

XQ-28

The Story of a Gene

Chapter 9

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Adrian Challis



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Although he believes the concept of authorship to be dead, Adrian Challis asserts the contradictory and dubious moral right to be identified as the author of this work under the Copyright and Patents Act 1986.

To all the friends and family who encouraged it, to all the great minds that inspired it. But mostly, to Adrian & Anthony, who lived it.

Interlude

in which the author philosophises on the subject 'Life is a book'

Prologue.

Conception - an idea is born. A slowly coalescing germ, dividing, sub-mutating, taking on a rough outline that indefatigably loses its roughness. Original sin of original flawed idea, morphically limited from all its latent possibility into recognisable, only moderately modified form. A book within covers. An opening conduit, a slap, a scream, an opening sentence. A Christening, a title, the spell to access the text. The first chapter defines the parameters of the narrative to come, predetermined development judged against the ur-book, the texts of carefully maintained normality. First chapter set in then frozen in the flood of pubescent hormone; dyed fast. How much is left, but to play out the delineaments of unacted desires, of roles and ciphers, generated in those first brief accelerated pages?

Marriage the next big chapter, the meeting and mating with another form: the selling of the film rights. Children - mere sequels? What chapters follow, what divertissements are left once our own lives become footnotes to some other text, reduced to references in some future bibliography? Divorce - the studio withdraws its backing? Sue for breach of contract...

What else before maturity, our final draught? Our last breath on the lithographic flatbed before our manuscript shuffles off to meet the publisher. Obituaries are filed in the review pages, dictating the limits of our immortality. Then to lie in the corporation graveyard of the public library, a vast repository, of which, like Alexandria, but a few titles remain, their texts rotting or burnt, hopelessly scrambled beyond access...

And at the centre of this gigantic whodunit, this story without a narrator, this classic myth of origin - the double helix. Flick back to the front of the book, even before the prologue - is our heredity, our DNA, a contents page?

When does behaviour stray into the margins? When does it fall to the foot of the page, a genuflecting acknowledgement of past texts? In this Life Lived as Literature, what is incidental to the narrative, what numerical disjecta forces us to skip pages and

look to the back for references to books of law and stringently applied morality? What do we choose to record, what incidents do we censor, whilst encouraging attention to spiral down into ever more Proustian detail, as if to capture in a cage of words the irrational mesh of internal monologue, constantly spewing from hidden lips like so much intellectual vomit, bringing up half-chewed fragments of other people's language, worn film of spatial locations, ghostly peregrinations of our disembodied selves, wandering down antiseptic corridors of thought, ricocheting from one big event to another?

All the ifs unuttered... The actions taken for granted like so much autonomic language. The stories we tell ourselves about what we are going to do, the prophetic bare essentials of first-person fabrication. Jerry-built fantasies, invariably demolished, condemned by reality, some leaving gaps, some much richer architecture, mostly just incongruous post-modern edifices of chance and serendipity.

Between disappearance and memory - the lived text.

If folios, the serial record of experiences past, are directly equatable to years lived, then most live novellas. The verso-recto march of divisible and prime, sticky numerical patches alternating like good and mediocre Claret. Whole pages crumbling under the weight of typographical diversity. The rows of leaden negative space between the letters - a perpetual critique of what could have been.

How many texts are re-writes, ghosted lives, programmed by bureaucrats, social engineers of the straight and narrow? Roughly pulped-out lives, ciphers from the wise and good, prescription existences of compulsively monitored slow-release generics where only the brand names change. Come and live the two-point-two-sequenced nuclear novella with 50 minute teleplay tie-in.

Despicable trash.

Perhaps only the in-the-beginning-was-the-word of the social law exists as such, the program Winston Smith manipulates to churn out pulp for the proles. In contrast, the beauty of each life is in the nuance of its deviation. History, like literature, ends only with the destruction of difference.

(T)HIStory ends when we all live polite dutiful lives and finish

up remaindered, neatly stacked, brushing covers with our screenplay, (unoptioned).

Or maybe it ends in reams of looped cut-up, staggering from farce to tragedy in seemingly eternal return. There's no guarantee. Aesthetics is nothing to live a life by. So you like the idea of experimentation? Well get this, honey, you're living in a pretty hostile laboratory and there's no protection from emotional vivisection where you're going. You're flowing, incidental, dropping neatly tied-in subplots, full-pelt purple spurts of synchronous delight then... block. You slump exhausted into shopping lists and scatology, anally picking back through chapters, trying to find out exactly where it was you lost the plot.

So, dear reader, if you accept for a moment this voluminous metaphor, this délire which threatens to render the text inscrutable, to call too much attention to big ideas like 'Death of the Author' and court the story so far into self-knowing self-defeat, spare a thought for us. What is left for us, we XQ-28ers? No sequels. No movie. No title to work back from. Our serried tombstones stand lock-tongued, refusing to speak ill of the dead.

Time to scramble the text, to marry your sensibility to a new structure. Serial intertextuality. Shake the foundations of narrative motivation and scatter the fragments. Cut from the boundaries of accepted headings, we glitter like free-verse.

We are all books without chapters.

So, what happens next?

Readers are all alike. They sniff for details, authenticities, tell-tale signs of future developments, second-guess the possible labyrinths the narrative may spiral into. Without events, they are clueless, bloodhounds off the scent.

So what if now the story loses its thread, develops amnesia from sleep deprivation, short-term memory loss brought on by too much tetra-hydro-cannabinol? What if it begins to repeat itself, cycling through its jaded vocabulary, struck dumb for new expression? Will you cease to embrace its truth if it calls you into a loop of pulsing bodies like a stack of dominoes that never quite hit the floor? If it calls you on the telephone, and answers your double yes with the static of international data exchange and

damaged codes, the 2300hrz whistle of nothing on the line?

If not then, when?

When it rambles psychopathically through epiphanic revelation whilst peppering the mundane with hallucinogenic detail? Blows its own brains out and leaves the body to drift aimlessly from one perfect cumshot to another, each one merging facelessly, anonymous, like so many jockey stains, crystallising into a fathomless topography of cracked and yellowing latency? Hieroglyphs of twisted sperm spell out an arid discourse of broken possibility.

Fuck all that shit. This is my story, not a story about me.

It's hard to remember those three months, we were so happy. Happiness seems to settle in a part of the brain not easily accessed by memory. It's as though the mind is satisfied, feels no need to re-serve these adequately digested morsels. Happiness becomes haziness; our most ecstatic memories reduced in time to glimpses through rough gauze. Home movies help to distil the essence of memory, grainy mnemonics in the place of lives.

To tell you the truth, we slept, shat, ate, pissed, talked and fucked. The rest is ashes. Writing in air.

True, there was detail. Even within the apparent vacuum of breathlessness, microscopic shifts in the breath of another still seem to suck air you didn't know existed from your lungs. Melville could have written pages on the uncanny quality of inertia caused by a sail without wind.

So, trad reader, this is your captain speaking. Call me Ishmael.

Let me let you in on a little secret. Forgive my whisper. Read my lips:

Nothing is true. Everything is permitted.

Chapter 9 Three Months Pass

That first night. I remember now. It started with a kiss. Two brute hands in the darkness grasp me, hustle me over and part my cheeks. I'm waiting for a pain, an indefinable presence that forces all the sweat I can muster into an invisible shroud. It doesn't come. Instead, one mucous membrane is met by another.

Like I said - a kiss.

A feeling and a voice, close to my ear, barely audible, seductive like a hammer beating out six words.

Nothing is true. Everything is permitted.

It is said that the true secret of the Pharaohs was the secret language of kinesis. With it, they built the pyramids. It is also said that this knowledge has been lost, surviving only in childish concepts such as Abracadabra and Open Sesame. With just six words, Martin tilted the axis of my world. Not that I realised it then. The tilt was only perceptible much later, when the changes had time to multiply out, until gravity could no longer hold us and we had no choice but to spin off into the chaotic void.

My brain knew nothing but what it was not. Something was shifting, amorphous, inchoate, waiting until it could pulse into being, a force transforming me discreetly by degrees, one cell at a

time. A binary mitosis, exponential transformation of zeros into more than ones. This slow becoming. It sits pulsing, a formless force of undulating as yet undifferentiated matter, dancing to another's choreography.

Unconscious of self, adrift in a heady fertile jelly of hormones that sprang from hitherto well-guarded synaptic gateways, a fungal growth of otherness was brewing between our clenched bodies. Cut free from clocks, spinning in the timestretched cacophony of varispeed heartbeats, locked into a rhythm conducted by adrenaline and pheromone, we slept at dawn, and awoke as the last rays of the sun dipped the houses opposite in pink ink, all our movements suffused with twilight or softened by tungsten.

I would awaken and he would be gone. But evening would find a fridge full of goodies to augment Martin's return.

What else remains? Glimpses. Only glimpses.

A sliver of conversation from that first night.

-Why did you tense up when I kissed your hole?

-I was expecting something else.

-Expecting, or hoping?

-Neither really. Resigned, you might say.

-Disappointed?

-No. Like you said, there's plenty of time for that.

-And what if I said you're going to have to wait even longer?

-I'd say it sounds like you've got an agenda.

His eyes in mine, two shiny black holes, demanding gravity.

-When was the last time you got fucked?

-The truth?

-Always.

-Never.

-Come on, you're kidding?

-Nope. Never met the right man. You should be flattered...

-I'm being serious. You can probably guess I'm no angel.

Pause. One brain and two ears strain to find the words. Finally...

-We wait three months then take a test. Agreed?

-But Martin you know they're checking all the clinics now, it's

getting dangerous just having a test whether it's positive or not.

-I know people. That's not the issue. The real question is, do you want to know?

-I'll think about it.

-Okay, but until we know, you'll have to make do with this...

What we made do with has faded from my mind. It is part of my physical memory now. Like my first teddy bear. I have a much clearer memory of my first Pacman - the anxious simplicity of its movements. It has more meaning for me, the me I am now. It is merely enough that I *had* a first teddy bear, and like my first teddy bear, those three months with Martin taught me how to love.

Quintessence of dust.

Forgotten cartography. Erogenous nodes to tap the telluric currents. An unmappable trajectory across Martinia, Martian, alien but for the spontaneous desire lines that all lead to the throne of the King of the World, Martin's cock, Agartha at its core, the font of all gravitational attraction. Chemical maps beyond consciousness, our odysseys guided by olfactory archetypes, neglected signifiers our nostrils follow, taking our bodies with them on dances for pollen.

Our tongues rambled an articulate discourse over the subconscious landscape, the contour maps where our bodies touched rippling into dark shadow, trying to merge, to go through each other to a new synthesis - Martinian life. Always failing, dying trying, falling apart, twisting languorously into sleepable shapes. Waking individuated, sleeping as one.

In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni

A whiff of body odour hits me and I recall the suffocation of his pubic hair as I'm gagging on his cock thick mucous filling my oesophagus aiding his complete entry and suddenly a whole night returns with Martin's thighs gripping my head blocking my ears eyes shut tight my nose in his balls his cock in my throat my cock in his throat locked like ancient Chinese symbols a little good in evil a little evil in good each gripping swallow each flurry of the tongue perfectly mirrored from Martin tranced out on the visceral

surgings in our ears the ear at the centre of our hEARTs' alternating beats producing one nosebleed breakbeat slowing as we slow ourselves to preserve the high smashed before we began on some crossbreed called Tantric Haze now delirious and suffocating but both pushing to the limits riding the cycle our bodies fusing at the breast bone until the centre cannot hold and the tension crazy itch blue shudder begins to shine and it's all hands on deck as the wave breaks and we slide around like sperm whalers harvesting the catch...

It was later, but I don't remember how many later, that Martin rolled off my calming, cooling stomach and said in a low whisper

-In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni...

-Is that supposed to mean something?

-I just thought it was appropriate. It's Latin.

-Get away.

-It means 'We turn in circles in the night and are consumed by fire'. It's a palindrome.

-I bet you say that to all the boys.

in girum imus nocte 69 etcon sumi murig ni

Outside our window the seasons changed. The whole world became fecund, buds and shoots aroused by the sounds of our lovemaking. The first thing I noticed was the smell of fresh air hitting my nostrils as if for the first time, bringing with it long lost memories of unfocussed sexuality. Electric stimuli sent shock waves across memory lobes bursting open doors I didn't know were shut. Seemingly indiscriminate memories flooded my mind - snap-shots of other happy times, of moments of epiphany and joy from days long dead. The smell of spring three years before, suddenly feeling alive after a long neutered hibernation; distant euphoria of late summer harvest behind the asylum in which my best friend's mother's brain was being routinely hooked up to the power supply and fried in its own juices, obliviously ecstatic amidst the hayricks; thirteenth summer, giggling with cramping excitement at Billy's pale blue eyes, aching soft skin and puppy fat, washing ourselves afterwards in the lake ('my cousin says it

stops you catching anything - we do it all the time...'); long decanted recollections cracked by spring.

One day we threw open the windows and fucked as the breeze covered us in cherry blossom, sending the post-coital Martin off on an extended dissertation on the poetics of Mishima, some Japanese fag writer he thought was the business.

What I'd always thought was a tiny flat became both physically smaller, since we hardly ever left the bedroom except to piss (and sometimes not even then), and infinitely huge. Outside, the skyscrapers could rend the bloody guts from the sky, peel back the blue and white skin to reveal the heaving entrails of heaven, wriggling flesh marbled with fat, and drip thick blood onto the pavement below, and we'd have noticed nothing. A world was being created by two people, a perfect model for a new society, where being was all that counted. As our lips met, the kisses crackled blue electricity that incinerated reality on contact.

Everywhere, everything turned green. The grass returned, bulbs sprouted, the trees covered their naked shame in every fertile hue, and the abandoned kitchen grew a layer of arsenic-green fur, until you needed a chemical warfare suit to contemplate the washing-up. Clocktime and daylight returned regularly every two weeks, as I dutifully arose for my appointment at the labour exchange, collected my cheque, and went back to bed. The money, unspent, went straight in the bedside drawer. I didn't know how, but Martin seemed to find shops open in the middle of the night. The cupboards were always full. Why should I care? To ask how would have spoiled the mystery.

And I too had mystery. My true name, undisclosed so long ago for no good reason, had slipped its leash and fled, leaving this nothing name, this strange routine of the cheeks, throat and tongue in place of a true name. But as I thought about how to explain this, I realised that it was perfect. Not only did it let me keep something from Martin, something that protected us both if the worst did happen, but it gave me a way of both distancing myself from my actions, and of objectifying myself to my own gaze. This pseudo-self - Ian - was not quite me, and there were times when my nameless self watched on amused and amazed by the performance of this other person, who seemed to know

exactly how to behave in every situation, despite never having existed until Martin's question bore him.

I couldn't help thinking how I couldn't have picked a better name if I'd tried. Ian. One arch short of a statement of being. Just stopping itself before it says 'I am'. Something less than a finished name, for something greater than a finished state.

Another name for becoming.

Since that first night, the real first night that seemed more and more like a vertiginous nightmare, I had begun to live an alien identity, one without history, family or control. I was ruled purely by pleasure. A brain in a vat of endorphins. If I was hungry, I went to the cupboard or the fridge and ate, or more regularly I would call attention to my growling stomach and within half an hour I would be dribbling over some perfect delicacy Martin had prepared, naturally with careful attention to include all the necessary food types.

-You are what you eat, he said, that's why most people are shit.

-Does that make me your cock?

-Is right. Now give us a cuddle, I fancy a wank.

[Sometimes we would have entire meals consisting of food of the same colour. Red Lentil lasagna, a hard baked crust of Red Leicester, carrots cooked with orange peel, potatoes in turmeric, washed down with Stolichnaya and freshly squeezed orange juice.]

-Martin. What do you do? For a living I mean?

I'm in demolition is all he'd say.

He taught me how to build spliffs. I went from never having rolled a bus ticket to five-skin behemoths in a fortnight. Only ever the mildest cigarettes, the thinnest papers, the most mind-boggling assortment of cultivated transcendences were allowed to be used. At one point Martin refused to allow me to use something he called Polm, this sandy brown hashish that seemed to fall and settle into its thin bed of tobacco like soft brown sugar settling in a bowl. He handled it reverently, barely touching it, lightly rolling it off his fingers, almost holding his breath as he watched it fall into the open papers, nodding approvingly.

-Do you know how they make this? On the hottest day, high in the Kashmiri mountains, all the fittest young men walk up into the weed fields, take their kit off and just run and jump and dance into the dope plants, covering themselves in all the pollen from the plants until they can dance no more. Then they put their clothes on and walk back to the village. Then all the women of the village strip them and rub them, really lightly, so that all the pollen falls onto this muslin. Then they sit and sift it and work it with their hands and work it and roll it and work it some more until it's a ball of this beautiful light brown fudge you see before you. It is, quite simply, the smoothest smoke in the world. And I'm afraid it is just too good to leave to an amateur, albeit a pretty gifted amateur like yourself.

Whenever anyone had said something like that to me before, my reaction was usually to say something witty like 'shut your face you pompous twat', or say nothing, and just think 'wanker' and avoid that person from then on. You know what I mean, I'm sure. But now I know that this was just because they were talking about some middle-brow whisky, or poxy high-street chocolates, and their sad little attempts at exclusivity said more about them than it intended to. Here, however, was a substance like rare spice, that justified fetishisation, that demanded respect.

I looked forward to the day I would be invited to prepare the sacrament.

-Where do you know all this stuff from Martin?

-All over the place. Stories you hear from people who've travelled, history programmes on TV...

-I don't think beautiful boys dancing naked through the dope fields was on TV, I think I would have remembered seeing that...

He breathed in deeply, catching the sweet, almost flowery smoke in his mouth and smiling, holding it in with his eyebrows raised, waiting then laughing it out, passing it on so that I could partake in this grail-like saga, this journey from the peaks of Kashmir to the bronchioli of my lungs. It was so smooth, it was difficult to tell you were smoking anything, and I kept drawing the smoke deeper into my lungs, from whence it seemed reluctant to emerge.

-A lot of it comes from books. Don't look so surprised, I can

read you know.

-I'm not surprised you can read, I'd just forgotten what you were saying. So you've read lots of books then.

-Not loads and loads. I realised quite early on that there's far too much to read in the world, and 99.9% is worthless shite, and if I was going to read anything it had to be good. I don't mean what everyone thinks of as good, y'know, Good Literature, drawing room shit, I mean books with a high pleasure quotient. At school, it was usually stuff with a high sex and drug quotient too, but that's natural, you ain't gonna learn nothing worth knowing about those two from the teachers. But it's mad cos I ended up reading amazing literature. Capital L stuff. Aristophanes, Plato, St Augustine - he's a laugh you should check him out sometime - Chaucer - a very funny man, could have done with learning to spell - Milton - great stuff, nearly got burned for having all the angels shagging each other, that and making Satan a bit too cool for his own good - Marlowe, fuck man Marlowe is a boss writer, *Faust* of course, *Edward II* natch but *Tamberlaine* - what a play!

-You haven't really read all of these have you?

-Is right ya cheeky bastard. The Romantics, they were all as bad as each other, nobbing everything that moved, especially their families, tanked up on laudenum tripping their tits off, 'cept Blake o'course he didn't need the drugs...

-I've read William Blake. He's ace.

-You're not kidding. He used to have conversations with Job y'know. He reckoned that when he was four he saw the face of God at the window. Knocked him across the room - imagine that! De Quincey, he's alright but so slow it's a crime. Not much fear of corrupting the youth with that boring shite. De Sade on the other hand - he knew how to edit a book, no beating about the bush with him...

-More like beating about the body from what I've heard...

-De Sade's excellent man, you should read some. A necessary step in the battle against control. *Philosophy in the Bedroom*. Perfect. I'd love to see it performed somewhere...

-You don't see many performances of de Sade being advertised these days do you?

-I wonder why... Anyway, what was I saying?

I suddenly hadn't a clue. Luckily, Martin remembered.

-Oh yeah. Rabelais. Ever heard of him? He is so funny it's sad man, he was from the border of France and Spain, he's got that Scatalonian thing...

-The what?

-I was being clever. Catalonia, in Spain yeah, has this reputation for being obsessed with shit - at Christmas they give each other little statues of nuns shitting and chocolate turds on sheets of rice paper...

-You *are* making this up, aren't you?

-Not a word. It's true, well, as true as anything else. Rabelais taps into that scatalogical earthiness. His stuff is full of extreme violence and jokes about shit and domes made out of fannies and...

-Y'what?

-There's this brilliant scene in one of his books where this guy gets the idea that because the prostitutes of Paris are so cheap, it would be far better to make a dome for a building out of their fannies, instead of expensive stones.

-That's incredible. A dome made of holes - a presence made of absences...

-Precisely. Isn't that ace? And also he says that it would be even better than a real dome, because it could open in the sunshine, and shut tight when it rains! This is all in about 1640 he wrote this...

-You lie...

-N-n. He's totally out there, you have to wait till Bill Burroughs before you get anything as mad as that again. Worth waiting though... loads of other shit. Henry Miller - another one who didn't know how to edit. Good though. Genet, same again, but madder, more beautiful, lived it too. And of course the immortal Yukio...

-Never heard of him.

-I told you about him before. Mishima. His first name's Yukio.

-The Samurai merchant...

-His pockets full of currents...

-Wha'?

-Bad joke. You ever read *The Waste Land*?

-Did it at school I think.

-Like it?

-Don't remember.

-You should read it now. Now that you don't have to. The only poem worth reading in the last hundred years if you ask me. Loads of other stuff you won't have heard of, like Huysmanns and Trocchi and Fourier and Foucault and Vaneigem and Bataille and Emmett Grogan and Hubert Selby Jr....

-I've heard of him...

-He's boss, a total soul.

-Martin, have you really read all these books?

-Most of them. The best bits anyway. Reading was an escape, taught me loads about the bullshit everyone else was telling me. I liked it because it gave me an edge against the teachers. They just thought I was trouble, that I had no interest in learning anything apart from signing my name on a giro. It was that kind of school. I'd probably read more of the classics than they had.

-You're going to tell me you read Shakespeare for all the sex and drugs now. I suppose when Macbeth's going 'Is this a dagger I see before me' he's actually in the throes of some smack vision and just embroidering the hyperdermic...

-Hey hangon, you might have something there... Of course, it's obvious, he's a total junk fiend. That's why he freaks out at the end - 'The trees, they're coming to get me!'...

-The witches are obviously his dealers, giving him the true dope on the whole deal...

-And the wife's after his stash. Fuck, no wonder he's so paranoid. And let's face it you'd be bound to go off on a bummer stuck in some Bela Lagosi castle in the middle of Scotland. Bad fucking trip guaranteed I'd have said...

-What were we talking about?

-Shakespeare.

-No before that?

-Sex and drugs and good books...

-Oh yeah.

-What was I saying?

-Shakespeare.

-Fuck yes, thanks. I can't diss him cause I'm telling you my man Billy was doing it large. Funny as fuck. Sad as shit. Everything in between. What can I say, a bright man.

-But you can't read him every day now, can you.

-Not unless you're very sad. The sonnets maybe. One a day tops. Did you know most of them were written to a young man? My voice high and rising.

-As if...!

-It's true man. Some young Lord he was tugging, or probably more often just wanting to tup, there was a whole etiquette to it then.

-Martin, what are you talking about, we've always been queer.

-Nn-nn, wrong again. For a very long time, and not so long ago, a gentleman wasn't a gentleman without a young boy to shag. It was the done thing.

-I suppose you mean Rome and Greece? Well look what happened to them. Too many orgies..

-Bollocks. They just didn't get their shit together and take care of business to pay for all the parties. Nothing to do with morality, they were just plain slack. I'm talking about before the 19th century, before the Industrial Revolution, the silent revolution when the machines took over, and everyone had to make babies to service the machines. Of course, now they don't need us to work their machines, since they can get some unmarried mother in South-East Asia to do it for half a bowl of rice a day, they make different excuses for it. Family values don't mean jack shit since everyone found out the spooky stuff families get up to. So now it's spreaders of diseases and drains on what's left of the health service on one hand, and moral hatred from the unholy alliance of Christs on the other..

-Yeah, the mad messiahs and mullahs bunch. Scary shit.

-You know what makes me so fuckin sick about them is how they all go on about what we do as unnatural. Well, for starters, nature has absolutely no morality whatsoever, you've only got to look around you to see that one. A lion doesn't think Thou Shalt Not Kill as it bears down on some poor suspecting head of cattle,

and for that matter neither do the members of the Christian-Islamic Alliance. But if God made us like they say, and God is Good and God is Great, then why did He give us two seriously effective pleasure centres that pretty much fit together in such an appealing way? Did you know your arse lubricates when it gets excited?

-No, I thought that's why you needed the WG...

-Not when you're really ready. A woman can't just be penetrated without a little TLC and neither can ya old brown owl.

-So crude...

-You love it. And tell me why your prostate gland can feel pleasure if it wasn't meant to be touched? It's right inside, for fuck's sake!

-Literally, if you are to be believed.

-Precisely. It's the second clitoris. And like the man said, they're like opinions. Everyone's got one.

-Martin.

-Yes.

-Whilst we're on the subject, isn't it about time we...?

-I told you before, not until we know.

-But what about condoms?

-They split.

-They're pretty safe.

-Pretty ain't nowhere. Ask yourself this. Would you let me fuck you, knowing that accidents can happen, knowing for definite that I was HIV+?

I didn't answer.

-It's settled then.

-But Martin, all this talk about sensitive hidden glands has got me so fucking horny it's stupid.

-I'm not going to fuck you until we've had the test.

I changed tack.

-You're expecting me to believe this whole renunciation of all that is spiritually good without any evidence at all.

-I'm telling you that your prostate is more sensitive than your cock.

-You're lying. You're just hoping that by the time we get to try

it I'll have forgotten all about it.

-I'm telling you that I could make you come the orgasm of your life without so much as breathing on your cock.

-Prove it.

Silence.

-See.

He sat up in bed, silently checking something, concentrating on I couldn't see what. Then he sighed and reached under the bed, retrieving a Durex Osmiridium and a tube of lube. He took out the condom and squeezed a little Welcome Guest on the inside of the johnny, then slid it down two of his fingers. The rubber sagged a little on either side.

-Gloves are better but this'll have to do, he said. Turn on your side and don't let your cock touch anything, I want to prove it to you.

I did as he said and waited, expecting a sudden thrust like I'd always imagined, but instead felt the lightest of touches on my hole, cold and carressing. Gently, he worked his fingers along the line my other lips made, which seemed to be puckering up for his rubber fork-tongue to lick. I started to spin, the joint still working its wonders, his fingers finding a way inside into colder softer rubber on rubber-like mucous membrane a hiatus eagerly devouring his fingers and a morpheic shadow of cackle blue orgone shivers up my cock my eyes closing under the blows of the reefer journeying west across mountains and deserts and a whisper caressing the lips of my tympan 'relax and enjoy it just move back to meet me' and breathing out losing all stiffness in seconds and feeling a shiver so deep down inside like y'know you gotta go and suddenly it's there like a solid rod running from some icky white cold hole to the tip of my now pulsing cock and then there's another solid pressure between my legs a hot hard presence massaging this icky white zone from the outside and suddenly everything relaxing and I'm breathing with tight popping stomach muscles and something deep releases and all I can feel is an itch so smooth sliding in and around this rising white light of pulsing white itch so strange no wait no weight no way just turning in space about two fingers of celestial creation the obscenest gesture of the hand of God bunching and bulging

this black hole this solar anus at the centre of this fundamental firmament a soft covered smooth coloured sticky finger conjuring this thunderbolt of ball lightning...

...and time stops and falls away, and by the time I'm back on earth, the clock has melted into Dali puddles on my stomach, muscles radiating waves, across an ocean of sore tranquillity.

-Look Ma, no hands! says Martin's smiling face, resolving from a cloud of amorphous white.

What else? You really want to know? Pull the tape. It's all there.

Reel One: *Super 8/colour/silent 3mins15secs*

White - ten seconds. Orange flash. Green-black. Hillside at dawn. Static medium shot of trees in foreground, the orange light of morning behind. Two explosions of flame either side of copse illuminating and drawing out its greenery. One of the trees in centre of frame begins to shake, then moves towards the camera. Unidentified man dressed in leaves, branches of ivy and holly and topped with garlands of flowers, spreads his arms. Lap dissolve to same scene, with tree-man holding a rose in each hand. The roses burst into flame, setting the man off on a circular dance, which he stops and throws one rose out of frame left. Cut to still flaming rose hitting forest floor, which erupts into flame. Fast cut to repeat of dance, this time with one rose which man throws out of frame right. Repeat shot of flame hitting floor with explosion. Long shot of tree-man standing between two fires. Cut to silhouette of figure, a flag tied to a branch against his left shoulder, blowing a long horn against blue and orange sky of dawn. Cut back to tree-man standing between the fires. Stop-frame animation of a circular trench 'digging itself' around the fires as the tree-man raises his arms, then brings them together. Lap-dissolve to tree-man holding large round loaf of bread, a birch branch jutting obscenely from the space between his legs. The man breaks the bread, throwing chunks of it out of frame in all directions until only one chunk remains. The man begins to dance between the fires and the trench. Cut to close-up of fire. Tree-man suddenly bursts through the flames, holding branch/phallus above his head. Cut to repeat view of fire. Repeat

of man jumping towards camera through flames. Repeat cut to flames with man jumping through flames, this time parts of his costume catching light. Cut to medium-shot of river with tree framed along left edge in foreground. Tree-man runs into frame right, still partially alight, and places the branch on two supporting twigs of the overhanging tree, then jumps into the river, disappearing below the water. Lap-dissolve to door of house with branch/phallus in exact position as last shot, this time above the doorway. Shot holds until film runs through the gate.

Weeks merge into months, composed of long hours where nothing happens but pleasure - emerging from a timeless embrace to find the world changed beyond all recognition, with no memory of anything specific, no sound but the sibilance of our laughter, reverberating around a bedroom I no longer recognise. I am complete, a satisfied entity unrestricted by thought, a mindless body blown by winds of happiness upon a sea of cotton and kapok, a superabundance of nothingness, wanting for nothing, needing nothing but what I have and am becoming...

-What are you thinking? asks Martin.

I laugh outloud at the uncanniness of his question.

-I was thinking how I was thinking nothing, and how satisfied I am by that... but my voice trailed away as another thought took its place, an unfamiliar trepidation I had never felt before. Since that night we talked about Martin's obvious erudition, I had wondered what it was he saw in me, what I had to offer this ghetto intellectual. Why me, whose literary arsenal had barely the firepower to blow my own nose? A growl in my stomach, a shock of insecurity, a feeling of inadequacy so powerful as to drain the colour from my face...

-Why do you ask? Unsure of myself, a sudden self-consciousness invading an interior that hitherto had wanted nothing, asked for nothing, been aware only of total unawareness.

-No reason, just wanted to know what was going on inside...

I wanted to repeat I was thinking nothing, but this last statement implied that I would be admitting to nothing going on inside, when what *had* been going on was beyond language,

cluding my then meagre vocabulary to express how happy one person could feel, how even more consummate each act of consummation made me. Something, perhaps brought on by the infeasibly strong spliff that had sparked the start of this latest session in the concrete definition of perfection, seemed to be turning sour, curdling the milk of human kindness that had flowed unabated between us for what, three months? There was a thought that went with this too, but something stopped me from grasping it, until Martin's words brought it into existence...

-Ian.

-What?

-It's time. Tomorrow we take a test...

How can I sleep? How can I rest when tomorrow could change everything? I want nothing to change - strange as it may seem but this very immutability has been change enough for me. After a lifetime of never daring to even want happiness like this, I can barely stand the thought that something may invade our Eden. Least of all the serpent of reality, of disease and necrology. It's not as if I have even thought of a future - this presence has been more than enough for me. I want to live in the perpetual present indefinitely - no history, no expectation - just now, forever.

I had to have options. I knew that if I was negative, and Martin positive... listen to it, even the language is inverted, is made unrecognisable, signifies its other... but if so, he would never do me the 'honour' of infecting me. We have already discussed this - I remember. He would never condone condoms, and so the thought of placing tiny pricks through the latex of unopened packets will never be an option. I could sharpen his toothbrush and scour my gums after he has used it. I could lick his razor blades and run the minute cuts along his gumline. I could wait until he is sleeping and whisper obscenities into his ear until he is hard enough to dry-mount, then force myself hard onto him until I bleed.

I watch him as he sleeps, his inert beauty enough to make me cry. The contrast of his smooth light olive skin against the vacuum of his dark brown hair - what I had at first thought total blackness, revealed itself in daylight to harbour an irisation of

dark chocolate highlights, that must contrast so strangely with my own, almost white, hair. When I told him that I had turned grey at eighteen, Martin had observed, only half-jokingly, that I obviously worried too much. At times I wondered if worry was my intrinsic state, and here I was, naturalised, welcomed back into the bosom of the mother country, at home in desolation and abject despair. How could he sleep so soundly, knowing that the morning would perhaps delineate the limits of our own mortality?

Then something gripped me - the opposite realisation. What if I was positive, and Martin clean? Could I really say I had always been so careful? It was true that I had never been fucked, but when it comes to sex, what can anyone say is genuinely without risk? Masturbation only. With each blink of my eyes, another graphic image flashed into my mind - a hard cock thrusting into my mouth in a train station toilet, the metal taste of blood staying with me for the rest of the day; a moment's abandon with a boy who, at the apex of my orgasm, spun round and engulfed my erection in a loose tunnel of accepting flesh and grasped me until I was empty; forcing my priapism through a toilet wall, disinterested in who or what was on the other side, and being... what? Wanked, sucked, fucking something so hard that as I retrieved myself moments later I could only stare at my raw flesh and ask 'what did he just do to me...?' And what then if it was me who was responsible for some double unhappiness? I knew that inside I didn't really care if I was positive, but could I live with the possibility that I may have infected someone else, especially this man, who had redefined the meaning of... what? Can you say it? I stopped dead in my own tracks. Go on - you can't say it can you? The only word that makes sense, the only thing that makes sense. Say it! I stared into the darkness and deep into my own conscience, and found the word writ large upon every cell. Love. It's love. You *love* this man. Love him with such a solid intensity as to make the word, and the world, meaningless until this moment. Was that really so hard?

Breath came in short drafts, but beneath it lay a stoic centre of pure calm. I sat and looked at his perfect face, and watched as his nystagmic eyes oscillated behind the eyelids I had kissed so

many times, and wondered what dreams played upon them, and realised for the first time that I wanted to wake beside this man for the rest of my life, for however long that may be, wanted to watch him grow old, to share all of his triumphs and bear any defeats beside him. How long does anybody have? Who can say with certainty that any day is not their last? A line from a story I once heard read by a crokey old junkie hit me with a righteous intensity - 'you face death all the time, and for that time, you are immortal...'

I lay down beside him, and breathed in his smell, a warm soft musk that never failed to arouse me, and heard him breathe in too, and turn over and push his smooth back against me, until we were wrapped around each other like human spoons, my now solid cock resting in the crease of his backside, trying to push every inch of my skin against his. I kissed his neck, ran my nose along his hairline and tried hard not to let my sobs wake him, and wondered how anyone could find anything more perfect than this. Tomorrow we find out what's real and what's not, but in that instant I knew what happiness meant, and if this was the last time we ever knew it, I tried to believe that this was enough, and repeated the words, until sleep made thought redundant.

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XQ-28: The Story of a Gene.
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