty. But you know now that we are one and the same."

Lucy sees. He is an educated Lucy.

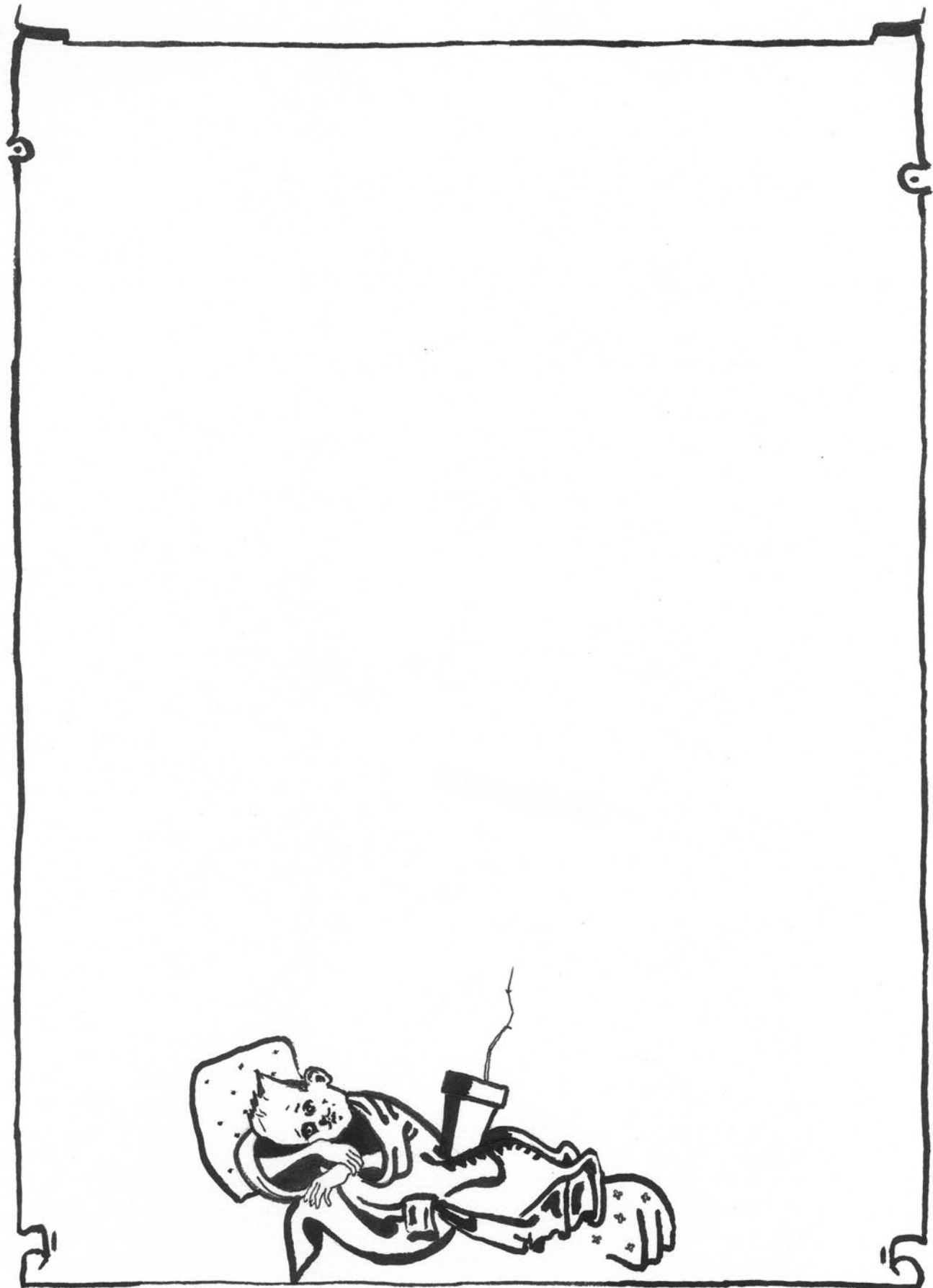
As Etobnik is about to leave, Lucy says twice: "thank you."



The Tree of Jesse

When Lucy woke up, he knew that much time flew, and that he was growing again. The tumor, even though it made him sweat, had indisputable merits. It belonged to Lucy. It could be fondled and thought about. True, it was gluttonous, it fed on Lucy's entrails—but what of it? Lucy is attached. Lucy moves more carefully now, he inches on ponderously, but his slow movement is unlike the slowness of the dead friend, and his caution is different from that of Radical Lawrence. Lucy is rather like a pregnant woman. And so it is that Lucy, who used to have a frantic pace, is now rather proud of his dignified sluggishness.

A new tissue grew around Lucy's body, perhaps as a reaction of his immune system. It looks as if his blanket left a dense residue when he was asleep. The tissue has a bothersome, glove-like effect. Lucy is less sensitive to heat and cold. Playing the piano is practically impossible. Holding a fork is a task. Nevertheless, he feels more protected. Now he dares to roam the streets again, in spite of the incriminating glances thrown at him. Now he is partially able to face the silence that enfolds him. Now he can masturbate again. He masturbates compulsively, and his fantasies are pregnant with offers that can't be refused and prospects of growth. Soon, he will even be able to think of her.



Encyclopedia

After he woke up, at ten AM, Lucy received the expected phone call, informing him the production was cancelled. He was to go to a certain office at a convenient time for a final meeting. Now that his free time is freer, he embarks, with scholastic fervor, on a study of Annie. Archival vigor and meticulous analysis will be applied to all details, as scarce as they seem. Knowledge will grow out of breaking her into ever smaller categories. An ever expanding Annie-field.

A restless map, animated by fluctuating traces.

An organic index.

A perpetuum mobile of desire and precision. The task would tax. He will eat steamed, odorless food. He will masturbate only twice a day.

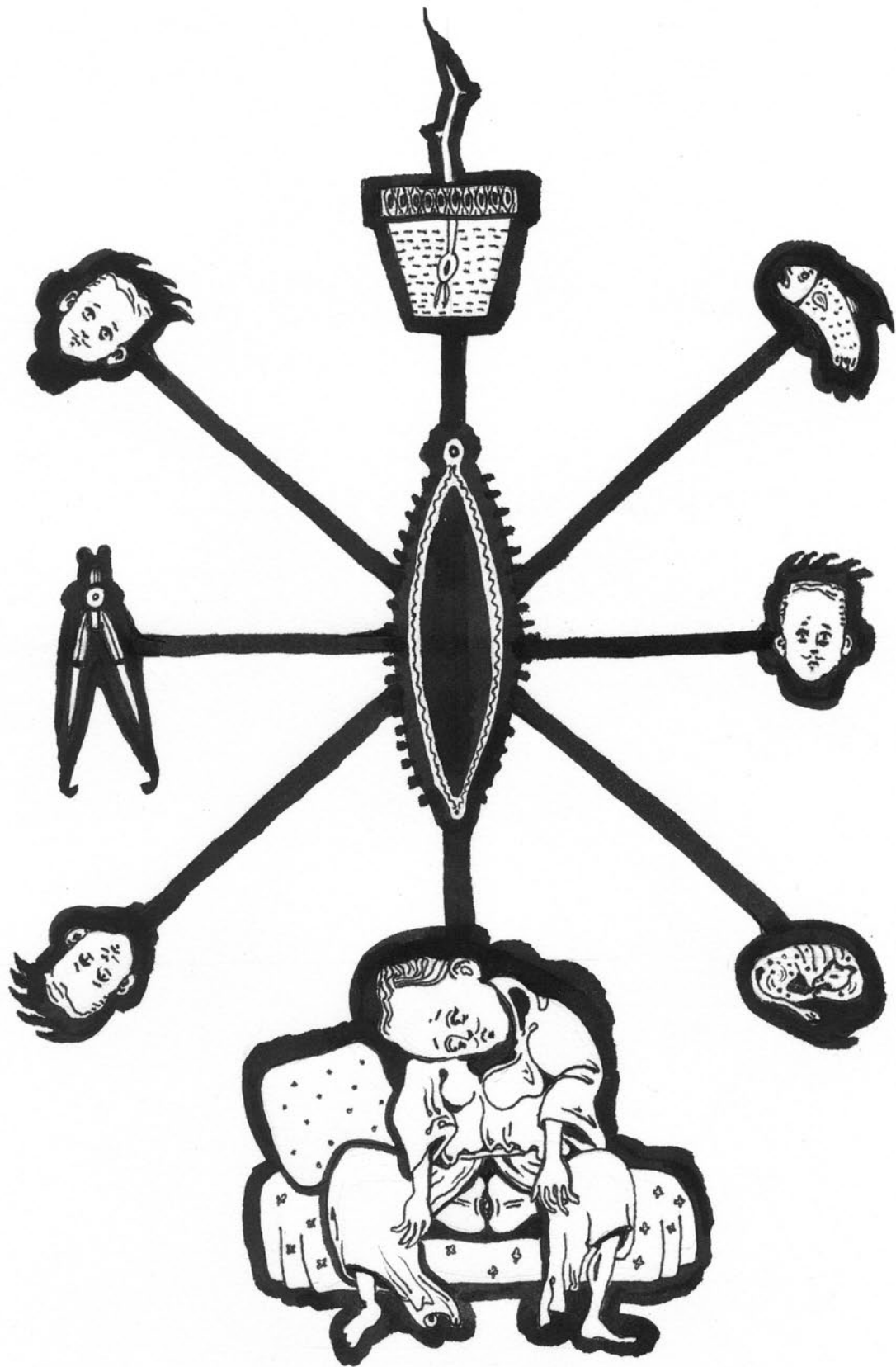
The first category he studied was Words She Used Often. Anchor; Bovine; Breach; Children; Cretins; Evasive; Mosaics; Ostentatious; Ravenna; Subservient; Support-system; Vindictive.

The list was clearly potent with meanings, yet those seemed either threatening or embarrassing. He was not sure how to proceed. He decided not to stall: leave the list as raw data; later, the overall structure would clarify its proper implications.

He thoughts her odors called for classification and annotation, but his intellectual integrity prevented him from pursuing this route. Pure knowledge, he knew, will surely be mired by melancholy, projection, lust. No other insights in mind, he retreated to the more conventional Biographical Details category. His preliminary list read as follows:

Maternal family: old money from Milan, immigrated before the war. Paternal family: alcoholic Catholics, White Trash (further research: difference from Red Necks, etymology, political leaning with possible connection to scholarships won by both her father and his sister). Parents met at Yale. Moved to Texas, where Annie and her older sister grew up (research: Texas—nothing known, siblings jealousy and dependency). Summer vacation with parents (now dead) at beloved (now dead) maternal grandparents' ancestral palazzio on a certain Lago. Ice-cream and horny bikers (her fantasies: expand). History: Communism or Fascism? Annie married to a certain one Paul, of the Upper-East-Side—East-Hampton trajectory (Research urgently. Also—study carefully the distinctions between the different Hamptons). Her studies: Psychology, then Social Work, Then Law. The serious physical problem appeared (expand later). The side effects.

Reflecting on his cards, Lucy is able to blame himself for never knowing her. He is emancipated enough to blame himself! The encyclopedia served a purpose, and is deserted.



The Cock

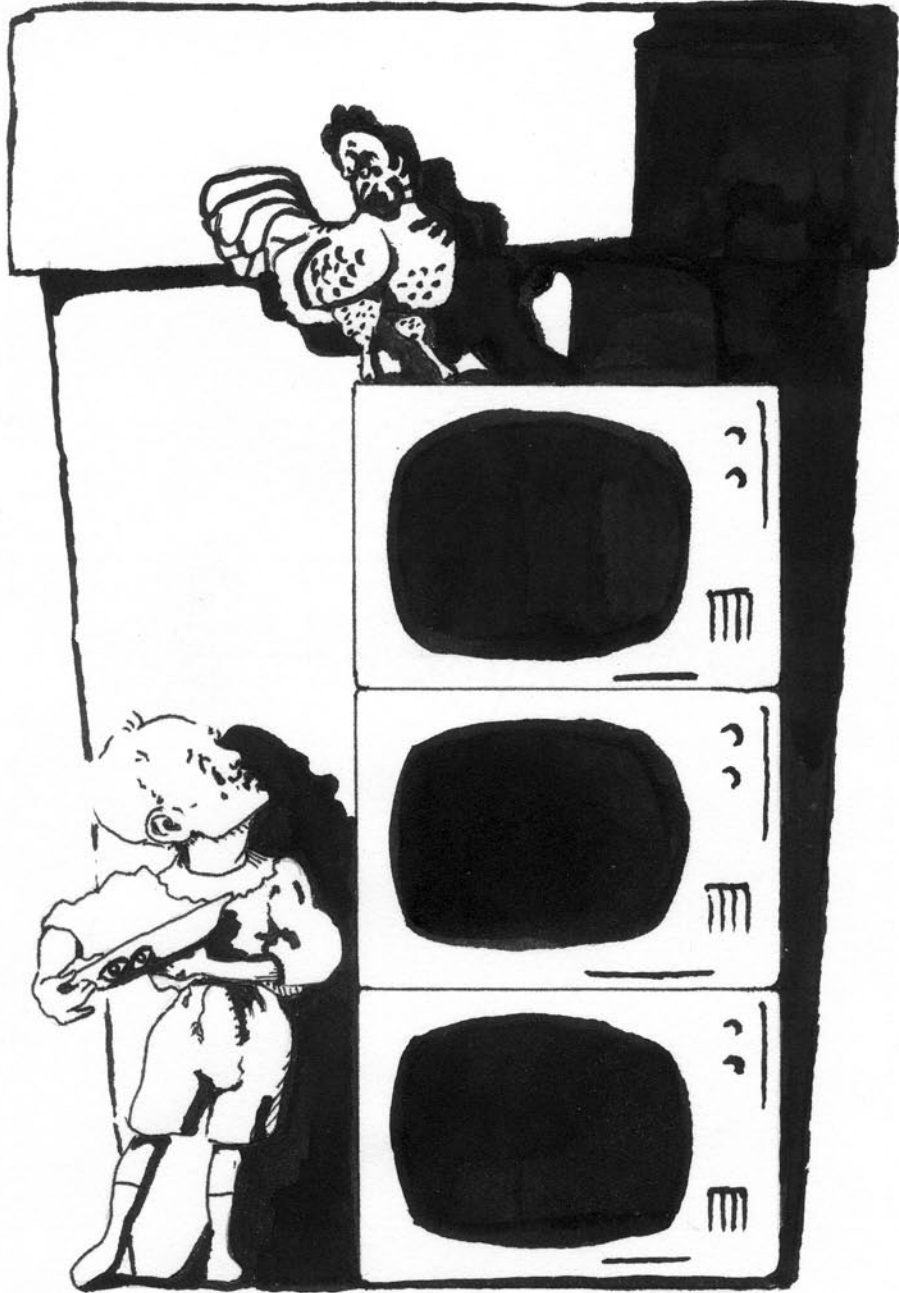
As the alarm clock crowed that morning, Lucy remembered, suddenly, that he did, in fact, betray Annie three times.

The polecat was a forty year old nude model. She was small, shivery, sharp featured. She was misguided like all other people writing poetry after 1970. She had parents in Brooklyn and a French husband on tour, and she needed to punish all three. She went by a French name, and spoke with a fake foreign accent. Lucy was compelled by her nervous energy, her crass make-up, her red-number-17-dye hair, her transparent skin. He was drunk at her place ten days after his affair with Annie begun. In bed, her shivers became jerky spasms, she might have been on something, physically dangerous, enticing and desperate. Her mound was shaven, but dark, thick whiskers were growing on it, giving her sex a prisoner's look. She did not have enough pigments on her skin to cover herself up. Her exposure was overwhelming. Even her smell seemed bare. Her juvenile perfumes evaporated as soon as she was naked, as if her glands neutralized them. She clung to Lucy, three sharp-nailed fingers thrust deep in his anus, her teeth biting his ears whole, her pubic thorns lacerating his cock. Once he ejaculated she fell asleep, and later was furious at Lucy.

He first heard the Norwegian cellist play in a concert, a couple of years back, with the quartet of her prestigious college, atonal music. She displayed herself with unabashed pride, her abnormally perky nipples protruding through thin black silk, Her thighs flanking the cello, lewdly defying the dense, cerebral music. Back then, she had a brief affair with Lucy's dead friend, and when they would meet, she would make an occasional pointed comment on Lucy's score. He slept with her several times. He was never satisfied, but kept coming back, as if to solve a nagging enigma. She seemed ceremonious in bed, and Lucy believed she did not perspire at all. Her scent remained that of dry sandalwood, gentle and clean. She was very narrow, and Lucy came quickly, and then twice more. She always, always cried during sex, and would later tell him she always cried during sex. Save for her tears, she was extremely calm. She used to ask him questions about the holocaust, as if he were a specialist. Lucy believed she felt soiled by him, and would often sit on her face, to make her confess her repugnance. He soon felt something was awfully wrong, and stopped seeing her, ignoring her pleas.

The hyper-fertile woman seemed to have been there always. Lucy and her, old friends, met in bed every couple of years, purposeless encounters that were invariably hallucinatory, emotional and sobering. She would tell him about her abortions and career. She would insist on reciting poetry to him, despite his embarrassment. She would stand spread-eagled above a sprawling Lucy, her olive skin shiny with excessive health, her whole being fuming with energy and resilience. Was she too warm? Too friendly? Too strong? There was always an understanding between them, always a misunderstanding, signs of pleasure with no pleasure. He called her when Annie was away, and they spent two days together.

Radical Lawrence returned from California the same day that Lucy remembered. His friend finally died. A week earlier he sold his life-insurance for cash to one of the resourceful money dealers the epidemic nourished. Lucy told Lawrence about his betrayals and cried.



Immaculate

The check was handed to him in an acid free envelope by one of his ex-assistants. It was a cordial gesture, indicating both generosity and absolute termination. Now, that the operetta was no more, he was cleansed of any belonging to time and place. He was an immaculate, hypothetical Lucy. He could look at that envelope, and reflect in no language, with no resonance. So the envelope assumed some importance.



Renewed

Lucy sees himself with a new pair of eyes. Lucy is open to his own suggestions. He knows now that he was mistaken, that Annie's flesh was never meant for him. Lucy climbs the stairs lightly. Like a Manichean elect, Lucy climbs to the light. He is untouchable, the only member of his own, private caste. His body is autarchic, growing and consuming its own cucumbers. He sizzles with insights, the sum lesson of suffering and passion and unbridgeable difference—her difference from him, his difference from her. His apartment is a luminous sun. Even the news of his sister's disappearance and of his father's stroke cannot deter him. Suddenly it occurs to him that she still has his key, and that she maybe waiting inside.

