

COSMOPOLIS

a screenplay by

David Cronenberg

Based on the novel by Don DeLillo

FFADE IN:

White letters on black spell these words:

a rat became the unit of currency

ZBIGNIEW HERBERT

FADE OUT:

EXT. ERIC'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

New York City. A man in an expensive suit and tie, ERIC PACKER, stands with his back to us. He is facing the eighty-nine storey apartment tower where he lives. The sunlight ricochets off its hazy bronze glass sheathing.

Eric puts on his sunglasses and walks across First Avenue, where five identical white stretch limos stand waiting. The stretch drivers, hatless in dark suits, talk and smoke on the sidewalk.

Eric approaches TORVAL, his Chief of Security, who stands waiting for him. Torval is bald and no-necked.

TORVAL

Where?

ERIC

I want a haircut.

TORVAL

The president's in town.

ERIC

We don't care. We need a haircut.
We need to go crosstown.

TORVAL

You will hit traffic that speaks in
quarter inches.

ERIC

Just so I know. Which president are
we talking about?

TORVAL

United States. Barriers will be set
up. Entire streets deleted from the
map.

ERIC

Show me my car.

INT. LIMO - DAY

SHINER, Eric's Chief of Technology, sits opposite Eric inside the car. Torval sits up front with the driver, where there are dashboard computer screens and a night-vision display on the lower windshield.

Shiner is small and boy-faced. He wears a faded shirt and jeans and sits in a masturbatory crouch.

ERIC

What have we learned, then?

SHINER

Our system's secure. We're impenetrable. There's no rogue program.

ERIC

It would seem, however.

SHINER

Eric, no. We ran every test. Nobody's overloading the system or manipulating our sites.

ERIC

When did we do all this?

SHINER

Yesterday. At the complex. Our rapid-response team. There's no vulnerable point of entry. Our insurer did a threat analysis. We're buffered from attack.

ERIC

Everywhere.

SHINER

Yes.

ERIC

Including the car.

SHINER

Including, absolutely, yes.

ERIC

My car. This car.

SHINER

Eric, yes, please.

ERIC

We've been together, you and I, since the little bitty start-up. I want you to tell me that you still have the stamina to do this job. The single-mindedness.

SHINER

This car. Your car.

ERIC

The relentless will. Because I keep hearing about our legend. We're all young and smart and were raised by wolves. But the phenomenon of reputation is a delicate thing. A person rises on a word and falls on a syllable. I know I'm asking the wrong man.

SHINER

What?

ERIC

Where was the car last night after we ran our tests?

SHINER

I don't know.

ERIC

Where do all these limos go at night? I know I'm changing the subject. I haven't been sleeping much. I look at books and drink brandy. But what happens to all the stretch limousines that prowl the throbbing city all day long? Where do they spend the night?

INT. LIMO - MOMENTS LATER

The limo runs into stalled traffic before it reaches Second Avenue. A taxi stopped next to the limo honks its horn.

Eric is now sitting in the club chair at the rear of the cabin looking into the array of visual display units. There are many touchscreens at graded distances from the rear seat which can swing out, tilt, and fold up. There is a microwave and a heart monitor. There is a spycam on a swivel pointed at Eric.

Shiner is in the jump seat near the liquor cabinet, facing rearward. He is drinking fresh orange juice through a plastic straw.

ERIC

What?

SHINER

Do you get the feeling sometimes
that you don't know what's going on?

ERIC

Do I want to ask what you mean by
that?

SHINER

All this optimism, all this booming
and soaring. Things happen like
bang. This and that simultaneous.
I put out my hand and what do I feel?
I know there's a thousand things you
analyze every ten minutes. Patterns,
ratios, indexes, whole maps of
information. I love information.
This is our sweetness and light.
It's a fuckall wonder. And we have
meaning in the world. People eat
and sleep in the shadow of what we
do. But at the same time, what?

No response.

SHINER (CONT'D)

Any special reason we're in the car
instead of the office?

ERIC

How do you know we're in the car
instead of the office?

SHINER

If I answer that question.

ERIC

Based on what premise?

SHINER

I know I'll say something that's
halfway clever but mostly shallow
and probably inaccurate on some level.
Then you'll pity me for having been
born.

ERIC

We're in the car because I need a
haircut.

SHINER

Have the barber go to the office.
Get your haircut there. Or have the
barber come to the car. Get your
haircut and go to the office.

ERIC

A haircut has what. Associations.
Calendar on the wall. Mirrors
everywhere. There's no barber chair
here. Nothing swivels but the spycam.

Eric glances out his window at the adjacent taxi and recognizes the woman in the back seat. It's his wife of twenty-two days, ELISE SHIFRIN, mid-twenties, delicate beauty. Eric signals Torval up front, then gets out of the limo.

INT. TAXI - DAY

Eric taps on the taxi's window, then gets into the taxi as Elise slides over to make room for him.

ERIC

Where's your car?

ELISE

We can't seem to find it.

ERIC

I'd offer you a ride.

ELISE

I couldn't. Absolutely. I know you work en route. And I like taxis. I was never good at geography and I learn things by asking the drivers where they come from.

ERIC

They come from horror and despair.

ELISE

Yes, exactly. One learns about the countries where unrest is occurring by riding the taxis here.

ERIC

I haven't seen you in a while. I looked for you this morning.

Eric takes his sunglasses off for effect.

ELISE

Your eyes are blue.

ERIC
Eat breakfast yet?

ELISE
No.

ERIC
Good. I'm hungry for something thick
and chewy.

ELISE
You never told me you were blue-eyed.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

In a 47th Street coffee shop, Eric sits with his back to the wall, watching Torval position himself near the front door where he has a broad view of the room. The place is crowded. French and Somali are heard. From time to time, Torval puts his hand to his head, listening to someone speaking into his ear bud.

In front of Eric, a plate of pancakes and sausages, butter and syrup.

ELISE
What are we going to talk about?

ERIC
We want a heliport on the roof.
I've acquired air rights but we still
need to get a zoning variance. Don't
you want to eat? And a shooting
range next to the elevator bank.
Let's talk about us.

ELISE
You and I. We're here. So might as
well.

ERIC
When are we going to have sex again?

ELISE
We will. I promise.

ERIC
We haven't in a while now.

ELISE
When I work, you see. The energy is
precious.

ERIC
When you write.

ELISE

Yes.

ERIC

Where do you do this? I look for you, Elise.

ELISE

I curl up somewhere. I've always done this. My mother used to send people to find me. Maids and gardeners combing the house and grounds. She thought I was dissolvable in water.

ERIC

I like your mother. You have your mother's breasts.

ELISE

Her breasts.

ERIC

Great stand-up tits.

ELISE

Tell me this. Where will you go now? To a meeting somewhere? To your office? Where is your office? What do you do, exactly? You know things. I think this is what you do. I think you're dedicated to knowing. I think you acquire information and turn it into something stupendous and awful. You're a dangerous person. Do you agree? A visionary.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Eric stands by the car, parked illegally, listening to Torval.

TORVAL

Report from the complex. There's a credible threat. Not to be dismissed. This means a ride crosstown.

ERIC

We've had numerous threats. All credible. I'm still standing here.

TORVAL

Not a threat to your safety. To his.

ERIC

Who the fuck is his?

TORVAL

The president's. This means a ride crosstown does not happen unless we make a day of it, with cookies and milk.

ERIC

Do people still shoot at presidents? I thought there were more stimulating targets.

TORVAL

In the next block there are two haircutting salons. One, two. No need to go crosstown. The situation isn't stable.

INT. LIMO - DAY

Michael Chin, Eric's Currency Analyst, is in the jump seat now.

ERIC

I know that smile, Michael.

MICHAEL

I think the yen. I mean there's reason to believe we may be leveraging too rashly.

ERIC

It's going to turn our way.

MICHAEL

Yes. I know. It always has.

ERIC

The rashness you think you see.

MICHAEL

What is happening doesn't chart.

ERIC

It charts. You have to search a little harder. Don't trust standard models. Think outside the limits. The yen is making a statement. Read it. Then leap.

MICHAEL

We are betting big-time here.

ERIC

I know that smile. I want to respect it. But the yen can't go any higher.

MICHAEL

We are borrowing enormous, enormous sums.

ERIC

Any assault on the borders of perception is going to seem rash at first.

MICHAEL

Eric, come on. We are speculating into the void.

ERIC

Your mother blamed the smile on your father. He blamed her. There's something deadly about it.

MICHAEL

I think we ought to adjust.

ERIC

She thought she'd have to enroll you in special counseling.

INT. LIMO - MOMENTS LATER

Chin is making entries in his hand organizer, resentfully. The car is moving fitfully. Eric is watching himself on the oval screen below the spycam. The image seems to anticipate his movements by a second or two.

ERIC

Where is Shiner?

MICHAEL

On his way to the airport.

ERIC

Why do we still have airports? Why are they called airports?

MICHAEL

I know I can't answer these questions without losing your respect.

ERIC

Shiner told me our network is secure.

MICHAEL

Then it is.

ERIC
Safe from penetration.

MICHAEL
He's the best there is at finding
holes.

ERIC
Then why am I seeing things that
haven't happened yet?
(pause)
How old are you?

MICHAEL
Twenty-two. What? Twenty-two.

ERIC
You look younger. I was always
younger than anyone around me. One
day it began to change.

MICHAEL
I don't feel younger. I feel located
totally nowhere. I think I'm ready
to quit, basically, the business.

ERIC
Put a stick of gum in your mouth and
try not to chew it. For someone
your age, with your gifts, there's
only one thing in the world worth
pursuing professionally and
intellectually. What is it, Michael?
The interaction between technology
and capital. The inseparability.

MICHAEL
High school was the last true
challenge.

ERIC
There's a poem I read in which a rat
becomes the unit of currency.

MICHAEL
Yes. That would be interesting.

ERIC
Yes. That would impact the world
economy.

MICHAEL
The name alone. Better than the
dong or the kwacha.

ERIC

The name says everything.

MICHAEL

Yes. The rat.

ERIC

Yes. The rat closed lower today against the euro.

MICHAEL

Yes. There is growing concern that the Russian rat will be devalued.

ERIC

White rats. Think about that.

MICHAEL

Yes. Pregnant rats.

ERIC

Yes. Major sell-off of pregnant Russian rats.

MICHAEL

Britain converts to the rat.

ERIC

Yes. Joins trend to universal currency.

MICHAEL

Yes. U.S. establishes rat standard.

ERIC

Yes. Every U.S. dollar redeemable for rat.

MICHAEL

Dead rats.

ERIC

Yes. Stockpiling of dead rats called global health menace.

MICHAEL

How old are you? Now that you're not younger than everyone else.

Numbers are streaming in opposite directions on the many data screens.

EXT. DIDI'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

The limo stops. Eric gets out and enters an apartment building.

INT. DIDI'S APARTMENT - DAY

Eric is just finishing having sex with DIDI FANCHER, 40s, a scorched blonde, in her art-strewn apartment. They roll apart on her bed.

DIDI
Was I expecting you?

ERIC
Just passing by.

DIDI
Thought you'd drop in, did you?
That's nice. I'm glad. Been a while.
I read about it, of course. Or did
I see it on TV?

ERIC
What?

DIDI
What? The wedding. How strange you
didn't tell me.

ERIC
Not so strange.

DIDI
Not so strange. Two great fortunes.
Like one of the great arranged
marriages of old empire Europe.

ERIC
Except I'm a world citizen with a
New York pair of balls.

DIDI
How many billions together do you
two represent?

ERIC
She's a poet.

DIDI
Is that what she is? I thought she
was a Shifrin.

ERIC
A little of both.

DIDI
So rich and crisp. Does she let you
touch her personal parts?

ERIC
You look gorgeous today.

DIDI
For someone who's forty-seven and
finally understands what her problem
is.

ERIC
What's that?

DIDI
Life is too contemporary. How old
is your consort? Never mind. I
don't want to know. Tell me to shut
up. One more question. Is she good
in bed?

ERIC
I don't know yet.

DIDI
That's the trouble with old money.
Now tell me to shut up.
(pause)
I know something you want to know.

ERIC
What?

DIDI
There's a Rothko in private hands
that I have privileged knowledge of.
It is about to become available.

ERIC
You've seen it.

DIDI
Three or four years ago. Yes. And
it is luminous.

ERIC
What about the chapel?

DIDI
What about it?

ERIC
I've been thinking about the chapel.

DIDI
You can't buy the goddamn chapel.

ERIC
How do you know? Contact the principals.

DIDI
I thought you'd be thrilled about the painting. One painting. You don't have an important Rothko. You've always wanted one. We've talked about this.

ERIC
How many paintings in his chapel?

DIDI
I don't know. Fourteen. Fifteen.

ERIC
If they sell me the chapel, I'll keep it intact. Tell them.

DIDI
Keep it intact where?

ERIC
In my apartment. There's sufficient space. I can make more space.

DIDI
But people need to see it.

ERIC
Let them buy it. Let them outbid me.

DIDI
Forgive the pissy way I say this. But the Rothko Chapel belongs to the world.

ERIC
It's mine if I buy it. How much do they want for it?

DIDI
They don't want to sell the chapel. And I don't want to give you lessons in self-denial and social responsibility. Because I don't believe for a minute you're as crude as you sound.

ERIC

How much?

DIDI

What does it mean to spend money? A dollar. A million?

ERIC

For a painting?

DIDI

For anything.

ERIC

I have two private elevators now. One is programmed to play Satie's piano pieces and to move at one-quarter normal speed. This is right for Satie and this is the elevator I take when I'm in a certain, let's say, unsettled mood. Calms me, makes me whole.

DIDI

Who's the other elevator?

ERIC

Brutha Fez.

DIDI

Who's that?

ERIC

The Sufi rap star. You don't know this?

DIDI

I miss things.

(pause)

I don't know what money is anymore.

ERIC

I'm losing money by the ton today. Many millions. Betting against the yen.

DIDI

Isn't the yen asleep?

ERIC

Currency markets never close. And the Nikkei runs all day and night now. All the major exchanges. Seven days a week.

DIDI
I missed that. I miss a lot. How many millions?

ERIC
Hundreds of millions.

DIDI
How old are you? Twenty-eight?

ERIC
Twenty-eight. I want you to go to the chapel and make an offer. Whatever it takes. I want everything that's there. Walls and all.
(pause)
I remember what you told me once.

DIDI
What's that?

ERIC
Talent is more erotic when it's wasted.

DIDI
What did I mean?

INT. LIMO - DAY

Eric is back in the limo. Michael Chin is still in the jump seat, facing rearward.

MICHAEL
While you were away.

ERIC
Yes. Tell me.

MICHAEL
There was a report that consumer spending is weakening in Japan. Raising doubts about the country's economic strength.

ERIC
See. What. I said as much.

MICHAEL
The yen is expected to fade. The yen will sink a bit.

ERIC
There we are. See. Has to happen.
(MORE)

ERIC (CONT'D)

The situation has to change. The yen can't go any higher.

Torval taps at the window. Eric lowers it.

TORVAL

A word.

ERIC

Yes.

TORVAL

The complex recommends extra security.

ERIC

You're not happy about this.

TORVAL

First a threat to the president.

ERIC

You're confident you can handle whatever comes up.

TORVAL

Now an attack on the managing director of the International Monetary Fund.

ERIC

Arthur Rapp.

TORVAL

Arthur Rapp, yes.

ERIC

Where?

TORVAL

Nike North Korea. While being interviewed on television. All the channels have it.

ERIC

The complex. Accept their recommendation.

Eric raises the window and Torval walks back to the front of the limo and gets in. Eric flicks a channel changer. Two of his screens now show footage of the death of Arthur Rapp, killed live on the Money Channel.

A man in a short-sleeve shirt comes into camera range and begins to stab Rapp in the face and neck while he is in mid-interview.

Rapp clutches the man and they fall, tangled in the mike cord of the willowy woman interviewer, who is dragged down with them. Her slit skirt rides up high on her thigh.

ERIC (CONT'D)

(to Michael)

Time for you to do what.

MICHAEL

Yes. All right.

ERIC

You don't know this? We both know this.

MICHAEL

There's work to do at the office. Yes. I need to retrace events over time and see what I can find that applies.

ERIC

Nothing applies. But it's there. It charts. You'll see it.

MICHAEL

I need to back-test currencies, I don't know, like into the misty dawn.

The limo stops at a red light. Marking jogging time at the light is a woman, JANE MELMAN. Eric spots her. She is looking in his direction, at his limo, checking her watch, expecting to be picked up.

ERIC

You can't stay here.

MICHAEL

I like it here.

ERIC

No, you don't.

MICHAEL

I like riding backwards. He died as he lived. Backwards. Details after the game.

On a median strip there is a woman in gray spandex holding a dead rat aloft. A performance piece, perhaps.

Michael hops out just before Park Avenue and Jane Melman gets in. Sweaty in jogging shorts and tank top. She is Eric's Chief of Finance.

JANE

All these limos, my god, that you can't tell one from another. We could be kids on prom night, or some dumb wedding wherever. What's the charm of identical?

ERIC

That I'm a powerful person who chooses not to demarcate his territory with singular dribbles of piss is what? Is something I need to apologize for?

JANE

I want to go home and tongue-kiss my Maxima. You know what today is, incidentally.

ERIC

I know.

JANE

It's my day off, damn it.

ERIC

I know this.

JANE

I need this extra day desperately.

ERIC

I know this.

JANE

You don't know this. You can't know what it's like. I am a single struggling mother.

ERIC

We have a situation here.

JANE

I am a mother running in the park when my phone explodes in my navel. I think it's the kids' nanny, who never calls until the fever reaches a hundred and five. But it's the situation. We have a situation all right. We have a yen carry that could crush us in hours.

ERIC

Take some water. Sit on the banquette.

JANE

I like face-to-face. And I don't need to look at all those screens. I know what's happening.

ERIC

The yen will fall.

JANE

That's right.

ERIC

Consumer spending's down.

JANE

That's right. Besides which the Bank of Japan left interest rates unchanged.

ERIC

This happened today?

JANE

This happened tonight. In Tokyo. I called a source at the Nikkei.

ERIC

While running.

JANE

While flinging my body down Madison Avenue to get here on time.

ERIC

The yen can't go any higher.

JANE

That's true. That's right. Except it just did.

ERIC

I didn't sleep last night.

EXT. MERCANTILE LIBRARY - DAY

The limo crosses Madison and stops in front of the Mercantile Library.

A man in a suit and tie approaches the car, carrying a small satchel. When he taps on the window of the car, Torval is there.

TORVAL

Who the fuck are you?

INGRAM

Excuse me.

Torval yanks the man's arm up behind him and presses him into the side of the limo. Eric lowers the window.

TORVAL

There's a time limit.

INGRAM

Dr. Ingram.

ERIC

Who the fuck are you?

INGRAM

Dr. Ingram.

ERIC

Where is Dr. Nevius?

INGRAM

Called away suddenly. Personal matter.

ERIC

Speak slowly and clearly.

INGRAM

Called away suddenly. I don't know. Family crisis. I'm the associate. I flushed out your earholes once.

Eric looks at Torval and nods briefly.

INT. LIMO - MOMENTS LATER

Eric sits stripped to the waist while Ingram examines him with a stethoscope.

JANE

You do this what.

ERIC

What. Every day.

JANE

No matter.

ERIC

Wherever I am. That's right. No matter.

Jane splashes some spring water from a bottle on her face.

INT. LIMO - MOMENTS LATER

Now Eric is on his back with a view of the monitor as Ingram does an echocardiogram.

JANE

So you do what. Same routine every day.

ERIC

Varies, depending.

JANE

So he comes to your house, nice, on weekends.

ERIC

We die, Jane, on weekends. People. It happens.

JANE

You're right. I didn't think of that.

ERIC

We die because it's the weekend.

JANE

I thought we were moving. But we're not anymore.

ERIC

The president's in town.

JANE

You're right. I forgot. I thought I saw him when I ran out of the park. There was an entourage of limousines going down Fifth, with a motorcycle escort. I thought all these limos for the president I can understand. But it was somebody famous's funeral.

ERIC

We die every day.

Eric sits upright on the table while Ingram looks for swollen nodes under his arms. Eric points out a slightly sinister blackhead on his lower abdomen.

ERIC (CONT'D)

(to Ingram, re
blackhead)

What do we do about this?

INGRAM

Let it express itself.

ERIC

What. Do nothing.

INGRAM

Let it express itself. You can stand now.

Eric stands. Ingram adjusts the examining table to half length. Eric drops his pants and shorts and bends over the near end of the table, legs apart. He is now facing Jane.

Ingram prepares to palpate Eric's prostate. The latex gloves snap.

JANE

So look. We have two rumors working in our favor. First there's the bankruptcies for six straight months. More each month. More on the way. Large Japanese corporations. This is good.

ERIC

The yen has to drop.

JANE

This is loss of faith. It will force the yen to drop.

ERIC

The dollar will settle up.

JANE

The yen will drop. Where is Chin?

ERIC

Working on visual patterns.

JANE

This thing doesn't chart.

ERIC

It charts.

JANE

It doesn't chart the way you chart technology stocks. You can find real patterns there. Locate predictable components. This is different.

ERIC

We are teaching him to see.

JANE

You should do the seeing. You're the seer. What is he? A kid. He has the streak in his hair. He has the earring.

ERIC

He doesn't have the earring.

JANE

If he was any more dreamy, we'd have to put him on life support.

ERIC

What's the second rumor?

Eric is looking right in her face. She does not recede from his gaze. As Ingram continues to probe, there is a rising sexual tension between Eric and Jane which comes close to being orgasmic.

JANE

There's a rumor it seems involving the finance minister. He's supposed to resign any time now. Some kind of scandal about a misconstrued comment. He made a comment about the economy that may have been misconstrued. The whole country is analyzing the grammar and syntax of this comment. Or it wasn't even what he said. It was when he paused. They are trying to construe the meaning of the pause. It could be deeper, even, than grammar. It could be breathing. So the whole economy convulses because the man took a breath.

ERIC

You grip the water bottle.

JANE

It's that soft type plastic.

ERIC

You grip it. You choke it.

JANE

It's a matter-of-fact thing.

ERIC
It's sexual tension.

JANE
It's everyday nervousness in a life.

ERIC
It's sexual tension.
(pause)
Days like this.

JANE
What?

ERIC
That whole sad business of Judeo-Christian jogging. You were not born to run. I look at you. I know what you are. You are sloppy-bodied, smelly and wet. A woman who was born to sit strapped in a chair while a man tells her how much she excites him.

JANE
How come we've never spent this kind of time together?

EXT. LIMO - MOMENTS LATER

Jane jumps out of the limo and begins running north on Fifth Avenue. Eric notices a shabby man with paper-shredded hair at a nearby ATM in a khaki field jacket. He seems somehow familiar to Eric.

INT. LIMO - DAY

Ingram folds the examining table back into the cabinet. As he packs his satchel, he looks briefly up at Eric.

INGRAM
Your prostate is asymmetrical.

EXT. LIMO - LATER

The West Side. The diamond district. Hasidim walk the streets. Two new security aides, a white man and a black woman - DANKO and KENDRA - pace the limo, one to each side. They both wear dark blazers, gray trousers, and turtleneck shirts.

The limo comes to a halt. On one of Eric's screens, a column of rusty sludge geysers from a hole in the ground. Torval approaches the window. Eric lowers it and gestures towards the two security.

ERIC
Those two. They're ours?

TORVAL
I felt the need. Imperative that we reroute.

ERIC
The situation is what.

TORVAL
This. Water-main break. We have flood conditions in the streets ahead. State of chaos. This. The question of the president and his whereabouts. He is fluid. He is moving. And wherever he goes, our satellite receiver reports a ripple effect in the traffic that causes mass paralysis. This also. There is a funeral proceeding slowly downtown and now deflecting westward. Many vehicles, numerous mourners on foot. And finally this. We have a report of imminent activity in the area.

ERIC
Activity.

TORVAL
Imminent. Nature as yet unknown. The complex says, Use caution.

INT. GOTHAM BOOK MART - DAY

Eric stands in the poetry alcove, leafing through chapbooks. Kendra is stationed at the front door, a book in her hands.

Eric spots a woman moving through the store, and he turns to follow her. When he finds her, sitting on the back stairs reading a book of poems, we see that it is Elise.

ERIC
Recite to me.

ELISE
Where is your necktie?

ERIC
Had my checkup. Saw my heart on a screen.

ELISE
I don't like saying this.

ERIC

But.

ELISE

You smell of sex.

ERIC

That's my doctor's appointment you smell.

ELISE

I smell sex all over you.

ERIC

It's what. It's hunger you smell.
 I want to eat lunch. You want to
 eat lunch. We're people in the world.
 We need to eat and talk.

INT. LUNCHEONETTE - DAY

A crowded luncheonette across the street. Eric and Elise sit at the middle of the counter. Danko sits at the far end of the counter, nursing a coffee.

ELISE

I'm not sure how hungry I am.

ERIC

Eat. You'll find out. Speaking of sex.

ELISE

We've been married only weeks. Barely weeks.

ERIC

Everything is barely weeks.
 Everything is days. We have minutes
 to live.

ELISE

We don't want to start counting the
 times, do we? Or having solemn
 discussions on the subject.

ERIC

No. We want to do it.

ELISE

And we will. We shall.

ERIC

We want to have it.

ELISE

Sex.

ERIC

Yes. Because there isn't time not to have it. Time is a thing that grows scarcer every day. What. You don't know this?

ELISE

I like that bookshop. Do you know why? Because it's semi-underground.

ERIC

You feel hidden. You like to hide. From what?

ELISE

Sometimes only noise.

ERIC

You were one of those silent wistful children. Glued to the shadows.

ELISE

And you?

ERIC

I don't know. I don't think about it.

ELISE

Think about one thing and tell me what it was.

ERIC

All right. One thing. When I was four, I figured out how much I'd weigh on each of the planets in the solar system.

ELISE

That's nice. Oh I like that.

(kisses him)

Such science and ego combined.

(pause)

When are we going to the lake?

ERIC

Fuck the lake.

ELISE

I thought we liked it there.

(MORE)

ELISE (CONT'D)

After all the planning, all the construction. To get away, be alone together. It's quiet at the lake.

ERIC

It's quiet in town.

ELISE

Where we live, yes, I suppose. High enough, far enough. What about your car? Not so quiet surely. You spend a lot of time there.

ERIC

I had the car prousted.

ELISE

Yes?

ERIC

The way they build a stretch is this. They take a vehicle's base unit and cut it in half with a huge throbbing buzz-saw device. Then they add a segment to lengthen the chassis by ten, eleven, twelve feet. Whatever desired dimension. Twenty-two feet if you like. While they were doing this to my car, I sent word that they had to proust it, cork-line it against street noise.

ELISE

That's lovely actually. I love that.

ERIC

The vehicle I armored of course. This complicated the cork-lining. But they managed in the end. It's a gesture. It's a thing a man does.

ELISE

Did it work?

ERIC

How could it work? No. The city eats and sleeps noise. It makes noise out of every century. It makes the same noises it made in the seventeenth century along with all the other noises that have evolved since then. No. But I don't mind the noise. The noise energizes me.

(MORE)

ERIC (CONT'D)

The important thing is that it's there.

ELISE

The cork.

ERIC

That's right. The cork. This is what finally matters.

A counterman puts a bowl of soup down in front of Elise, a chopped liver sandwich in front of Eric, and moves on. Elise looks into the bowl, bobbing with life forms.

ELISE

(re bowl of soup)

Is this what I wanted?

ERIC

Tell me what you wanted.

ELISE

Duck consommé with an herb twist. It's true, you know. You do actually reek of sexual discharge.

ERIC

It's not the sex you think I've had. It's the sex I want. That's what you smell on me. Because the more I look at you, the more I know about us both.

ELISE

Tell me what that means. Or don't. No, don't.

ERIC

And the more I want to have sex with you. Because there's a certain kind of sex that has an element of cleansing. It's the antidote to disillusion. The counterpoison.

ELISE

You need to be inflamed, don't you? This is your element.

ERIC

Where were you going after the bookstore? Because there's a hotel.

ELISE

I was going to the bookstore. Period.
I was in the bookstore. I was happy
there. Where were you going?

ERIC

To get a haircut.

ELISE

Do you need a haircut?

ERIC

I need anything you can give me.

ELISE

Be nice.

ERIC

I need all the meanings of the
inflamed. There's a hotel just across
the avenue. We can start over. Or
finish with intense feeling. That's
one of the meanings. To arouse with
passionate feeling. We can finish
what we barely started. Two hotels
in fact. We have a choice.

ELISE

I don't think I want to pursue this.

ERIC

No, you don't. You wouldn't.

ELISE

Be nice to me.

The nearest counterman slams a plate down and shakes his
head.

COUNTERMAN

(in Spanish)

It's those rat guys again!

Eric and Elise turn to see two men in gray spandex standing
in the narrow aisle between the counter and the tables.
They stand back to back, right arms raised, each man holding
a live rat by the tail.

When they begin to shout something incomprehensible, Danko
begins to speak into his lapel. Eric gestures to Danko to
take no action.

The two rat men stride in opposite directions and begin to
swing the rats over their heads, shouting something about "a
specter". The patrons tense up.

The countermen arm themselves with cutlery.

The men fling the rats into the crowd, then run out into the street. The rats bounce off the walls and begin to run along the countertop.

INT. LIMO - DAY

On the other side of Sixth Avenue, the car moves slowly. In the rear seat, in Eric's club chair, sits VIJA KINSKI, Chief of Theory. Vija is a small woman in a beret, button-down business shirt, old embroidered vest, long pleated skirt. Her hair is smoky gray and looks lightning-struck, but her face is barely marked.

Eric is finishing his chopped liver sandwich.

VIJA

We want to think about the art of money-making. The Greeks have a word for it. Chrimatistikós. But we have to give the word a little leeway. Adapt it to the current situation. Because money has taken a turn. All wealth has become wealth for its own sake. There's no other kind of enormous wealth. Money has lost its narrative quality the way painting did once upon a time. Money is talking to itself. Oh, and this car, which I love. The glow of the screens. I love the screens. The glow of cyber-capital. So radiant and seductive. I understand none of it. Does it ever stop? Does it slow down? Of course not. Why should it? Fantastic.

The screens continue to endlessly flow data.

VIJA (CONT'D)

But you know how shameless I am in the presence of anything that calls itself an idea. The idea is time. Living in the future. Look at those numbers running. Money makes time. It used to be the other way around. Clock time accelerated the rise of capitalism. People stopped thinking about eternity. They began to concentrate on hours, measurable hours, man-hours, using labor more efficiently. It's cyber-capital that creates the future. What is the measurement called a nanosecond?

ERIC
Ten to the minus ninth power.

VIJA
This is what.

ERIC
One billionth of a second.

VIJA
I understand none of this. But it tells me how rigorous we need to be in order to take adequate measure of the world around us.

ERIC
There are zeptoseconds.

VIJA
Good. I'm glad.

ERIC
Yoctoseconds. One septillionth of a second.

VIJA
Because time is a corporate asset now. It belongs to the free market system. The present is harder to find. It is being sucked out of the world to make way for the future of uncontrolled markets and huge investment potential. The future becomes insistent. This is why something will happen soon, maybe today. To correct the acceleration of time. Bring nature back to normal, more or less.

EXT. LIMO. SEVENTH AND BROADWAY - DAY

The car has stopped in the compressed space where Seventh Avenue and Broadway begin to intersect. People suddenly seem to be running everywhere, some startled and confused, some surging en masse.

Eric rises out of the sunroof of the limo to see what's going on.

A styrofoam rat, twenty feet tall, dodges taxis in the street, carried by five people in rodent spandex. Plate glass breaks, kicked out of windows high above, falling in sheets to the pavement.

Torval is in the street with Danko and Kendra, all three swiveling at different degrees of speed to scan the area.

Runners begin to emerge from both sides of the nearest ticket outlet, most in ski masks. They pause when they see the car, then they begin to approach it, chanting.

PROTESTERS

(chanting)

A specter is haunting the world!!

Eric sees Torval confront a man carrying a brick. Torval drops him cold with a right cross, then glares at Eric. Eric lowers himself back into the car.

INT. LIMO - DAY

In the car, Eric pours two vodkas for himself and Vija. They watch the protest unfold on TV. Windows of chain stores are smashed. Battalions of rats are loosed in restaurants and hotel lobbies. Masked figures roam the area on the tops of cars, tossing smoke bombs at the cops.

In the car, they can hear the chanting more clearly now. Protesters start rocking the car. Teenagers on skateboards are spraying the car with graffiti.

The styrofoam rat topples. Police in tight formation advance behind riot shields. Tear gas is launched.

Eric turns to Vija and smiles. Vija sighs.

VIJA

You have to understand.

ERIC

What?

VIJA

The more visionary the idea, the more people it leaves behind. This is what the protest is all about. Visions of technology and wealth. The force of cyber-capital that will send people into the gutter to retch and die. What is the flaw of human rationality?

ERIC

What?

VIJA

It pretends not to see the horror and death at the end of the schemes
(MORE)

VIJA (CONT'D)

it builds. This is a protest against the future. They want to hold off the future. They want to normalize it, keep it from overwhelming the present. The future is always a wholeness, a sameness. We're all tall and happy there. This is why the future fails. It always fails. It can never be the cruel happy place we want to make it.

The vodka sloshes in their glasses as the car bounces back and forth. There are people banging on the windows and hood. Torval and the bodyguards sweep them off the chassis. A trash can is flung at the rear window.

Police now join Eric's security to help protect the car. Rubber bullets are fired through the smoke.

VIJA (CONT'D)

What would happen if they knew that the head of Packer Capital was in the car? You know what the anarchists have always said.

ERIC

Yes.

VIJA

Tell me.

ERIC

The urge to destroy is a creative urge.

VIJA

This is also the hallmark of capitalist thought. Enforced destruction. Old industries have to be harshly eliminated. New markets have to be forcibly claimed. Old markets have to be re-exploited. Destroy the past, make the future.

EXT. LIMO. SEVENTH AND BROADWAY - EVENING

Somewhere nearby there is a detonation, loud and deep. The protesters abandon the car and disappear in the smoke.

Across the avenue, an electronic outdoor display shows these words:

A SPECTER IS HAUNTING THE WORLD - THE SPECTER OF CAPITALISM.

After few seconds, the words are replaced by the following:

A RAT BECAME THE UNIT OF CURRENCY.

INT. LIMO - EVENING

The limo begins to move.

VIJA

This is the thing about genius.
Genius alters the terms of its
habitat. Technology is crucial to
civilization why? Because it helps
us to make our fate. We don't need
God or miracles or the flight of the
bumble bee. But it is also crouched
and undecidable. It can go either
way.

ERIC

You've been talking about the future
being impatient. Pressing upon us.

VIJA

(sharply)
That was theory. I am your Chief of
Theory. I deal in theory.

As the limo crawls along, it brings a hideous spectacle into
view. A man sitting cross legged on the sidewalk is in flames.
People turn away or watch, spell-struck, dumbstruck, or just
walk by, pretending not to notice.

Eric and Vija are close enough to see that the man is wearing
glasses. Eric opens the sunroof and stands up out of it to
get a better look.

EXT. LIMO - EVENING

The glasses begin to melt into the man's eyes. A jerry can
next to the man is also in flames. News cameramen come
running with their cameras bouncing on their shoulders.

People on the sidewalk begin to wail and cover their faces,
unable to get close to the burning man.

INT. LIMO - EVENING

Eric lowers himself back into the jump seat opposite Vija.
The limo moves on, leaving the man to burn.

VIJA

(re burning man,
dejected)
It's not original.

ERIC
 Hey. What's original? He did it,
 didn't he?

VIJA
 It's an appropriation.

ERIC
 He poured the gasoline and lit the
 match.

VIJA
 All those Vietnamese monks, one after
 another, in all their lotus positions.

ERIC
 Imagine the pain. Sit here and feel
 it.

VIJA
 Immolating themselves endlessly.

ERIC
 To say something. To make people
 think.

VIJA
 It's not original.

EXT. LIMO - MOMENTS LATER

The car comes to a stop. Torval walks back and tries to open the door, which is dented and bent and resists opening. Eric helps by pushing from inside and steps out into the street.

The car is a mess, slathered in red-and-black spray paint, dented, punctured, bruised, scraped. Foul smoke from the burning corpse out of sight up the street drifts by. Sirens blow.

TORVAL
 Just now.

ERIC
 What?

TORVAL
 Report from the complex. Concerns
 your safety.

ERIC
 Little late, are they?

TORVAL

This is specific and categorical.

ERIC

There's been a threat then.

TORVAL

Assessment, credible red. Highest order of urgency. This means an incursion is already in progress.

ERIC

Now we know.

TORVAL

And now we have to act on what we know.

ERIC

But we still want what we want. We want a haircut.

INT. LIMO - EVENING

The limo is moving again.

ERIC

Apparently there's been a threat.

VIJA

Do they think the threat is credible?

ERIC

Status urgent.

VIJA

(laughs)

It's interesting, isn't it? About men and immortality. You live in a tower that soars to heaven and goes unpunished by God. And you bought an airplane. I'd nearly forgotten this. Soviet or ex-Soviet. A strategic bomber. Capable of knocking out a small city. Is this right?

ERIC

It's an old Tu-160. NATO calls it Blackjack A. It was deployed around 1988. Carries nuclear bombs and cruise missiles. These were not included in the deal.

VIJA
(clapping hands)
But they wouldn't let you fly it.
Could you fly it?

ERIC
Could and did. They wouldn't let me
fly it armed.

VIJA
Who wouldn't?

ERIC
The State Department. The Pentagon.
The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and
Firearms.

VIJA
The Russians?

ERIC
What Russians? I bought it black-
market and dirt cheap from a Belgian
arms dealer in Kazakhstan. That's
where I took the controls, for half
an hour, over the desert. U.S.
dollars, thirty-one million.

VIJA
Where is it now?

ERIC
Parked in a storage facility in
Arizona. Waiting for replacement
parts that nobody can find. Sitting
in the wind. I go out there now and
then.

VIJA
To do what?

ERIC
To look at it. It's mine.

VIJA
People will not die. Isn't this the
creed of the new culture? People
will be absorbed in streams of
information. I know nothing about
this. Computers will die. They're
dying in their present form. They're
just about dead as distinct units.
A box, a screen, a keyboard. They're
melting into the texture of everyday
life. Is this true or not?

ERIC
Even the word computer.

VIJA
Even the word computer sounds backward
and dumb.

EXT. LIMO - EVENING

The crippled limo glides through the twilight.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Kendra Hays, the beautiful black bodyguard, wears her ZyloFlex body armor while she has sex with Eric.

KENDRA
You work out.

ERIC
Six percent body fat.

KENDRA
Used to be my number. Then I got
lazy.

ERIC
What are you going to do about it?

KENDRA
Hit the machines in the morning.
Run in the park at night.

ERIC
Where is he now?

KENDRA
Who?

ERIC
You know.

KENDRA
He's in the lobby. Torval? Watching
them come and go. Danko's in the
hall outside.

ERIC
Who's that?

KENDRA
Danko. My partner.

ERIC
He's new.

KENDRA

I'm new. He's been watching your back for some time now, ever since those wars in the Balkans. He's a veteran.

ERIC

What's he going to say to you about this?

KENDRA

Torval? Is that who you're talking about? Say his name.

ERIC

What's he going to say to you?

KENDRA

Just so you're safe. That's his job.

ERIC

Men get possessive. What. You don't know this?

KENDRA

I heard the rumor. But the fact is I technically speaking went off duty an hour ago. So it's basically my time we're dealing with here.

ERIC

Do you find this interesting?

KENDRA

What?

ERIC

Protecting someone in danger. What makes you willing to do this? Take this risk?

KENDRA

Maybe you're worth it. Maybe it's just the pay. The pay's pretty good. The risk? I don't think about the risk. I figure the risk is yours. You're the man in the crosshairs.

ERIC

But is it interesting?

KENDRA

It's interesting to be near a man somebody wants to kill.

ERIC

You know what they say, don't you?

KENDRA

What?

ERIC

The logical extension of business is murder. Move a little left.

KENDRA

Move a little left.

ERIC

There. Nice. Perfect. What kind of weapon did he give you?

KENDRA

Taser. Doesn't trust me yet with deadly force. You ought to eat more healthy.

ERIC

Today is different. How many volts at your disposal?

KENDRA

One hundred thousand. Jam your nervous system. Drop you to your knees. Like this.

Kendra pours a few drops of vodka on his genitals and laughs. Eric stands up.

ERIC

Stun me. I mean it. Draw the gun and shoot. I want you to do it, Kendra. Show me what it feels like. I'm looking for more. Show me something I don't know. Stun me to my DNA. Come on, do it. Click the switch. Aim and fire. I want all the volts the weapon holds. Do it. Shoot it. Now.

EXT. BARRYMORE THEATER - NIGHT

The limo is parked outside the hotel and across the street from the Barrymore Theater, where a group of smokers is gathered at intermission, tucked under the marquee.

Torval stands in the rain with arms folded, a lone figure facing a series of empty loading docks.

INT. LIMO - EVENING

Eric sits in the car, working the screens, borrowing yen like there's no tomorrow, eating peanuts. He notices that Elise is among the smokers in front of the theater.

EXT. BARRYMORE THEATER - EVENING

Eric gets out of the limo to go to Elise, but Torval intercepts.

TORVAL

I need to know where you're going.

ERIC

Wait and learn.

Eric leaves Torval and approaches Elise.

ERIC (CONT'D)

You smoke since when.

ELISE

I took it up when I was fifteen. It's one of those things a girl takes up. It tells her she's more than a skinny body no one looks at. There's a certain drama in her life.

ERIC

She notices herself. Then other people notice her. Then she marries one of them. Then they go to dinner.

INT. LITTLE TOKYO RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A Japanese restaurant, empty except for Eric and Elise. No food, no waiter in sight.

ERIC

You're wearing a cashmere sweater.

ELISE

Yes I am.

ERIC

It's beige.

ELISE

Yes.

ERIC

And that's your hand-beaded skirt.

ELISE

Yes it is.

ERIC

I'm noticing. How was the play?

ELISE

I left at intermission, didn't I?

ERIC

What was it about and who was in it?
I'm making conversation.

ELISE

I went on impulse. The audience was
sparse. Five minutes after the
curtain went up, I understood why.
Where is your jacket?

ERIC

Where is my jacket.

ELISE

You were wearing a suit jacket
earlier. Where is your jacket?

ERIC

Lost in the scuffle, I guess. You
saw the car. We were under attack
by anarchists. Just two hours ago
they were a major global protest.
Now, what, forgotten.

ELISE

There's something else I wish I could
forget.

ERIC

That's my peanuts you smell.

ELISE

Didn't I see you come out of the
hotel just up the street while I was
standing outside the theater? Is
that the hotel you wanted to take me
to?

ERIC

We don't need a hotel. We'll do it
in the ladies room. We'll go to the
alley out back and rattle the garbage
cans. Look. I'm trying to make
contact in the most ordinary ways.
To see and hear.

(MORE)

ERIC (CONT'D)

To notice your mood, your clothes. This is important. Are your stockings on straight? I understand this at some level. How people look. What people wear.

ELISE

How they smell. Do you mind my saying that? Am I being too wifely? I'll tell you what the problem is. I don't know how to be indifferent. I can't master this. And it makes me susceptible to pain. In other words it hurts.

ERIC

This is good. We're like people talking. Isn't this how they talk?

ELISE

How would I know?

ERIC

My prostate is asymmetrical.

ELISE

What does that mean?

ERIC

I don't know.

ELISE

You have to see a doctor.

ERIC

I just saw a doctor. I see a doctor every day.

ELISE

You just saw a doctor.

ERIC

That's how I know.

(pause)

Packer Capital's portfolio has been reduced to near nothingness in the course of the day. My personal fortune in the tens of billions is in ruinous convergence with this fact. And there's been a credible threat on my life.

(pause)

It's okay. It's fine. It makes me feel free in a way I've never known.

Elise begins to cry.

ELISE

That's so awful. Don't say things like that. Free to do what? Go broke and die? Listen to me. I'll help you financially. I'll truly do what I can to help. You can re-establish yourself, at your pace, in your way. Tell me what you need. I promise I'll help. But as a couple, as a marriage, I think we're done, aren't we? You speak of being free. This is your lucky day.

INT. BILTMORE THEATER - NIGHT

Danko and Eric are in the balcony of the grotty Biltmore theater. A rave is taking place. Cold, repetitive, computer-looped music, tightly packed bodies in cyclonic dance, a wash of achromatic light.

Danko is about forty, scarred across the forehead and cheek, bent nose and close-cropped bristled hair.

A bedsheet banner, hand-lettered, dangles from the balcony.

DANKO

This is very crazy. Take over whole theater. What do you think?

ERIC

I don't know.

DANKO

I don't know either. But I think it is crazy. Looks like drug scene. What do you think?

ERIC

Yes.

DANKO

I think it is latest drug. Called novo. Makes pain go away. Look how good they feel.

ERIC

Kids.

DANKO

They are kids. Exactly. What pain do they feel that they need to take pill?

(MORE)

DANKO (CONT'D)

Music, okay, too loud, so what. It is beautiful how they dance. But what pain do they feel too young to buy beer?

ERIC

There's pain enough for everybody now.

DANKO

I don't believe I am here. You tell me when we leave. I take you out.

ERIC

Where is he?

DANKO

At the entrance. Torval? He watches at the entrance.

ERIC

Have you killed people?

DANKO

What do you think? Like lunch.

EXT. BILTMORE THEATER - NIGHT

Eric and Torval stride to the limo. The rain has stopped.

TORVAL

Where is he?

ERIC

Decided to stay inside.

TORVAL

Good. We don't need him.

ERIC

Where is she?

TORVAL

Sent her home.

ERIC

Good.

TORVAL

Good. It's looking good.

When Torval opens the car door, they discover that there's a bag lady camped in the limo, nodding off, all plastic and rags.

BAG LADY

I need a gypsy. Anybody here read palms? What about feet? Read my feet.

EXT. LIMO - NIGHT

The car crosses Eighth Avenue, out of the theater district. Eric talks through the open window to Torval, who walks alongside.

ERIC

What do we know?

TORVAL

We know it's not a group. It's not an organized terror cell or international kidnapers with ransom demands.

ERIC

It's an individual. Do we care?

TORVAL

We don't have a name. But we have a phone call. The complex is analyzing voice data. They've made certain assessments. And they're projecting a course of action on the part of the individual.

ERIC

Why can't I work up any curiosity on the subject?

TORVAL

Because it doesn't matter. Whoever it is, that's who it is.

Police barricades block access to Ninth Avenue. A funeral is on the way.

Eric gets out of the car and stands near the bicycle shop on the corner, with Torval planted nearby. An enormous man approaches through the gathering crowd - KOZMO THOMAS - broad, meaty, solemn, wearing pale linen slacks and a black leather shirt, sleeveless, with platinum accessories here and there.

They do the handclasp and half hug.

ERIC

Why are we here?

KOZMO

You ain't heard?

ERIC
What?

KOZMO
Brutha Fez.

ERIC
What?

KOZMO
Dead.

ERIC
No. What. Can't be.

KOZMO
Dead. Died. Early today.

ERIC
I don't know this?

KOZMO
Funeral's been in progress all day.
The family wants to give the city a
chance to pay respect. The record
label wants an exploitation event.
Big and loud. Street to street.
Right through the night.

ERIC
I don't know this? How can this be?
I love his music. I have his music
in my elevator. I know the man.
What, they shot him?

KOZMO
Fez been having cardiac problems for
years. Since high school. Been
seeing specialists, been seeing faith
healers. Heart just wore out. This
ain't a thug down some alley. The
man never been breathalyzed, barely,
since he was seventeen. Hope you're
not disappointed.

ERIC
Disappointed.

KOZMO
That our man here wasn't shot. Hope
he didn't let you down. Natural
causes. That's a letdown. What
happened to your stretch? Letting a
fine machine degrade in public.
That's a scandal, man.

ERIC

Everything's a scandal. Dying's a scandal. But we all do it.

KOZMO

I'm hearing voices in the night.
Because I know it can't be you that's
saying this.

A big rapper funeral is in progress: squad of police motorcycles, two private security vans, flower cars banked with white roses, the hearse with Fez lying in state at the rear in a coffin angled upward to make the body visible.

Scores of women walk alongside the limousines, in headscarves and djellabas, hands stained with henna, barefoot, wailing. Breakdancers in jeans, dervishes in tunics and long flared skirts, family and friends, figures of world religions.

News choppers pass overhead.

And Fez's amplified voice coming from farther back in the procession, accompanied by harmonium and hand drums, the Sufi influence strong.

BRUTHA FEZ (O.S.)

Getting shot is easy. Tried it seven times. Now I'm just a solo poet, working on my rhymes.

KOZMO

Ask me do I love this shit. Me being big as I am, and a retro-nigger, I have to love what I'm seeing. Because this is something I could never dream of doing in my thinnest day on earth. He liked having his clergy nearby. He showed up in my office once with an imam and two white boys from Utah in suits. He was always excusing himself so he could pray.

ERIC

He lived in a minaret for a while, in Los Angeles.

KOZMO

I heard that.

ERIC

I went to visit once. He built it next to his house and then moved out of the house and into the minaret.

BRUTHA FEZ (O.S.)

Kid used to think he was wise to the system, prince of the street always do things his way. But he had a case of conventional wisdom, never say nothing the others don't say. Thread of dawn that wakes the East to the cry of souls unfolding. O God O Man living high at last, sucking the titmilk of prayer and fast. Man gave me the news in a slanted room and it felt like a sliver of icy truth. Felt my sad-ass soul flying out of my mouth, my gold tooth splitting down to the root. Let me be who I was, unrhymed fool that's lost but living.

Eric finds himself weeping for Fez, yielding completely to enormous body sobs. Kosmo wraps an arm around him and they weep together.

EXT. 47TH STREET - NIGHT

The limo glides along a dead 47th Street, past the Spanish church and the cluster of scaffolded brownstones.

INT. LIMO - NIGHT

Eric folds up all the screens back into their hatches and cabinets and pours himself a brandy. He sees an Ethiopian restaurant ahead, on the south side of the street. It does not seem to be open, but there's a dim light back toward the kitchen.

EXT. ETHIOPIAN RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The limo stops and Eric steps out onto the sidewalk. A man immediately approaches running and strikes Eric in the face with a pie. Eric manages to throw a glancing punch but is now blinded.

Torval scuffles with the man - ANDRE PETRESCU - while Eric stands on the curbstone and cautiously wipes his face with his handkerchief. Torval soon has the man bent over the trunk of the limo, forearm locked behind his head.

TORVAL

(into his lapel)

Subject reduced.

Torval yanks the man off the rear of the car and splays him toward Eric, snapping his head back smartly. Petrescu is a small guy with hair dyed glossy blond and wearing a Disney World T-shirt.

PETRESCU

I am after you long time. Son of bitch. I glop you good. Today you are crèmed by the master, André Petrescu, the pastry assassin.

Eric now sees three photographers off to the right and a man shooting video from his knees. Their car sits with doors flung open.

PETRESCU (CONT'D)

This is my mission worldwide. To sabotage power and wealth. I am three years waiting for this. Fresh baked only. I pass up president of the United States to make this strike. I crème him any time. You are major statement, I tell you this. Very hard to zero in.

Eric carefully kicks Petrescu in the nuts, watching him spaz and crumple in Torval's grip. Eric then chases the photographers, landing a number of punches. The three backpedaling men stumble into a row of garbage cans, then scuttle up the street. The videographer flees in the car.

Eric returns to the limo, ladling whipped cream off his face and eating it. Petrescu is in pain.

PETRESCU (CONT'D)

You lack of humor, Mr. Packer. You are living up to reputation, okay. But I am kicked and beaten by security so many times I am walking dead. They make me to wear a radio collar when I am in England, to safe the queen. Track me like a rare crane. But believe one thing please. I crèmed Fidel three times in six days when he is in Bucharest years ago. I am action painter of crème pies. I drop from a tree on Michael Jordan one time. This is famous Flying Pie. It is museum quality video for the ages. I quiche Sultan of fucking Brunei in his bath. They put me in a black hole until I am screaming from my eyes.

Torval allows Petrescu to stumble away into the night.

The restaurant is locked and empty. Eric has whipped cream in his hair and ears. His clothes are streaked with cream and dashes of lemon. He feels great.

Eric hears the sound of a bouncing basketball and sees a couple of kids in a playground on the north side of the street. The kids are crouched and growling, going one-on-one.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - NIGHT

Eric climbs the two fences surrounding the playground and Torval dutifully follows. They go to the far end of the park and watch the kids go at it, playing in shadow and murk.

ERIC

You play?

TORVAL

Not really my game. Rugby. That was my game. You play?

ERIC

Some. I liked the action in the paint. I pump iron now.

TORVAL

Of course you understand. There's still someone tracking you.

ERIC

There's still someone out there.

TORVAL

This was a petty incursion. The whipped cream. Technically irrelevant.

ERIC

I understand. I realize. Of course.

TORVAL

Next time no pies and cakes.

ERIC

Dessert is over.

TORVAL

He's out there and he's armed.

ERIC

He's armed and you're armed.

TORVAL

This is true.

ERIC

You will have to draw your weapon.

TORVAL
This is true.

ERIC
Let me see the thing.

TORVAL
Let you see the thing. Okay. Why
not? You paid for it.

The two men chuckle. Torval removes the weapon from his jacket and hands it over, a handsome piece of equipment, silver and black, four-and-a-half-inch barrel, walnut stock.

TORVAL (CONT'D)
Manufactured in the Czech Republic.

ERIC
Nice.

TORVAL
Smart too. Scary smart.

ERIC
Voice recognition.

TORVAL
That's right.

ERIC
You what. You speak and it knows
your voice.

TORVAL
That's right. The mechanism doesn't
activate unless the voiceprint matches
the stored data. Only my voice
matches.

ERIC
Do you have to speak Czech before it
fires?

TORVAL
(smiles)
But the voice is only half the
operation.

ERIC
You're saying there's a code as well.

TORVAL
A preprogrammed spoken code.

ERIC

What is it?

TORVAL

Nancy Babich.

Eric pulls the trigger and shoots Torval, once. Torval goes down. The basketball stops bouncing and rolls on the ground twenty yards away as Torval lies dying.

Eric glances at the kids, who stand motionless watching. He gives them a casual hand signal indicating they ought to continue their game. He tosses the weapon in the bushes and walks towards the chain-link fence.

EXT. BARBERSHOP - NIGHT

The car crosses Tenth Avenue and stops outside the barbershop, which is on the north side of the street facing a row of old brick tenements. Under the streetlamp, the limo has a bruised cartoonish quality.

INT. LIMO - NIGHT

Inside the limo, Eric is urinating, stooped over the vehicle's toilet bowl. When he's finished, he watches the bowl fold back into its housing.

The limo driver, IBRAHIM HAMADOU, opens the door.

IBRAHIM

We are here.

Eric looks at him carefully for the first time, as do we. The man is slim and black, medium height, longish face. And his left eye is almost non-existent, hidden behind folds of scar tissue, collapsed and twisted away from his nose.

EXT. BARBERSHOP - NIGHT

Eric gets out and looks around. A grim street evoking a lot of memories.

The barbershop is closed, but Eric goes to the door and knocks. An old man comes moving through the dimness, ANTHONY ADUBATO, in his working outfit, a striped white tunic, short-sleeved, with baggy pants and running shoes.

INT. BARBERSHOP - NIGHT

Anthony Adubato answers the door.

ANTHONY

But how come you're such a stranger lately?

ERIC
Hello, Anthony.

ANTHONY
Long time.

ERIC
Long time. I need a haircut.

ANTHONY
You look like what. Get in here so
I can look at you.

Anthony flips the light switch and waits for Eric to sit in the one barber chair that is left. There is a hole in the linoleum where the other chair had been and there is a toy chair for kids, a green roadster with red steering wheel.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
I never seen such ratty hair on a
human.

ERIC
I woke up this morning and knew it
was time.

ANTHONY
You knew where to come.

ERIC
I said to myself. I want a haircut.

ANTHONY
Maybe you want to eat something first.

ERIC
I could eat something.

ANTHONY
There's take-out in the fridgerator
that I nibble at it when I get the
urge.

Anthony goes into the back room and returns with a small white carton in each hand.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
So you married that woman.

ERIC
That's right.

ANTHONY

That her family's got like money unbeknownst. I never thought you'd get married so young. But what do I know? I have chickpeas mashed up and I have eggplant stuffed with rice and nuts.

ERIC

Give me the eggplant.

ANTHONY

You got it.

(pause)

He went fast once they found it. He was diagnosed and then he went. It was like he was talking to me one day and gone the next. In my mind that's how it feels. I also have the other eggplant with garlic and lemon all mashed up together if you want to try that instead. He was diagnosed it was January. They found it and told him. But he didn't tell your mother until he had to. By March he was gone. But in my mind it feels like a day or two. Two days tops. You were four years old.

ERIC

Five.

ANTHONY

Exactly. Your mother was the brains of the outfit. That's where you get your mentality. Your mother had the wisdom. He said that himself.

ERIC

And you? You're keeping well?

ANTHONY

You know me, kid. I could tell you I can't complain. But I could definitely complain. The thing is I don't want to. Because there isn't time. Let me think what I have that we could drink. There's water from the tap. I drink water now. And there's a bottle of liqueur that's been here don't ask how long.

ERIC

I could drink some of that.

ANTHONY

Good. Because if your father himself walked in here and I offered him tap water, god forbid, he would rip out my last chair.

ERIC

And maybe we could ask my driver to come in. My driver's out in the car.

ANTHONY

We could give him the other eggplant.

INT. BARBERSHOP - MOMENTS LATER

Eric and Ibrahim sit eating, halfway through the meal, Eric in the barber chair under a striped cape and Ibrahim in a folding chair, still wearing his jacket and tie. Anthony stands and talks and cuts Eric's hair.

ANTHONY

I drove a checkered cab. Big and bouncy. I drove nights. I was young. What could they do to me?

IBRAHIM

Nights are not so good if you have a wife and child. Besides, I can tell you it was crazy enough in the daytime.

ANTHONY

I loved my cab. I went twelve hours nonstop. I stopped only to pee.

IBRAHIM

A man is hit one day by another taxi. He comes flying into my taxi. I mean he is flying in the air. Crash against the windscreen. Right there in my face. Blood is everywhere.

ANTHONY

I never left the garage without my Windex.

IBRAHIM

I am Acting Secretary of External Affairs in my previous life. I said to him, Get off from there. I cannot drive with your body on my windscreen.

ANTHONY

I ate at the wheel. I had my sandwiches in tinfoil.

IBRAHIM

I ate at the wheel also. I could not afford to stop driving.

ANTHONY

Where did you pee, Ibrahim? I peed under the Manhattan Bridge.

IBRAHIM

This is where I peed, exactly.

ANTHONY

I peed in parks and alleys. I peed in a pet cemetery once.

IBRAHIM

Night is better in some ways. I am certain of it.

ANTHONY

I was here what. Probably four hours a day, helping my father cut hair. Nights I drove my cab. I loved my cab. I had my little fan that worked on a battery because forget about air-conditioning in that day and age. I had my drinking cup with a magnet that I stuck on the dashboard.

IBRAHIM

I had my steering wheel upholstered. Very nice, in zebra. And my daughter with her photograph on the visor.

ANTHONY

I gave this guy his first haircut. He wouldn't sit in the car seat. His father tried to jam him in there. He's going no no no. So I put him right where he's sitting now. His father pinned him down. I cut his father's hair when he was a kid. Then I cut his hair. His father grew up with four brothers and sisters. They lived right across the street there. The five kids, the mother, the father, the grandfather, all in one apartment. Listen to this. Eight people, four rooms, two windows, one toilet.

(MORE)

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

I can hear his father's voice. Four rooms, two with windows. It was a statement he liked to make. Two with windows.

Something in what Anthony has been saying has triggered a thought in Ibrahim. He looks around the place with a quizzical look on his face.

IBRAHIM

But where is the chief of security in this situation? I realize he is not with us. We are alone.

ERIC

I gave him the rest of the night off.

ANTHONY

But you have protection, right, in the car?

ERIC

Protection.

ANTHONY

Protection. You don't know what that means?

ERIC

I had a gun but I threw it away.

IBRAHIM

But why?

ERIC

I wasn't thinking ahead. I didn't want to make plans or take precautions.

ANTHONY

You know how that sounds? How does that sound. I thought you had a reputation. Destroy a man in the blink of an eye. But you sound pretty iffy to me. This is Mike Packer's kid? That had a gun and threw it away? What is that?

IBRAHIM

What is that?

ANTHONY

In this part of town? And you don't have a gun?

IBRAHIM

There are steps you must take to safeguard yourself.

ANTHONY

In this part of town?

IBRAHIM

You cannot walk five meters after dark. You will be careless, they kill you straightaway. You will be reasonable with them, they take a little longer. Tear out your entrails first.

ANTHONY

What happened to your eye that it got all twisted that way?

IBRAHIM

I can see. I can drive. I pass their test.

ANTHONY

Because both my brothers were fight trainers years ago. But I never seen a thing like that.

ERIC

You were beaten and tortured. An army coup. Or the secret police. Or they thought they'd executed you. Fired a shot into your face. Left you for dead.

Ibrahim looks away, not submitting to the tide of memory and emotion.

ANTHONY

I loved my cab. I gulped my food. I drove twelve hours straight, night after night. Vacations, forget about. But what did I do for protection?

Anthony reaches into a drawer and folds back two towels to reveal an old pockmarked revolver, a nickel-plated piece of junk, five-shot, snub-nosed, wide trigger.

Ibrahim picks it up and solemnly hands it to Eric, who takes it reluctantly, then throws off the cape and stands up to leave.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

But how come?

ERIC

I need to leave. I don't know how come. That's how come.

ANTHONY

But let me do the right side at least. So both sides are equal.

ERIC

I'll come back. Take my word for it. I'll sit and you'll finish.

INT. LIMO - NIGHT

The car approaches Eleventh Avenue. Eric sits up front with the driver.

ERIC

Ibrahim, tell me this.

IBRAHIM

Yes.

ERIC

These stretch limousines that fill the streets. I've been wondering.

IBRAHIM

Yes.

ERIC

Where are they parked at night? They need large tracts of space. Out near the airports or somewhere in the Meadowlands. Long Island, New Jersey.

IBRAHIM

I will go to New Jersey. The limo stays here.

ERIC

Where?

IBRAHIM

Next block. There will be an underground garage. Limos only. I will drop off your car, pick up my car, drive home through the stinking tunnel.

EXT. UNDERGROUND GARAGE - NIGHT

The car crosses Eleventh Avenue into the car barrens, then stops at the mouth of the underground garage. Across the street is a derelict tenement, windows boarded, a padlocked iron door where the entrance used to be.

Eric and Ibrahim get out of the limo. The revolver is stuck uncomfortably in Eric's belt.

IBRAHIM

Early morning you can see, right here, teams of men in white coveralls, they are washing the limousines. A marketplace of limos. Rags flying.

They embrace. Ibrahim gets back into the limo and drives it down the ramp and into the garage. The steel grille comes down, and Eric is alone on the street.

Then a shot rings out, then another shot. A man's voice howling from somewhere across the street:

BENNO (O.S.)

Eric Michael Packer!

Eric fumbles the revolver out of his belt, fires back blindly at the derelict tenement across the street and then runs towards it. The man in the tenement fires back.

EXT. DERELICT TENEMENT - NIGHT

Eric breaks into the tenement, bypassing the padlocked door and entering through an alley leading to a junked-up yard and a small, misshapen service door.

INT. DERELICT TENEMENT - NIGHT

A swampish back hallway. A man lying dead or sleeping in the vestibule. Eric climbs two flights of stairs lit by a couple of strung bulbs.

INT. TENEMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

Eric stands in a desolate hallway, the revolver up by his face. He whispers to the weapon.

ERIC

(whispers)

Nancy Babich.

INT. BENNO'S SPACE - NIGHT

Eric kicks open the door and enters firing.

A sizable space with wall rubble everywhere and wobbly light. A shredded sofa, a stationary bike, a heavy metal desk covered with papers, the remains of a kitchen and bathroom.

A portable orange toilet from a construction site, seven feet tall, mud-smoked and dented.

The toilet door opens and a man, BENNO LEVIN, comes out, barefoot in jeans and T-shirt, a bath towel over his head and shoulders draped in the manner of a prayer shawl. He is slight and unshaven.

Eric fires again, indifferently, distracted by the man's appearance.

BENNO

What are you doing here?

ERIC

That's not the question. The question is yours to answer. Why do you want to kill me?

BENNO

No, that's not the question. That's too easy to be the question. I want to kill you in order to count for something in my own life. See how easy?

Benno walks over to a coffee table bearing an unlit candle in a saucer and picks up a foot-long HK Mk23 military pistol with a matte black finish and a laser-aiming module. He sits on the sofa, hunched forward, half lost in the towel shroud.

BENNO (CONT'D)

You're not a reflective man. I live consciously in my head. Give me a cigarette.

ERIC

Give me a drink.

BENNO

Do you recognize me?

ERIC

I can't see you clearly.

BENNO

Sit. We'll talk.

Eric looks around, brings the molded plastic desk chair over to the coffee table, and sits.

ERIC

Yes, I'd like that. Sit and talk. I've had a long day. Things and people. Time for a philosophical pause. Some reflection, yes.

Benno fires a shot into the ceiling, scaring himself.

ERIC (CONT'D)

You're not familiar with that weapon. I've fired that weapon. It's a serious weapon. Whereas this. I'm thinking of installing a shooting range in my apartment.

BENNO

Why not your office? Line them up and shoot them.

ERIC

You know the office. Is that right? You've been in the office.

BENNO

Tell me who you think I am.

ERIC

I don't know. Who are you?

Benno takes the towel off his head, revealing a high forehead, scarified hair hanging in unwashed strips, thin and limp.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Maybe if you told me your name.

BENNO

You wouldn't know my name.

ERIC

I know names more than faces. Tell me your name.

BENNO

Benno Levin.

ERIC

That's a phony name. It's phony. It's fake. It's fake. It isn't real. But I think I recognize you now. You were at the cash machine outside a bank sometime after noon.

BENNO

You saw me.

ERIC

You looked familiar. I didn't know why. Maybe you used to work for me. Hate me. Want to kill me. Fine.

BENNO

Everything in our lives, yours and mine, has brought us to this moment.

ERIC

Fine. I could use a tall beer about now. How old are you? I'm interested.

BENNO

Do you think people like me can't happen?

ERIC

How old?

BENNO

We happen. Forty-one.

ERIC

A prime number.

BENNO

But not an interesting one. Or did I turn forty-two, which is possible, because I don't keep track, because why should I?

Wind is blowing through the halls, chilling Benno. He puts the towel back on his head, the ends falling over his shoulder. He holds his weapon between his knees, using both hands to grip it.

BENNO (CONT'D)

I have become an enigma to myself. So said Saint Augustine. And herein lies my sickness.

ERIC

That's a start. That's a crucial self-realization.

BENNO

I'm not talking about myself. I'm talking about you. Your whole waking life is a self-contradiction. That's why you're engineering your own downfall. Why are you here? That's the first thing I said to you when I came out of the toilet.

ERIC

I noticed the toilet. It's one of the first things I noticed. What happens to your waste?

BENNO

There's a hole below the fixture. I knocked a hole in the floor. Then I positioned the toilet so that one hole fits over the other.

ERIC

Holes are interesting. There are books about holes.

BENNO

There are books about shit. But we want to know why you'd willingly enter a house where there's someone inside who's prepared to kill you.

ERIC

All right. Tell me. Why am I here?

BENNO

You have to tell me. Some kind of unexpected failure. A shock to your self-esteem.

ERIC

The yen. I couldn't figure out the yen.

BENNO

The yen.

ERIC

I couldn't chart the yen.

BENNO

So you brought everything down.

ERIC

The yen eluded me. This had never happened. I became halfhearted.

BENNO

This is because you have half a heart. Give me a cigarette.

ERIC

I don't smoke cigarettes.

BENNO

The huge ambition. The contempt. I can list the things. I can name the appetites, the people. Mistreat some, ignore some, persecute others. The self-totality. The lack of remorse. These are your gifts.

ERIC

What else?

BENNO

Funny feeling in your bones.

ERIC

What?

BENNO

Tell me if I'm wrong.

ERIC

What?

BENNO

Intuition of early death.

ERIC

What else?

BENNO

What else. Secret doubts. Doubts you could never acknowledge.

ERIC

You know some things.

BENNO

I know you smoke cigars. I know everything that's ever been said or written about you. I know what I see in your face, after years of study.

ERIC

You worked for me. Doing what?

BENNO

Currency analysis. I worked on the baht.

ERIC

The baht is interesting.

BENNO

I loved the baht. But your system is so microtimed that I couldn't keep up with it. I couldn't find it. It's so infinitesimal. I began to hate my work, and you, and all the numbers on my screen, and every minute of my life.

ERIC

One hundred satang to the baht. What's your real name?

BENNO

You wouldn't know it.

ERIC

Tell me your name.

BENNO

Sheets. Richard Sheets.

ERIC

Means nothing to me. Tell me. Do you imagine that I stole ideas from you? Intellectual property.

BENNO

What does anyone imagine? A hundred things a minute. Whether I imagine a thing or not, it's real to me. I have syndromes where they're real, from Malaysia for example. The things I imagine become facts. They have the time and space of facts.

ERIC

You're forcing me to be reasonable. I don't like that.

BENNO

I have severe anxieties that my sex organ is receding into my body.

ERIC

But it's not.

BENNO

Shrinking into my abdomen.

ERIC

But it's not.

BENNO

Whether it is or not, I know it is.

ERIC

Show me.

BENNO

I don't have to look. There are folk beliefs. There are epidemics that happen. Men in the thousands, in real fear and pain.

ERIC

All right. People like you can happen. I understand this. I believe it. But not the violence. Not the gun. The gun is all wrong. You're not a violent man. Violence is meant to be real, based on real motives, on forces in the world that what. That make us want to defend ourselves or take aggressive action. The crime you want to commit is cheap imitation. It's a stale fantasy. People do it because other people do it. It's another syndrome, a thing you caught from others. It has no history.

BENNO

It's all history. The whole thing is history. You are foully and berserkly rich. Don't tell me about your charities.

ERIC

I have no charities.

BENNO

I know this.

ERIC

You don't resent the rich. That's not your sensibility.

BENNO

What's my sensibility?

ERIC

Confusion. This is why you're unemployable.

BENNO

Why?

ERIC

Because you want to kill people.

BENNO
That's not why I'm unemployable.

ERIC
Then why?

BENNO
Because I stink. Smell me.

ERIC
Smell me.

BENNO
Even when you self-destruct, you want to fail more, lose more, die more than others, stink more than others. In the old tribes the chief who destroyed more of his property than the other chiefs was the most powerful.

ERIC
What else?

BENNO
You have everything to live and die for. I have nothing and neither. That's another reason to kill you.

ERIC
Richard. Listen.

BENNO
I want to be known as Benno.

ERIC
You're unsettled because you feel you have no role, you have no place. But you have to ask yourself whose fault this is. Because in fact there's very little for you to hate in this society. Think.

BENNO
Think.

ERIC
Violence needs a cause, a truth.

BENNO
There's nothing in the world but other people. I had this thought one day. It was the thought of my life. I'm surrounded by other people.
(MORE)

BENNO (CONT'D)

It's buy and sell. It's let's have lunch. I thought look at them and look at me. Light shines through me on the street. I'm what's the word, pervious to visible light. I thought all these other people. I thought how did they get to be who they are. It's banks and car parks. It's airline tickets in their computers. It's restaurants filled with people talking. It's people signing the merchant copy. It's people taking the merchant copy out of the leather folder and then signing it and separating the merchant copy from the customer copy and putting their credit card in their wallet. This alone could do it. It's people who have doctors who order tests for them. This alone. I'm helpless in their system that makes no sense to me. You want me to be a helpless robot soldier but all I could be was helpless.

ERIC

No.

BENNO

It's women's shoes. It's all the names they have for shoes. It's all those people in the park behind the library, talking in the sun.

ERIC

No. Your crime has no conscience. You haven't been driven to it by some oppressive social force. How I hate to be reasonable. You're not against the rich. Nobody's against the rich. Everybody's ten seconds from being rich. Or so everybody thought. No. Your crime is in your head. Another fool shooting up a diner because. Bullets flying through the walls and floor. So useless and stupid. Even your weapon is a fantasy. What is it called? What's the attachment that abuts the trigger guard? What is it called? What does it do?

BENNO

All right. I don't have the manhood to know those names. Men know these names. You have the experience of manhood. I can't think that far ahead. It's all I can do to be a person.

ERIC

Violence needs a burden, a purpose.

Eric lifts the muzzle of his own gun and presses it against the palm of his left hand. Benno tenses.

BENNO

What are you doing?

ERIC

I don't know. Maybe nothing.

Eric squeezes the trigger and blows a hole through his left hand. It's his last round. The fingers curl, middle finger twitching. Blood runs down both sides of the hand and a dark discoloration, a scorch mark, begins to spread across the palm.

Benno gets up, goes to his desk and finds some take-out paper napkins. He comes back and presses the napkins into Eric's bloody hand. Eric still holds his gun in his good hand. Benno seems unconcerned.

ERIC (CONT'D)

My prostate is asymmetrical.

BENNO

So is mine.

ERIC

What does it mean?

Benno sits back down, starts nodding in his towel shroud.

BENNO

Nothing. It means nothing. It's harmless. A harmless variation. Nothing to worry about. Your age, why worry?

(pause)

You should have listened to your prostate.

ERIC

What?

BENNO

You tried to predict movements in the yen by drawing on patterns from nature. Yes, of course. The mathematical properties of tree rings, sunflower seeds, the limbs of galactic spirals. I learned this with the baht. I loved the cross-harmonies between nature and data. You taught me this. You made this form of analysis horribly and sadistically precise. But you forgot something along the way.

ERIC

What?

BENNO

The importance of the lopsided, the thing that's skewed a little. You were looking for balance, beautiful balance, equal parts, equal sides. I know this. I know you. But you should have been tracking the yen in its tics and quirks. The little quirk. The misshape.

ERIC

The misweave.

BENNO

That's where the answer was, in your body, in your prostate.

Benno now reaches across the table and takes the gun out of Eric's hand.

BENNO (CONT'D)

(pause)

I still need to shoot you. I'm willing to discuss it. But there's no life for me unless I do this.

Benno gets up and begins pacing, a gun in each hand.

BENNO (CONT'D)

(pacing)

Don't you ever walk through the park behind the library and see all those people sitting in their little chairs and drinking at those tables on the terrace after work and hear their voices mingling in the air and want to kill them?

ERIC

No.

BENNO

I'm having my Korean panic attack. This is from holding in my anger all those years. But not anymore. You need to die no matter what.

ERIC

I could tell you my situation has changed in the course of the day.

BENNO

I have my syndromes, you have your complex. Icarus falling. You did it to yourself. Meltdown in the sun. You will plunge three and a half feet to your death. Not very heroic, is it?

Benno is behind Eric now, stationary.

BENNO (CONT'D)

Even if there's a fungus living between my toes that speaks to me. Even if a fungus told me to kill you, even then your death is justified because of where you stand on the earth. For your apartment and what you paid for it. For your daily medical checkups. This alone. Medical checkups every day. For the limousine that displaces the air that people need to breathe in Bangladesh. This alone.

ERIC

Don't make me laugh.

BENNO

Don't make you laugh.

ERIC

You just made that up. You've never spent a minute of your life worrying about other people.

BENNO

All right. But the air you breathe. This alone. The thoughts you have.

ERIC

Is there a fungus that speaks to you? I'm serious. People hear things. They hear God.

Benno comes around the table and slumps on the sofa. He sets the old revolver down and regards his advanced weapon. He pulls the towel lower on his face and aims the pistol at Eric.

BENNO

Anyway you're already dead. You're like someone already dead. Like someone dead a hundred years. Many centuries dead. Kings dead. Royals in their pyjamas eating mutton. Have I ever used the word mutton in my life? Came into my head out of nowhere, mutton.

(pause)

I wanted you to heal me, to save me.
I wanted you to save me.

They sit there, waiting for the shot to sound.

THE END