

THE DESCENT OF THE MERMAN:

A dialogue of Father and Son

## The Antics of Non-being

When Cal gave the go ahead, the men from the feed store went home to get their guns. That made 4, 5 counting the Polansky boy. Cal said all you need is a good flashlight, some duct tape, and if anybody had any, some 5 1/2 shot with a narrow spread. Nobody did.

As the truck reached Burleson road just beyond the burbs, each in turn noticed the swirling eddies of sand play up and down the long rows and blow out across the milo. The slow steady pull was punctuated now and again by the sound of air sucking into a bottle of Jim Beam and the disconcerting backblast from a jet fighter overhead.

By 8:30 they were back at Hank Small's Hardware and Feed. Green figured out how to fix a light to a barrel so you could still work the switch. Polansky was giving his boy a few last minute instructions on how to behave, while the rest snuck out back to snort a line. Polansky got mad as hell.

Out front a car bounced up the drive to pick up the black cleaning lady, and one could hear the strange hiss of hose scrape together before the door slammed and car bounded away on loose shocks.

A sky striated with scales turned dark red as they huddled before the huge warehouse, Cal fiddling with the lock. Then they put their left hand on the person in front and filed in quietly along the south wall, stopped, and waited for the squeak and subsequent slam. After a lengthy pause, Cal whispered, "now," and all flicked on their lights and started blasting away as they slowly moved north. In the intermittent spots, vignettes from untold stories flashed and burned. Mouthfuls of grain fell from hundreds of shocked and half-crazed rats interrupted from their gorging. Against the steel walls slapped the naked tails of a thousand. Fingers wriggled along their fat muzzles and numbed with the killing. Ears rang when the screeching halted. The deafening roar climbed the rafters where the few last rats whimpered mysteriously before falling like thick mud to the astro turf. The gore was left for the Crawford lady.

The men would remember the waiting in the strange dark before the torches had been lit, when they heard running between piles the chorus of rats feeding like a multitude upon a great

harvest. And though the shooting lasted a surprisingly short time, the men would also remember the cry and agony rise from that ratfeast when rodents fought to keep a last morsel intact. But the final moments they would try to forget. The confines of gravity slipped and the drugged assassins slowly began to rotate and shot not grape but bullets of the hate and horror they felt toward life itself. The furious pitch ended with slobber dribbling from their chins, just visible in the spots. No one would talk about it, as they drove off into the night, but those that could sought to smother the gnawing question about what kind of creatures they really were, as they clutched their mates in the dark and hid under a furious pant and groan.

## A Dying Man

For a year he bore the pain. Sometimes it would clutch him, but he would only momentarily grimace and almost smile. Then it began to eat his vital organs, pecking them like a rapacious bird. Arching a wild goose's neck in no direction in particular, he would snap at and bite those nearest. Bedraggled and near wit's end, mad with pain--goose down strewn on the bowel-soaked earth--his head sagged uncontrollably. Around the jowls, one could barely discern over the haggard face, despite the humiliation of being tarred and feathered with his own incontinence, a man bearing his allotment of pain, teaching one and all not to be afraid.

## Tape Loop

Well, Mom, I guess that's about it. I've run out of things to say and the guys are starting to come in. Pray for me. You know what they say, "War is hell." I love you. I'm turning off the tape now. Tell Brenda I'll marry her when I come home. Tell Sophie to pick some flowers for me. So long.

Mom, why is he fighting over there? Don't cry. Well, dear, it's hard to say. Sometimes people just can't live together. Listen, there's more on the tape. He must've forgotten to turn it off.

We love you mom. Tell Sophie to pick some flowers. Ha! Ha! Ha! You guys cut it out. What do you expect me to say. Got any shit? Hey, Polansky, you should have come with us last night. I did come with you, you fucked-up piece of shit. What happened? We took out the truck, 9 of us. And picked up this fuckin gook whore and balled the holy cream out of her. We were going down some crazy roads, destroyed out of our minds, balling that gook till she couldn't stand it anymore. But she kept wanting us to give her more. She couldn't get enough. Wanted us to bang her till she came all over the truck. So we kept banging and banging her and she started bleeding. But she didn't care, so we fucked her some more. Christ I looked at my balls when I got back and they were caked with gook whore, all red. But she didn't give a flying fuck. Man she sucked it up. We're going out to find her again tonight. Wanta come, Polansky? I told you I did come. Give me a hit. Let's go over to fridge and play puzzle. You guys in graves are crazy. Whoever keeps putting floaters in my fuckin closet has had it. Relax Doc. They're not going to climb into bed with you. They just wanta be friendly. They'll probably go out and pick you some flowers.

## Antics Before the Mirror

Under the quiet ticking of the evening clocks,  
After trying to brush his teeth,  
The wife of 43 years suggested a glass.  
He said, I can't remember  
How to look in the mirror.  
Don't be ashamed she said come with me.  
Now look, this is you reflection.  
This, now touch, is your face.  
Put on the toothpaste; that's right.  
The old man smiled broadly, knowingly,  
And scratched a frothy paste across the mirror.

## Catapult

Fire! Holy Shit look at that gook fucker fly. Looks like the bloody Paraclete... (That's one big fucken parakeet Polansky.) descending onto the heap of disciples yonder. Polansky, you some kind of priest fucker? Sergeant that's the last one. Got to hand it to you though, that pair of 18 wheeler brake pads did the trick. Now the stiffs sit up so pretty, just like in front of a cardinal. Serge they just brought in two more. Said they're the last. O.K. catapult 'em over the river. Then radio Viet Nam station the investigation team's found no evidence-to-date of U.S. forces inflicting alleged casualties across the river on unauthorized country. And Polansky, for God's sake tie any loose parts on tight. Don't want to see any gook limbs floating downstream when reporters come to verify.

## Le Toilet

Crouched over the white commode,  
Wrenching but unable to go,  
The old cancer patient held his thin knees  
And lowered his wagging head to the shoulder  
Of the son trying to comfort him,  
Saying, "Oh son you cannot know."



## Bail Out

Ask him where his men are. Corporal he won't say. Kick him in the nuts. Get him off the floor and ask him again. He won't say anything. Throw him out. What? You heard me, throw him out of the Goddamn chopper. He'll die. Just where the fuck you think we are private, Disneyland. Bring another one. Tell him if he doesn't tell us what we want to know, he'll join his buddy on a free ride down to earth. Polansky, you tell 'em that we got free tickets for everybody. You tell 'em we're in fucking Disneyland and we're all going on the parachute drop. Who's next?

## A Sign

The last gesture of the diseased  
To the son trying to administer the oxygen  
Was a loose wagging of the index finger  
Signifying a resolute, "No!"

## Mr. Potato Head

Put the arm over there. Got an ears? Two pricks. Polansky's got two pricks. How the hell dya get it to stay on? Just a little spit. Poor son of a bitch won't need it anymore. Now I can fuckum cominandgoin. Give me a toke. Hey, yesterday we put a coupla floaters in the new guy's tent, got him all fucked up on opium and hooch and sent him back to his bunk all alone. Scared the holy shit out of him. Came running out of there faster than a greased asshole. My God, it was beautiful. Polansky, looky here. Gotta real head for a prick. Now I can eat my way home. Sucky fucky G.I. God, that's good. Try the legs where the arms go. Next time I see that bastard gunny I'm gonna shove this cock right down his throat. Fucking Jesus, look at this shit. Give me another hit: Graves Registration, register Mr. Potato Head.



## Last Breath Warm Breast

Mother, waiting for my father to die said

"I only want to see his last breath."

When the moment came at last, his body shook and throat gargled;

she gave thanks, placed her hand upon his chest,

took mine and put it there and said smiling,

"He is still warm," and he was still warm.

## Passenger and Driver

Like an unwinding piano roll, childhood phantoms played in the brain of the dying old man as we drove the haunted, speechless, boyhood streets that night. Just moving when he gasped from emphysemic lungs, the petrified soul of an "El Greco" stared from the luminous windshield, as passersby caught images of him on his way to heaven. I longed for him to smile and call me son; yet the emaciated ghoul in the seat beside filled me with horror and compassion: (a man in the olive groves is weeping). Unable to divide time from time, stupor-like, he gawked while overhanging branches stroked the crooked lines of his brow. Assuming the function of the ordering mechanism, the ground reeled underneath, patterning the world of the far-gone man: (a woman stoops to lift him, a young boy throws a ball, a wife embraces, a son falls down and anoints his white elongated feet).

Now slowly I move through dark streets of the old town remembering. Neon flashes on my windshield, hands and face;  
trees rush by as leaves scuttle in rows across the broad road.

Only the steady rolling up of the earth choring beneath my wheels relieves me.

## Descent of the Merman

I should work my toes in first, using the nails above and the round bottoms to feather as a merman the soft layer of topsoil. Then the feet themselves find a pathway in. Working back and forth, back and forth, they establish a sensible rhythm for the whole effort. With time, the ankles, knees, and hips bend like tendrils caught adrift turning and returning to their element, a light fire inside the cells, split like lines on a round bulb flaring--so the memory would return to the members. Sinking in, speed, the belly covered, and peristalsis shaking, the slender arm feels a snaky path downunder and spins. All would be made ready for the skull and milky soul. Then easily as a dead man belly up over shipplank floats through a memorial sea, I abandon all hope and sink through crust and hard rock down to the center of the Earth.