

PAINKILLERS

an original screenplay
by
David Cronenberg

FADE IN:

EXT. SEEDY MOTEL - DAY

A seedy motel at the edge of a small bay.

A boy, BRECKEN, an ordinary-looking eight year old, sits in the shallow water which comes within yards of the motel. He's DIGGING around in the pebbly bay bottom with a soup spoon, looking for crayfish, leeches, anything interesting.

His mother, DJUNA DAUGHTERY, sits on a tattered lawn chair in front of their motel room, WATCHING her son with exaggerated intensity, nervously fingering an old cell phone. She is in her early thirties, attractive but strained, tense, exhausted.

DJUNA
(calling out)
Brecken, I don't want you eating
anything you find in there, you
understand me? I don't care what it
is.

Brecken hears her, but he doesn't answer, he just keeps digging.

INT. SEEDY MOTEL ROOM. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Djuna sits on one of two beds, DISTRACTEDLY watching the cigarette-scarred TV. Her cell phone is on the bed beside her.

INT. SEEDY MOTEL ROOM. BATHROOM - NIGHT

In the tacky bathroom, Brecken is brushing his teeth, looking at himself in the mirror. He is thin, malnourished, pallid, looks sad in his T-shirt and gray-white underpants.

Brecken SURREPTITIOUSLY glances over his shoulder towards the bathroom door, which is open. He hears the droning TV set. Leaving the water running at a slow trickle, he puts down his toothbrush and SITS on the cold bathroom floor, under the sink.

With one eye on the open door, Brecken drags the small pink PLASTIC WASTEPAPER BASKET towards him and pulls it into his lap.

We can see now that the rim of the basket has been torn away in bite-sized scallops, almost as though it has been CHEWED. And in fact it has been, because as we watch, the boy begins to GNAW HUNGRILY at the rim of the basket, pulling away small chunks of it, drooling a strange, thick WHITE SALIVA over it

as he eats and chews and hungrily wolfs the tough plastic down.

Brecken's eyes glaze over with pleasure as he eats, as he enters a kind of primordial RAPTURE. He is no longer worrying about the open door of the bathroom.

But perhaps he should worry, because at the door, watching him with fascination and a kind of melancholy disgust, is his MOTHER, Djuna, cell phone in hand.

Djuna stares with scary intensity at her son for a few moments, as though trying to truly perceive what it is he is doing, then quietly withdraws from the doorway.

INT. SEEDY MOTEL ROOM. BEDROOM - LATER

Brecken is sound asleep on the twin bed closest to the bathroom. Djuna sits watching him on the other bed. There is an angry vacatness in her look, a quiet DERANGEMENT. She toys absently with the cell phone which lies beside her, then slowly, stealthily, pulls back the bedspread of her bed, revealing the PILLOW. She takes the pillow in her hands and slips to her knees between the beds.

Djuna SLIDES closer to the sleeping Brecken on her knees, places the pillow gently over the boy's face. The boy stirs, his air flow interrupted.

Djuna rolls onto the bed and lies on top of Brecken, pressing the pillow down over his face with her forearms, LOCKING her fingers and hands together over the pillow. She barely notices the desperate STUGGLE that begins to stir beneath her.

INT. SEEDY MOTEL ROOM. BATHROOM - LATER

Djuna sits on the toilet with the lid down, absent-mindedly nudging the wastepaper basket across the floor with one foot. A full two inches of plastic have been gnawed away around the basket's rim since we last saw it.

The cell phone in her hand is RINGING, but for the moment she doesn't seem to notice.

Through the doorway she can see the LIFELESS form of Brecken lying on its bed, the pillow still over his face.

Djuna answers the phone.

DJUNA

(into phone)

Yes. It's still Djuna. Now you've confirmed the phone number. Yes.

(MORE)

DJUNA (CONT'D)

I want you to tell Lang that if he's interested in picking up the corpse of that creature he calls his son - yes, yes I mean the Brecken thing - then you tell him to come to the address I gave you. It'll be here, and I won't be.

Djuna presses END, and then she presses POWER, so that she can't be called back again.

She sits with the phone dangling in her hand for a beat, then suddenly she begins to SOB, deeply, horribly; she is racked by her sobbing, and doubles over on the toilet seat, clutching her knees and rocking in pain.

The cell phone CLATTERS to the floor.

INT. TENSER'S BEDROOM - MORNING

We are in a strange, dark space. Cave-like, with splinters of light. There is something hanging in the middle of this space, something bulky and irritated, like a bear in a hammock.

We hear the small, insect-like sounds of tiny motors making adjustments of some kind. A subdued MOAN of pain.

A light swells up. The place is a cave, but an aggressively hypoallergenic stainless steel and gray porcelain cave. A slim, attractive, efficiently-dressed woman in her early thirties - CAPRICE - fusses her way towards the thing hanging in the centre of the room.

The thing is a not a bear but a bear-like man, SAUL TENSER.

And he is hanging, not from a hammock, but from a series of SLINGS ON PULLEYS which come from the very high ceiling. As Tenser flinches or twitches in the slings, the slings raise, lower and rotate his body, forcing it into some obscure but precise geometry.

Tenser MOANS in his sleep, unaware of the light and of Caprice. He wears bizarre pyjamas which have a tight, machiney woven pattern like carbon fibre and are shaped like a random group of sacks.

CAPRICE

(gently)

Saul. Saul, darling, can you wake up?

A pause, then a moan, a sigh. We can't really see Tenser's face.

TENSER

Who's here?

CAPRICE

(calming)

It's just me, it's Caprice.

(pause)

Did you sleep?

TENSER

(not quite conscious)

I think my bed needs new software.

It's not anticipating my pain any more. It's not turning me properly.

CAPRICE

Yes, I heard you over the intercom. A sleepless night. I'll call SleepWare right away. They're usually very responsive.

TENSER

(sensing something)

What else?

CAPRICE

The tests cooked all night and were ready this morning. There's a new hormone in your bloodstream.

TENSER

(groggy but brightening)

Ah, great. It's about time. I thought I was all tapped out, dried up. Finished.

CAPRICE

You always think that, and you're always wrong.

TENSER

One day, I'll be right.

CAPRICE

Not today.

TENSER

Not today.

(MORE)

Tenser's hand, clad with a fingerless synthetic glove, appears from amid the slings and reaches for a control module which dangles from a cord.

He manipulates the module, operating the motors and slings which rotate him, lower him, and unfold him so that he can finally sit with his feet on the floor and his back curved in an odd position but still supported by the slings. Caprice holds herself back from helping him - a long-established ritual.

Tenser sits still, staring, breathing heavily. Now that we can see him clearly, he seems to be in his early forties, and he is still living in the residue of his troubled night.

Suddenly, a rumbling and shaking from Tenser which might be a coughing fit but turns out to be a heavy, coarse, smoky laugh.

TENSER (CONT'D)

(a heavy laugh)

Let's do it before breakfast.

CAPRICE

You're sure? You don't want to wait till...?

TENSER

Caprice, I'm sure. Before breakfast.

INT. TENSER'S OPERATING THEATRE - MORNING

Tenser is lying on a small, orthopaedically-shaped OPERATING TABLE - it's really more like a cutting-edge dentist's chair - set in the middle of a small, efficient private operating theatre within Tenser's apartment.

Hovering over him is Caprice, who is manipulating THREE TUBES which pierce Tenser's abdomen just below his rib cage. She is peering down one of the tubes, as through a microscope, and manipulating rods through the other two tubes, rods which operate some kind of instruments deep within Tenser's body.

All the rules that we know about O.R. procedure seem to be broken here, with neither pain suppression nor the need for a sterile environment seeming to have any priority.

Tenser is not only conscious, he's fully awake and conversational. The two are alone in the room, and Caprice is maskless and wearing the street clothes we saw her in earlier.

Tenser himself is still wearing his odd pyjamas, the top open and spread wide to surrender only the necessary square footage of skin for Caprice's rods.

TENSER

What do you see? I can feel you pulling things around in there.

CAPRICE

(into eyepiece)

It seems to be some small sort of endocrine gland, about the size of an adrenal gland.

TENSER

Small. That's disappointing. Not very dramatic.

CAPRICE

(encouraging)

It's a brand new organ, never before seen. And it's functioning. Can you feel it? That new hormone?

TENSER

(cryptically)

SleepWare.

CAPRICE

SleepWare?

TENSER

The pain is different. That's probably why my bed's computer is having trouble. This new organ is shifting my pain centres.

CAPRICE

For better or worse?

TENSER

So far, just different. How's the artwork coming?

CAPRICE

It's a slippery surface. Hard to be precise with the ink.

TENSER

Why not do something that really looks like a tattoo? A heart, a knife, "Mother"?

CAPRICE

I was just thinking that, although I
was tending towards a variation on
traditional Samoan.

TENSER

(nods)

You can't miss with Samoan.

INT. TENSER'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Caprice eats breakfast - bacon and eggs - in Tenser's kitchen. She sits at a tile and stainless-steel counter, reading a newspaper whose odd, stiff pages have been laminated in plastic.

INT. TENSER'S BREAKFAST ROOM - MORNING

Tenser eats breakfast alone in his bizarre breakfast room, which is ceramic and porcelain from floor to ceiling, small, claustrophobic, mechanical, like a stainless-steel Japanese robo-toilet.

He eats unrecognizable food from a ceramic tray attached to a MECHANO-CHAIR which is like a huge all-metal infant seat. The chair itself is electronic and gear-driven, and it constantly fidgets and adjusts as Tenser himself fidgets and adjusts.

He eats with difficulty, as if the process of eating itself were hugely uncomfortable for him, picking, probing, examining each morsel with a SET OF UTENSILS that look more like surgical instruments than eating tools.

As he struggles to swallow, tears well up in his eyes and roll down his cheeks, but this seems to be more a physiological reaction than one involving pain or emotion.

EXT. VICTORIAN BANK - DAY

Tenser and Caprice walk along a busy downtown city street, heading towards a shabby Victorian-style bank building.

At a distance there is no indication that the bank is not still functioning as a bank, but when we get close and up the rather grand set of front steps, we see a cardboard sign in black marker taped to the inside of the front door glass that reads: VICTORIAN BANK PERFORMING SPACE.

It is summer, but Tenser is dressed for late autumn, if not winter: heavy full-length black cloth coat, carbon-fiber gloves, scarf, hat, big insulated boots. He seems very uncomfortable in his body.

Caprice, on the other hand, is at ease in her jeans and a T-shirt, sneakers, beret.

CAPRICE
How're you doing?

TENSER
OK.

Tenser pulls out a modern, synthetic pocket watch, checks a timer, puts it away.

TENSER (CONT'D)
I've got the requisite two hours
before I have to scurry back to my
burrow.

CAPRICE
You're sure you want to go with a
live audience this time. You had a
bad reaction to somebody last time.

TENSER
We made it part of the show and it
worked. Besides, I need live for
validation. It's too easy to cheat
when it's only media, and everybody
knows it.

CAPRICE
(laughs)
We could generate the audience in.
We wouldn't be the first.

TENSER
I've already got the recluse tremors
bad, Caprice. Don't take my last
humans away from me.

INT. VICTORIAN BANK. BACKSTAGE - DAY

Backstage at the Victorian Bank is not really backstage: this area is a warren of small, barren rooms which retain only bits and pieces of their original ceiling moldings and woodwork. There is rubble everywhere, as though the place has been abandoned in mid-demolition.

The room they're in is hot and dusty, but Tenser hasn't removed any of his street gear. He and Caprice stand amid a group of about ten people, some standing, some sitting, all listening attentively. They have the feel of theatrical technicians, backstage workers.

TENSER

I seem to have produced a new marvel,
so we can incorporate it into our
next show.

(murmurs of excitement)

Not worth getting too excited about
though. It's pretty small and boring
and we'll have to use macro-screens
to show the audience what we're doing.
I'd hoped for something more
spectacular, but I'm at the mercy.

A short, thin man speaks up - ISBISTER, the stage manager
who is sitting on chunk of Ionic pedestal.

ISBISTER

Do you have a sell-by date on this
new organ? I remember the problem
with the last one.

CAPRICE

This one seems fairly benign. Unless
it decides to manifest ugly, we should
have two months before its growth
impedes.

TENSER

(competitive)

Is the troupe heavily booked,
Isbister? Is there a line-up, is
that the problem?

ISBISTER

We would unbook for a Saul Tenser
performance. You know that. But I'd
like time to do it right. The heavy
media presence you want is always
complex.

TENSER

Let's do it right, then. Let's...

Tenser's THROAT has seized. He can't swallow, he can't speak.
Caprice steps right up to him and jabs a large NEEDLE into
his throat.

The Victorian Bank troupe stirs, anxious, but they are not
panicked. They've seen this before.

INT. TENSER'S BEDROOM - DAY

Tenser is in his slings. Caprice leans in amongst the cables.
His bed has him stretched out, back arched, head down. He is
gasping for air.

Caprice is operating a THROAT DEVICE which is clamped around his windpipe.

CAPRICE

(soothing, singing)

We can use this, Saul. We can use this in the show. We'll use this, we'll use this till it's all used up.

EXT. GOVERNMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Caprice and Tenser are on the street again, Tenser's dress the same, Caprice now adding a windbreaker to her wardrobe. Tenser seems fully, even nonchalantly recovered from his allergy trauma.

As they approach a massive government building whose style is vaguely fascistic, they pass by a COUPLE in an alley. Both the young man and the older woman seem to have KNIVES in their hands, seem to be CUTTING each other, but we're not sure. Caprice and Tenser notice them but seem unconcerned, walk steadily by.

Once they reach the building, Caprice and Tenser walk right past the grand entrance and instead slip down a set of UNOBTRUSIVE STEPS which lead to the underground floors.

EXT. ACROSS STREET - NIGHT

Across the street in the shadows, a tall, handsome man, LANG DAUGHTERY, early forties, watches the pair.

He nervously peels the wrapper off what seems to be a PURPLISH CANDY BAR, and begins to bite pieces from the bar, more in agitation than in hunger. The wrapper is metallic in texture and bears no markings or advertising of any kind.

Once the pair across the street disappear down the steps into the depths of the government building, Daughtery begins to distractedly pace back and forth.

INT. GOVERNMENT BUILDING. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Tenser and Caprice walk down a dark hallway and stop at a door marked N.O.REGISTRY.

Tenser tries the door, but it's locked. He knocks. After a beat, the door is opened and a short, bespectacled man wearing a name-tag that labels him DON WIPPET peers out.

WIPPET

Wippet.

TENSER
It's Saul Tenser.

WIPPET
(sudden big smile)
Omigod. So it is.

INT. NATIONAL ORGAN REGISTRY OFFICE - NIGHT

Wippet fusses the pair into a dreary basement office which he shares with only one other person, a pale, ascetic, scholarly young woman name-tagged TIMLIN. She watches them shyly from her work-loaded desk as Wippet tries to get them settled.

Wippet locks the door with slightly too much drama.

WIPPET
Wow, this is a treat and a privilege
for us, isn't it, Timlin? That's
Timlin over there.
(Timlin waves shyly)
Can I take your coat?

TENSER
I'll keep it, thanks.

WIPPET
Fine, fine.
(gestures around the
office)
Well, this isn't very grand, is it?
But it is the National Organ Registry
nonetheless, and we are fully
equipped, aren't we, Timlin?

Timlin nods shyly.

WIPPET (CONT'D)
It's all secret stuff now because
we're part of the NVU of Justice,
but we'll be ready to break out and
go public when the time inevitably
comes. We're ready for prime time,
aren't we, Timlin?

A faint smile from Timlin that suggests that they're not.

TENSER
NVU?

WIPPET
New Vice Unit.
(MORE)

WIPPET (CONT'D)

(can barely suppress
a chuckle)

There's no crime like the present.

CAPRICE

We're a little confused about
procedure. This is our first time.

Timlin now speaks up, but speaks would not be the right word.
She whispers.

TIMLIN

Mr. Tenser, you were a police officer,
were you not?

TENSER

I was once, yes.

TIMLIN

You are no longer active as a police
officer?

TENSER

No, I'm not.

WIPPET

Never tempted to get back into law
enforcement? Lot of new and exciting
developments since you were on the
streets.

TENSER

I'm an artist now. And a handicapped
one at that.

TIMLIN

But you understand the necessity of
organ registration from a security
standpoint?

TENSER

I understand that... human bodies
are changing.

(hoarse, sardonic
laugh)

I know this quite well. And this
apparently is of some concern to the
governments of the world.

WIPPET

Human bodies, yes. "Human" is the
operative word.

(MORE)

WIPPET (CONT'D)

Human evolution is the concern. That it's going wrong. That it's uncontrolled, insurrectional. That it could lead to a bad place. Look what's happened to pain thresholds. The world is a much more dangerous place now that p-p-pain has all but disappeared. What good is it that only a lucky handful of us experience pain in our sleep? Pain has a function. It's a warning system that we don't have anymore. Why has this happened to us? What does this mean? And what about infections? Whatever happened to them? Nobody washes their hands anymore. And what about that new fad, what do they call it? Desktop surgery? In public! It's repulsive.

For some reason, Wippet stutters on the word "pain". Timlin matter-of-factly interrupts Wippet, as though she's used to his rants, hardly notices them any more.

TIMLIN

(to Tenser)

Our records indicate that you have been producing random and novel bodily organs for some years, but that you have consistently had them removed.

TENSER

Who wouldn't?

WIPPET

You'd be surprised.

CAPRICE

We would be surprised. They're basically tumours, aren't they? Who would want to keep them? They could kill you.

TENSER

Or at the very least, make you gain weight.

TIMLIN

(flat)

What is the relationship between you two?

A glance, a hesitation between Caprice and Tenser.

CAPRICE

I remove these tumours as part of our performance. We are performance artists. We perform together.

TIMLIN

And you are qualified to perform surgery?

TENSER

As Mr. Wippet was saying, everybody seems to be qualified to perform surgery these days.

CAPRICE

If consent is legally given, there's really no issue there.

TIMLIN

I'm speaking of your professional relationship. You wouldn't want to kill your performance partner, would you?

TENSER

(teasing)

You never know. There's a lot of improvisation in our shows.

CAPRICE

(not playful)

Stop it.

(to Timlin)

We met when Saul was cut up on the streets while he was on duty. I was a trauma surgeon at First General. We... unleashed things in each other. We both changed, left our professions. And now we are what we are.

WIPPET

You're stars, that's what you are. Gosh, everybody you meet wants to be in performance art these days. It's the hottest thing. But not everybody can do it.

An awkward moment of silence.

TIMLIN

Well, then. Registration?

INT. NATIONAL ORGAN REGISTRY O.R. - NIGHT

A long room like a 50s barbershop - four chairs, no waiting. Just as drab and dreary as the office. The chairs are like the operating table in Tenser's apartment only shabbier, more institutional.

One wall of the room is lined with glass-faced metal medical cabinets and drawers filled with instruments, jars, plastic containers.

Timlin and Wippet are on either side of the semi-reclined Tenser, each one peering through a VIEWING ROD inserted deep into the Tenser abdomen. Tenser has his eyes closed, possibly dozing. He still wears his coat, hat, gloves, scarf. Just enough chest has been exposed to allow the insertion of the viewing rods into what seem to be permanent channel inserts in his body.

Caprice sits sideways on the adjacent chair, adjusting a TINY CAMERA which she wears on her index finger like a ring. Satisfied, she slips off her chair and begins to record.

WIPPET

(into eyepiece)

Oh, my. It is so beautiful!

TIMLIN

I can't quite see the tattoo from my angle. Can you pick it up from where you are?

WIPPET

Oh, yes. It's very clear. Gosh! A gorgeous, I might even say sensual example of the registration tatooist's art.

CAPRICE

(recording)

Why don't you tell us what a registration tattoo is?

Wippet is suddenly aware of the camera. He immediately stiffens, performs for the camera.

WIPPET

(for the camera)

Well, we here at the National Organ Registry have just instituted a policy of tattooing novel organs, that is, new organs whose function is unknown, so that they can be registered and

(MORE)

WIPPET (CONT'D)

kept track of. Our fear is that some of these neo-organs will establish themselves genetically, and will be passed down from parents to children, who would then no longer be, strictly speaking, human. At least, not in the classical sense.

(stiff smile)

Our concept of the registration tattoo has largely been inspired by the performance art of Saul Tenser.

Timlin picks up on Wippet's "on camera" tone. She looks up from her viewing rod and finds Caprice as she moves around the room, looking for the best shooting angle.

TIMLIN

(to Caprice)

I'm sorry. It's forbidden to record in here.

CAPRICE

I was thinking we could use it for our performance. We record the most intimate things.

Timlin holds out her hand for the camera.

TIMLIN

I'm sorry, but it's illegal. This department does not yet exist.

WIPPET

(forced joviality)

If it doesn't exist, I guess it's impossible to record.

CAPRICE

Too bad.

Caprice removes her RING-CAM and drops it into Timlin's hand. Timlin drops it into a pocket and goes back to the eyepiece of her viewing rod.

TIMLIN

(into eyepiece)

Did you do this, Caprice? This is your work?

CAPRICE

The tattooing, you mean? Yes. It's been part of our act for years.

(MORE)

CAPRICE (CONT'D)

Decorating and celebrating the inner body and so on. From a practical point of view, it makes it easier to identify the new organ under the pressure of the performance context. And the audience loves it.

WIPPET

(manipulating his rod)

I can see why. God, the delicacy! The subtlety! The nuancing!

(looks up)

We're pretty pragmatic and down to earth at the Registry, as you can imagine.

(eye back to rod)

But looking at what you've done here - this is not just pragmatic and down to earth. This is Art. With a capital A.

Wippet lets go of his viewing rod and begins to pace excitedly back and forth. The loose rod bobs around in Tenser's abdomen like a bullfighter's banderilla.

WIPPET (CONT'D)

This speaks to me of the experience of an entire generation. A generation that is confused and dazzled and ironic, perhaps, but also passionate and hopeful.

(claps his hands)

Listen, what do you think of this: organ-registration tattooing as a latent 21st Century art form?

Tenser, his eyes still closed and his voice drowsy, begins to speak.

TENSER

Latent art is very good, very good. Secret laws for secret crimes, and now, secret art. You could establish the Saul Tenser Collection, a display of my neo-organs tattooed by Caprice. Think the Registry would go for it?

(MORE)

Tenser dozily snags the bobbing viewing rod with his hand and twists the flexible eyepiece around so that he can look into his own abdomen.

TENSER (CONT'D)

(into eyepiece)

Of course, it would all be very underground. Private viewing by mandarins only.

WIPPET

You're playing with me now, Mr. Tenser. And frankly, I'm flattered. But if you think "future art"... doesn't that resonate? The National Organ Registry won't be underground forever. We shall emerge and we shall be the future.

INT. TENSER'S OPERATING ROOM - NIGHT

Alone in his operating room, Tenser is fiddling with a large SARCOPHAGUS-LIKE DEVICE, its top lid like a huge insect's carapace resting against the wall. The human-shaped capsule is hinged open - a high-tech iron maiden.

From every interior surface NASTY-LOOKING IMPLEMENTS pop in and out as Tenser plays with the thing's controls - needle-like periscopes, razor-sharp cookie-cutter wheels, surgical scissors, auto-scalpels. You wouldn't want to fall asleep in this machine.

An embossed logo - SARK - adorns every prominent surface of the thing.

Caprice enters, hot.

CAPRICE

I don't think you should have invited those two creeps from the Registry to our show.

TENSER

Why not? Why not get 'em on our side?

CAPRICE

I don't trust them. The woman, Timlin, she's especially creepy.

TENSER

I thought she was rather attractive, in a bureaucratic way.

CAPRICE

(ignoring him)

The SleepWare technicians are here. They need to see you in your bed.

TENSER

I'm a little upset about the tattoo.

CAPRICE

(defensive)

Oh?

TENSER

Rambunctious. That's what I'd call it.

CAPRICE

That's a technical term?

TENSER

It really takes over the form, the shape of the organ itself. It really, in a sense, dominates it, reshapes it. It's not just parasitic, although I suppose, in a sense, it is that too. But it seems to take meaning away from the organ. Takes the process of meaning for itself, as it were.

CAPRICE

(won't get into it)

You'd really better get into bed.

INT. TENSER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tenser is in his bizarre sling and cable bed. The two SleepWare technicians, ROUTER and BERST, are busily working around him. They are both stocky women in their thirties, and they wear no-nonsense heavy-duty overalls.

Router is gently adjusting Tenser's position while Berst is working quietly in the background, handheld software analyser plugged into the wall, DIGITAL NOTEPAD humming, taking readings.

ROUTER

There, there. You'll be comfortable again soon. The SpiderWeb is our top of the line bed. Once we've corrected the misalignment created by your hormonal imbalance, you'll be floating. It won't be long, will it, Berst?

BERST

Naw. These things are basically bulletproof. This bed loves your body, Mr. Tenser.

(MORE)

BERST (CONT'D)

It is so flexible, so attuned to every shift of your pain centres, it's a beautiful thing to behold.

Berst pauses to check a page on her digital notepad.

BERST (CONT'D)

I see you've actually got several of our units here, don't you? The SpiderWeb bed, our BreakFaster Chair - that'll probably need some adjustment as well. We can download your SpiderWeb co-ordinates into the BreakFaster, tweak the EatWare parameters, and we'll be very close. And... omigod.

ROUTER

What is it?

BERST

Router, Mr. Tenser has a Sark unit here.

Router drops what she is doing and takes a look at Berst's notepad, leaving Tenser dangling awkwardly.

ROUTER

(awestruck)

Yes. He really does. A Sark unit.

INT. TENSER'S OPERATING THEATRE - NIGHT

Tenser, Caprice, Router and Berst are gathered around the Sark unit, whose lid has now been swung closed so that it looks like a high-tech, carbon-fibre coffin with a lot of unspeakable mechanical and electronic features.

The technicians stare at the thing with intense lust and longing, like Volkswagen mechanics in the presence of a vintage Ferrari.

BERST

The Sark autopsy module was one of the best units we ever made. It's gorgeous.

ROUTER

They're legendary.

BERST

So complex.

ROUTER

So subtle.

TENSER

Have you ever worked on one of these?

BERST

They stopped making them before our time. I've never seen one in the flesh before.

ROUTER

They're legendary.

BERST

What do you use it for? You're not in the autopsy business, are you?

CAPRICE

It's my paint brush.

INT. VICTORIAN BANK - NIGHT

Tenser, wearing his accustomed wintery clothes, is in the spotlight in the PERFORMANCE ARENA of the Victorian Bank.

Massive SCREENS everywhere showing him from different angles. Rubble architecture. Huge rooms with high ceilings all very open to each other. A forest of pseudo-Greek columns and architectural flourishes. No seats. Crowds swarming and schooling like fish. Heavy music.

Pulsing intermittently on the screens is the title of this particular performance: BODY IS REALITY.

Tenser is more emotional than we've seen him, and at times it seems real, at other times he's just playing with the idea of emotion. He's a performer: he saves it for public display, a special kind of exhibitionism, a revival meeting.

TENSER

(ultra intense,
emotional)

I know who you are. I know what's going on out there. I understand that what you're after is... transcendence. Do you buy that? Do you believe that? You might think that's what you want, transcendence through physical transformation. It might be what you think you want, but I'm here to tell you that you can't have it.

(MORE)

TENSER (CONT'D)

No, what you really want is meaning.
We're all dying from lack of meaning,
and transcendence is not meaning.
Transcendence is nothing but escape.
But meaning is not escape. Meaning
is acceptance. And there is only one
place we can look to for meaning,
because there is only one place that
is real. And so we must look where?

(points to a screen,
reads)

"Body is reality." You must look to
the human body for that meaning.

Tenser begins to sob heavily, with great, devastating emotion.

TENSER (CONT'D)

(suddenly sobbing)

Let me show you. Body is reality. It
is the only reality given to us, the
only reality left to us. If the body
changes, the reality changes. New
bodies seem like a beautiful thing
to us, but new bodies equal dangerous
new realities, and they must be
suppressed, they must be destroyed.

Tenser now turns off the sobbing, turns it off like a tap.

TENSER (CONT'D)

(regaining composure)

Body language. Please don't forget
body language. The body speaks to us
directly. The body speaks to us about
the evolution of the human species.
We've seized control of our own
evolution without being fully aware
of it, and our bodies are screaming
at us but we're not listening.
Tonight, we're going to listen.

(MORE)

There are tons of cameras in evidence. In fact, almost every
member of the audience has one, from ring-cams like Caprice's
to old-fashioned film-news Auricons, sixties-style Eclairs,
hand-cranked pre-war Bell and Howells, Beaulieu Super-8s,
wind-up Bolexs. RETRO-COVERAGE. You can't really tell the
official media from the amateurs. Everybody's either
transmitting or receiving - their eyes and ears are not
enough.

Here and there we find mixing carts with monitors, guys with
headphones of all kinds, it's hot, it's the centre of
something. But still with a seedy tone, an underground feel.

As we swirl with the crowd, we find some familiar faces: Wippet and Timlin from the Organ Registry; Router and Berst from SleepWare. They are recording and swooning, so excited to be there and to be in the KNOW: those are their clients up there, THEIRS.

And there is someone else there - Daughtery, who is nervously gnawing once again on a strange PURPLE CANDY BAR like the one we saw outside the Organ Registry Building.

There is a general awe of sound when Caprice appears from nowhere, from smoke, sitting on the Sark unit which looks especially deadly in this dramatic lighting, pulled along its skids by two women in vaguely S&M gear.

Caprice JUMPS off the Sark and begins to play with controls embedded in a CARBON-FIBRE BODICE strapped to her chest. Screws and knurled knobs along the side of the Sark rotate and spin, unlocking the Sark's lid, which then swings open with an ominous yawn like a beckoning tomb.

As if responding directly to the buttons on Caprice's bodice plate, Tenser strips down to absolutely nothing, meticulously hanging and folding each item of his clothing on a special rack wheeled out for them.

Tenser SLIDES himself into the Sark, head on a pillow clamp. Caprice plays with more buttons on her breast plate and the cover COMES DOWN OVER TENSER, encasing him in its shell like a beetle, clamped tight at the neck, only the head revealed, sealed into this bizarre suit of armour like Joan of Arc.

The crowd shuffles closer, drawn towards the capsule as if magnetized. The screens show various tight images of the details of the procedure, the Sark's locks and knobs spinning shut, the lid clamping around Tenser's neck, the panel in the lid sliding open on ball bearingss to reveal Tenser's naked chest and abdomen, TENSER'S FACE seen from directly above him, the controlled, frenzied ecstasy.

Now Caprice steps forward and seizes the surgery capsule's controls, begins to shift them like a locomotive engineer STIRRING his machine into life.

From a bewildering variety of crevices, trap doors, sliding panels and irisng channels a bevy of needle-scopes, insertion-scan devices, flesh cutters, saw-toothed probes, vise-like retractors and vibrating scalpels emerge. Ultrasonic spray nozzles to spritz clarifying fluids, suction nozzles to vacuum them back up.

As the crowd watches raptly, the surgical devices CONVERGE on Tenser's chest and abdomen, SLIT open his body in four different places, PLUNGE into the wounds, RUMMAGE around in

his abdominal cavity, SEVER his neo-organ, HAUL it out into the light of day - complete with tattoo.

Then they CAUTERIZE and STAPLE and SEW and GLUE everything back together again.

All of this is visible in exquisite close-ups on the squad of screens, including those recorded by tiny surgical cameras which are the first devices to SUBMERGE into Tenser's body.

And it's all accompanied by a pounding, hypnotic sound track - which is not so loud that you lose the WORDS that Tenser never stops speaking.

TENSER (CONT'D)

As the old saying goes, I'm not feeling any pain. If you were in here with me, you wouldn't be either. And that's the complaint of the body. That's the body saying that we haven't been listening. But I know there's hope, because I feel certain that pain is making a comeback. In my sleep I dream that I'm awake and feeling pain. And then when I wake up, the residue of the dream lingers, and for one beautiful, shining moment, I am in pain.

INT. VICTORIAN BANK - LATER

A BIG PARTY is in full swing in the many interlaced rooms of the Victorian Bank.

Huge photos of the removed and tattooed neo-organ are already on display everywhere, as is the ORGAN itself in a JAR above the bar, with magnifiers in place on all sides and, of course, cameras. The preservative fluid it's in ripples with the base waves of the music that shudders everything in the building.

Wippet and Timlin are getting very drunk, hanging out with the performance crew and spewing food and drink with every fit of laughing.

Caprice and Tenser lounge on a chaise longue near the bar, receiving the many that gather to pay court who sit on chairs and cushions surrounding them, standing and leaning against the fluted pillars.

Caprice occasionally touches TENSER'S WOUNDS to check their healing, wounds which are on full display even though Tenser now once again wears his hat, coat, scarf, gloves, boots.

And at the other end of the bar is Daughtery, sullen, drink in front of him but not drinking, eating another PURPLE CANDY BAR instead. And WATCHING Caprice and Tenser very, very carefully.

Standing next to Daughtery is a very drunk HEAVY MAN, who is scoffing up every canapé and beer nut within range. He is definitely eyeing Daughtery's intriguing purple candy bar as he laughs raucously and talks to Router and Berst, who are still in overalls, but now designer overalls.

BERST

(to Heavy Man)

Yeah, really. I'm a SleepWare technician. Saul Tenser is one of our favourite customers. The work we do for him is technically so challenging, fascinating. His body needs are subtle and they are constantly shifting. We feel, Danni Router and I do, that the Tenser account will force our entire organization into new, exhilarating territory.

Timlin comes over to Tenser's group, subtly works her way through the hangers-on in her low-key aggressive style. When she gets to Tenser, she kneels down behind him and whispers in his ear.

TIMLIN

(to Tenser)

Do you mind if I tell you something intimate?

TENSER

What? Oh, you. No, no. Go ahead.

TIMLIN

Surgery is sex, isn't it?

TENSER

Is it?

TIMLIN

You know it is. Surgery is the new sex.

TENSER

Does there have to be new sex?

TIMLIN

Oh yes. It's time.

(MORE)

TIMLIN (CONT'D)

When I was watching Caprice cut into you, I knew what I was seeing. I wanted...

TENSER

Yes?

TIMLIN

I wanted you to be cutting into me. That's when I knew.

Timlin nuzzles Tenser behind the ear, bites his earlobe, then staggers to her feet and sways her way back to Wippet and the performance crew.

Caprice has, of course, missed nothing.

CAPRICE

What was that all about?

TENSER

Just another epiphany. Art triumphs once again.

ANGLE ON

the Heavy Man, who notices that Daughtery, in order to wipe his mouth with a napkin, has put his half-eaten candy down on the bar.

He is listening to Router, who is now doing her own SleepWare monologue while desperately hanging on to the bar for support.

ROUTER

Saul Tenser is an artist of the inner landscape. The creation of art is often associated with pain, and pain, as we know, is always associated with sleep.

With a MISCHIEVOUS WINK at Router and Berst, the Heavy Man picks up the candy bar, grabs a quick, HUGE BITE, peels back the wrapper a bit to disguise his theft, then replaces it on the bar. Happily chewing now, he pats his own sweaty brow with a napkin and gives the women another wink.

ROUTER (CONT'D)

We at SleepWare specialize in manipulating and modulating the pain of artists, and for us, Saul Tenser is the greatest challenge, so intimate and involving is his art - and the

(MORE)

ROUTER (CONT'D)

nature of his pain. A good night's sleep is a hard thing to define when you are an artist and you seek pain.

As Router talks on, the Heavy Man suddenly begins to CHOKe, to gag, to vomit down his shirt. He collapses, quivering, twitching, now almost taking on the PURPLE HUE of Daughtery's bar. People rush to his side, pull his slimy shirt open, pound on his chest.

Daughtery, who is just finishing off his candy bar, crumples up the wrapper, puts it in his pocket, and moves away from the stricken Heavy Man as unobtrusively as he can.

Router and Berst, hammered though they are, are right in there with the other aid-givers, ready to operate on the spot with swizzle sticks if they have to.

But in the overall hubbub, this little drama is LOST.

INT. NATIONAL ORGAN REGISTRY OFFICE - MORNING

Another in the series of drab, hidden NOR offices.

There are three unoccupied chairs in the room, but Wippet and Timlin are standing side by side with their hands behind their backs and their heads, hang-over wracked, hanging low. Their Boss, BRENT BOSS, paces back and forth in front of them like a drill sergeant. He is big and nasty and he is not in a good mood.

BOSS

Starstruck puppies. Not dignified. Not savoury. Not up to Registry standards. And not low-profile enough. This office is invisible. And its inhabitants, its denizens, its citizens, you, are also invisible. And if you are not, you are disappeared.

Boss pauses to allow reaction. There is only embarrassed silence.

BOSS (CONT'D)

Not going to ask me how I know you went to the Tenser performance? How I know you got falling-down blotto at the post-performance party? I'll tell you. You were seen. It's that simple.

(MORE)

BOSS (CONT'D)

The Registry exists under New Vice legislation to help contain and shape human evolution. It is top secret. It's not a branch of showbiz, like practically everything else these days. If you expose yourselves and the Registry, not just to public ridicule, but merely to public view, you endanger not only your jobs. You get my meaning?

Wippet and Timlin nod glumly.

BOSS (CONT'D)

All right. Somebody wants to talk to you. Don't move.

Boss leaves the room. They don't move.

WIPPET

That's unfair.

TIMLIN

We're on dangerous ground.

WIPPET

(defiant)

We're not just functionaries. We are passionate about our work.

TIMLIN

I love this job. I don't want to lose it.

The door opens and into the room walks a man we have not seen: CHAULK. Tall, red-head, freckles, youthful old face. Definitely been a cop for a long time. He sits in Boss's chair and consults a FOLDER that has been left there.

CHAULK

Sit down.

They sit.

CHAULK (CONT'D)

I'm Detective Chaulk. I'm with New Vice. And you are?

WIPPET

Wippet.

TIMLIN

Timlin.

CHAULK

Yes, good. You have had recent dealings with the performance artist Saul Tenser?

WIPPET

Yes.

CHAULK

And you have a portfolio of all the neo-organs which he has developed and removed?

TIMLIN

(relaxing a bit)

He donated it to us. He was the first to undertake the logging, the archiving, of his inner creations. We call it the Tenser Organography. For him it was an art thing, an artist wanting an systematized record of his art...

WIPPET

But for us, it triggered an awareness of the flow, the significance of these spontaneous growths which many people were experiencing in secret. So now we've begun actually requiring the legal registering of these growths...

TIMLIN

The registering of a genuine, new Saul Tenser internal organ...

WIPPET

It's like discovering a new species of animal...

TIMLIN

Well, really more like discovering a new Picasso...

The pair have now run out of gas. Chaulk looks at them quizzically.

CHAULK

How can a tumorous growth be considered art? Where is the emotional shaping, the philosophical understanding that is basic to all art?

(MORE)

CHAULK (CONT'D)

Look, I have a lump in my neck - you see it? Picasso? Duchamp? Francis Bacon, perhaps? Am I an artist?

TIMLIN

(nervous but not
backing down)

He takes the rebellion of his own body and seizes control of it. Shapes it, tattoos it, displays it, creates theatre out of it. It has meaning, very potent meaning, and many, many people respond to it.

CHAULK

Tattoos it?

INT. NATIONAL ORGAN REGISTRY OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Chaulk is leafing through a PORTFOLIO OF PHOTOS of the many tattooed organs that have been removed from Saul Tenser's body - the Tenser Organography. Wippet and Timlin look on with pride and anxiety.

Each photo has appended next to it a detailed reproduction of the TATTOO which adorns it.

WIPPET

You see, right from the very beginning, after he met Caprice, all his neo-organs were tattooed while they were still in his body.

CHAULK

Caprice is his lover?

TIMLIN

(insistent)

Caprice is his performance partner. She does the tattoos. And the surgery.

Chaulk flips the plastic-covered pages of the portfolio. The tattoos are predominantly abstract and in a bizarre way, brilliant.

CHAULK

Looks to me as though Caprice is the artist. Tenser is just a glorified organ donor.

WIPPET

Well, there are the performances.
(MORE)

WIPPET (CONT'D)

And then, there is the question of will.

CHAULK

Will?

WIPPET

Yes. We believe that on a certain level, perhaps a subconscious one, Saul Tenser wills these new organs to grow.

(pause)

You really ought to get that lump on your neck looked at.

INT. TENSER'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Tenser sleeps in his SpiderWeb bed, but it is a restless sleep, and the servo-motors are having a hard time keeping up with him, hunting and adjusting the slings, straps, cables.

The lights swell up and Caprice comes in. She moves close to Tenser, speaks softly to him.

CAPRICE

(gently)

Saul. Saul, darling. Can you wake up?

A sigh, a moan. Tenser turns, suspended, opens an eye.

CAPRICE (CONT'D)

Saul, your bed says that you're working on something new. Can that be right? So soon?

TENSER

The bed is never wrong. Just ask our friends from SleepWare.

CAPRICE

Is this something we should worry about? The interval between growths seems to be closing up.

TENSER

I'm feeling very creative. I guess. We'll just have to start cutting faster.

Caprice is not convinced. She's worried.

INT. HOCKEY ARENA - NIGHT

We are watching another body-art performance. STELARC (NOTE: an actual performance artist), a wiry Australian in his 40s, is being fitted by three attendants into a BIO-MECHANICAL CONTRAPTION which makes him look like the Terminator after his acid bath.

Another attendant - a young woman in peasant Ukranian dress - is just finishing SEWING HIS LIPS AND EYES SHUT with coarse black thread.

Stelarc's head is shaven in order to accentuate the strangeness of his TWO ADDITIONAL EARS, which sit just behind and above his original ears. They are pretty good replica ears, still reddish at the attachment points, lacking only real ear holes.

Stelarc hums as he breathes, in rhythm with the booming speakers over which his RECORDED VOICE recites a manifesto.

STELARC (O.S.)

The body is obsolete. It is time to redesign the body. As an object, the body can be amplified and accelerated, attaining planetary escape velocity. It is not immune from the human urge to redesign, to improve, to ameliorate. Why not hollow out the body and repack it with technology? It becomes a post-evolutionary projectile, departing and diversifying in form and function. The psycho-social period was characterised by the body circling itself, orbiting itself, illuminating and inspecting itself by physical prodding and metaphysical contemplation. But now, having confronted its image of obsolescence, the body is traumatised.

The performance takes place in a local hockey arena, and the audience is standing around on the ice which still bears the scars of the day's practice sessions. Stelarc and his attendants work on a set of foldout SPECTATOR STANDS which give them several levels to play with.

Scattered here and there in the audience are couples engaged in what Wippet called DESKTOP SURGERY: they are cutting and probing each other in INTIMATE places with highly ORNATE surgical instruments. As usual, pain and disinfection don't seem to be issues.

Once he has been fitted into his bio-suit, Stelarc stands, trailing WIRES and steel-braided hydraulic HOSES, and begins to crush and stomp on various items designed to show off the power of his bio-mechanics. Behind the stands, his effects team work furiously, manipulating several control panels while watching monitors to guide them.

At the edge of the rapt crowd stands Tenser, wearing his usual outfit, still overdressed - despite the ice, the air temperature is moderate and the spectators are dressed accordingly.

A slim, intense middle-aged woman - ADRIENNE BERCEAU - steps next to Tenser. She watches him watching for a moment or two, then speaks quietly to him.

BERCEAU

I don't like the ears.

TENSER

What?

BERCEAU

The ears. They're cute, they're striking, but what do they have to do with the obsolescence of the body? Four ears is not good design. Surround sound? The extra ears don't even work. They're just for show.

TENSER

How do you know?

BERCEAU

I'm Adrienne Berceau. I'm Stelarc's Biomechanics Coordinator. Don't tell him I said this, but he's better with machinery than he is with flesh. Are you working on anything new, Mr. Tenser?

TENSER

I never really know when I'm working on something new. It doesn't seem to be my decision.

BERCEAU

What if it is?

TENSER

If it is?

BERCEAU

The creation of inner beauty cannot be an accident. Forgive me for quoting you and your show. Have you heard of Dr. Nasatir?

TENSER

No.

BERCEAU

You should pay him a visit. Inner beauty is his specialty, as it is yours.

Berceau slips Tenser a BUSINESS CARD as the Stelarc show storms on. She points to a date and an address written on the back of the card.

BERCEAU (CONT'D)

I've booked you an appointment. Go to the address written here.

TENSER

A consultation about a medical problem?

BERCEAU

A consultation about a political problem.

EXT. HOCKEY ARENA - NIGHT

Tenser leaves the Stelarc performance before it is over. He crosses the street, begins to walk home. He soon finds himself walking with somebody, a man, Daughtery, who has materialised out of the shadows.

Tenser is alert but just keeps walking with Daughtery, who mainly looks down at the ground, nodding to himself, working himself up to speaking. Finally.

DAUGHTERY

I've got a concept for you.

TENSER

Yeah?

DAUGHTERY

Yeah. It came to me when I noticed you use a Sark unit in your show. The Sark was originally an autopsy module. Did you know that?

TENSER

I knew that.

DAUGHTERY

Have you ever thought of using it for a real autopsy? As part of your show?

TENSER

Perform an autopsy on a corpse?

DAUGHTERY

I've got a corpse for you. A special corpse.

Tenser risks a sidelong glance at Daughtery. The man is CRYING quietly, sniffs back tears.

DAUGHTERY (CONT'D)

Yeah. You could do a live autopsy on a dead body. There would be surprises. I can guarantee a few surprises.

TENSER

What corpse are you talking about?

DAUGHTERY

My son. Eight years old.

TENSER

Why is he a corpse?

DAUGHTERY

His mother murdered him. Wouldn't that be good raw material for a performance?

TENSER

You have the body of your son?

DAUGHTERY

I have it. He's my son.

TENSER

Wow.

DAUGHTERY

Yeah. I know. How radical are you? You afraid of a little emotion?

TENSER

I'm afraid of everything.

INT. TENSER'S BREAKFAST ROOM - MORNING

Tenser is in his SleepWare BreakFaster chair, trying to eat.

Caprice knocks at the door. Tenser gives up his attempts at eating. He massages his throat.

TENSER

Come in.

Caprice comes in, closes the door, paces. She looks at his ceramic tray, still full of his odd but vaguely recognizable food.

CAPRICE

You're not eating.

TENSER

The throat thing is very severe today.
It won't open.

CAPRICE

What's going on?

TENSER

I'm not sure.

CAPRICE

You were out for a very long time
yesterday.

TENSER

It's not my allergies. In fact, they
haven't been bothering me. It's
strange.

CAPRICE

Are you in discomfort?

TENSER

It's a compelling fullness. Not a
completely bad feeling. At least,
not uninteresting.

(pause)

I went to see the Stelarc.

CAPRICE

How was it?

TENSER

The usual. It was packed.

CAPRICE

Jealous?

TENSER

Of course. But that's not it. I met a guy. On the street. He had an idea for a show.

INT. TENSER'S OPERATING THEATRE - MORNING

Caprice is in the Sark unit, naked. The lid is open. Tenser is playing with the controls. SHARP PROBES and CUTTING WHEELS are hovering over her body.

CAPRICE

So, I'm the boy's corpse. We'd have to modify the Sark. Convert it back into an autopsy module.

TENSER

I don't know where the law is on "acts degrading to human remains". We'd have to be outrageous to make it worthwhile. We'd have to go deep.

CAPRICE

We've broken the law before. They don't seem to want to touch you. It's probably the former cop thing.

TENSER

They're more likely to bust me. They considered it a betrayal when I left.

CAPRICE

The bust can be part of the show. We can share a cell.

TENSER

I'm not sure how we'd play the inner beauty angle. This guy, Daughtery, he said there'd be surprises when we opened the kid up. He wouldn't tell me what he meant.

Tenser is starting to CUT her.

TENSER (CONT'D)

Oops. Sorry. That was the machinery talking.

CAPRICE

That was you talking. Keep going.

TENSER

Really?

CAPRICE
So far so good.

He cuts her more, very sexually.

TENSER
You could be on the inside for the
next show.

CAPRICE
Maybe. But maybe this is just for
us.

Tenser programs the controls, lets go of them. They operate
without him. He CLIMBS on top of her in the Sark. The cutters
cut them both as he kisses her.

EXT. EXPRESSWAY - NIGHT

Under the expressway, Tenser paces back and forth, waits for
somebody. It's deserted and quiet.

A man EMERGES from the shadows and approaches Tenser, and we
soon see that it's Chaulk. Tenser backs away from him, doesn't
know him, not the right meet.

CHAULK
It's all right. I'm the new Richler.
Detective Chaulk. New Vice Unit.

TENSER
Where's the old Richler?

CHAULK
He's with Homicide now.

TENSER
Why?

CHAULK
He wasn't imaginative enough. How're
you feeling?

TENSER
What do you mean?

Chaulk nudges Tenser's abdomen.

CHAULK
Got anything cooking in there?

TENSER
Your imagination's working overtime.

CHAULK

I saw your portfolio. You're very prolific. It must be exhausting.

TENSER

I could live without it.

CHAULK

Could you? You'd come back to the force? New Vice?

TENSER

I'm kinda there now, aren't I?

CHAULK

Kinda. Listen, illuminate me. Why is Saul Tenser doing undercover? I mean, you seem pretty deep into that body-art stuff.

TENSER

What I'm saying with that body-art stuff is that I don't like what's happening with the body. In particular, I don't like what's happening with my body, which is why I keep cutting it up.

CHAULK

Huh. Your partner, Caprice. She's in the dark about this? The under the covers?

TENSER

Yeah.

CHAULK

Totally?

TENSER

Yeah.

CHAULK

She can't read your insides? There aren't any traces there that say "undercover cop"?

TENSER

You really are imaginative.

CHAULK

I told you. What have you got for me?

(MORE)

Tenser hands Chaulk the business card he got from Berceau.
Chaulk looks at it.

CHAULK (CONT'D)

(reading card)

Dr. Nasatir. Cosmetic surgery.

(to Tenser)

So?

TENSER

Someone contacted me at the Stelarc
show.

CHAULK

I heard it was a good show. Very
disturbing. Four ears. Wow. Got to
be good.

TENSER

It was OK if you like escapist
propaganda.

(pause)

This someone talked to me about my
take on inner beauty. Said I should
really consult with a doctor. Dr.
Nasatir.

CHAULK

Inner beauty, huh? That's right up
your alley.

TENSER

I guess that's why she was talking
to me.

CHAULK

OK, good. Follow it up. Find out
what it means. What else?

TENSER

Why is your body-crime unit called
New Vice? I don't get the vice part.

CHAULK

Somebody in the Bureau thought it
was sexier than Evolutionary
Derangement. Sexier means easier
funding. Anything else?

TENSER

Yeah.

(pause)

You have a woman named Djuna Daughtery
in the Metro Pen.

CHAULK

We have? New Vice has her?

TENSER

Probably just Old Homicide. She's in for murder, murdered her own kid.

CHAULK

Yeah, well?

TENSER

I need to talk to her.

INT. DENTAL CLINIC - EVENING

Tenser and Caprice are watching another performance, this one by a FAMOUS NEWSCASTER who is having only slightly glorified dental surgery on a makeshift stage set up in the middle of a very posh open-plan dental clinic.

The crowd here is different. They're very gentry and sleek. They're here to see the Famous Newscaster in a vulnerable moment.

ONE COUPLE, obviously bored and rebellious, are engaged in their own bout of desktop surgery. They're using a dental instrument tray on a stand as their mini-operating table and DENTAL INSTRUMENTS ferreted out of some still-open drawers to express their affection for each other. The square audience roundly ignores them.

The dentist chair is basically a dentist chair. The Newscaster wears his ANCHORISH screen clothes, and his dentist wears his designer surgery outfit, as do his two ultra-photogenic female assistants. The only recording crew in evidence is from the Newscaster's own station - the camera markings match the logo on his screens.

There is a tiny camera worn on a HEADBAND by the dentist so the everyone can look into the Newscaster's mouth as his wisdom teeth are being pulled. Four screens are devoted to this.

Tenser and Caprice exchange glances that say: it would be funny if it weren't so depressing. Everybody's doing it.

Screens set up on the walls show video of the newscaster's nightly news shows - clips from his most dramatic moments. He is basically a news anchor pretty boy, and his surgery is not pretty.

On the largest screen we see the newscaster at his NEWS DESK, but what he is saying was obviously meant as part of his performance.

It consists of not-very-witty arabesques on the MOUTH/TALK THEME.

NEWSCASTER (O.S.)

I talk for a living, but what comes
out of my mouth is not my life. Etc.

Tenser scans the crowd. Nothing much doing. The body-art underground knows it's a fake, a VANITY PERFORMANCE, and they've stayed away.

INT. NATIONAL ORGAN REGISTRY OFFICE - DAY

Another drab NOR office - or have we been in this one before? Hard to tell. Chaulk and Boss sit across a desk from each other.

BOSS

Your assessment?

CHAULK

He's very volatile, very unstable.
He's more them than he is us.

BOSS

That can be good.

CHAULK

It's the old story. The perfect
undercover agent fuses with his cover
and forgets he's an agent. Perfection
but useless. It could happen with
Tenser.

BOSS

We can pull him.

CHAULK

Not yet. He's still functioning as
an agent.

BOSS

His body? What do you think?

CHAULK

His body is his seal of authenticity.
As long as he keeps cutting himself
up and pulling those things out,
who's gonna blow the whistle on him?

BOSS

I mean, if his body changes his
mind...

Chaulk makes a hammer-coming-down-on-a-firing-pin gesture with his thumb and index finger.

CHAULK

Then we change our minds.

EXT. ROUTER AND BERST'S SHOP - DAY

A concrete-block former gas station now bears a sign reading "ROUTER AND BERST - AUTHORIZED SLEEPWARE REPAIRS". The intersection of two desolate suburban streets.

INT. ROUTER AND BERST'S SHOP - DAY

In the middle of their Spartan but very clean and orderly work space, Router and Berst have bolted Tenser's Sark unit onto an immense STEEL ROTATING WORKSTAND. They have the machine partially dismantled, and its complex insides are strewn over a variety of metal-topped tables and tool cabinets.

Along the walls of the shop stand several SleepWare products, mostly chairs - we've seen one of them, the BreakFaster - that have come in for repairs. Caprice wanders amongst these sculpturally provocative machines while Router and Berst chatter on as they work. They're wearing their working overalls and boots, but not much else.

ROUTER

The Sark was originally a coroners' autopsy sarcophagus. When they went out of style in the medical profession, they took on a new life as artists' supplies.

BERST

I've heard that some Sarks that were modified for performance surgery have been really brutally hacked around, but this one was converted by someone with a very delicate touch. It's in beautiful shape.

ROUTER

Where's your partner?

CAPRICE

Saul likes me do the techno dog work.
(picks up something sharp)
Keeps me in touch with my roots.

ROUTER

I heard he used to be a cop.

CAPRICE

He used to be.

BERST

They say you can't just turn it off.
The cop thing.

CAPRICE

(shrugs)

Do they? They say that?

Caprice is paying no attention to the working duo. Router nudges Berst, lays down her tools, and begins to SLIP OFF her overalls. Berst suppresses a laugh and begins to do the same.

ROUTER

What happened to him?

CAPRICE

The body-growth thing. They won't let you be a cop when you're cutting yourself open all the time.

BERST

So, it wasn't his choice?

CAPRICE

Hard to tell. Things all came together. Me and it. The condition, I mean.

BERST

Is there a name for it?

CAPRICE

Accelerated Evolution Syndrome. Your body gets very inventive and throws a lot of new stuff at you. I guess it wants to see what sticks for the next generation. There seems to be a lot of it around.

ROUTER

But Tenser isn't letting anything stick, is he? I mean, not if he gets rid of it all - the new, improved body parts?

CAPRICE

It's pathological. It's not healthy. It's a breakdown of the system. An organism needs organisation. Otherwise, it's just designer cancer.

BERST

Hey, Caprice. Check us out!

Caprice, cruising the SleepWare repair items, hasn't been looking at the Sark mechanics for the last minute or two - and neither have we. She turns in their direction now and bursts out laughing.

The two women have shed their overalls and have somehow INSTALLED themselves stark naked in the partially dismantled chassis of the Sark. Their chunky bodies are intertwined and adorned with electrical wires and machine pieces and their arms are outstretched in a theatrical TADDA! posture.

BERST (CONT'D)

Whaddya think? Do we gotta future in performance here?

EXT. DOCTOR NASATIR'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Tenser makes his way down a street to Dr. Nasatir's address and finds himself looking up at a modern highrise that is already showing signs of decay.

INT. HALLWAY. DOCTOR NASATIR'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Tenser walks down the hallway, finally finds Dr. Nasatir's door, knocks. A man with rolled-up sleeves opens the door. He is Eastern, but not quite Asian - Turkish, perhaps - and he is letting someone else out, a very young man, maybe eighteen. The young man flashes a knowing look at Tenser.

YOUNG MAN

Thank you, Doctor.

(laughs)

I feel so much more open.

As the young man walks away down the hall, DR. NASATIR turns to Tenser.

NASATIR

Saul Tenser. Come on in.

INT. DOCTOR NASATIR'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Tenser enters Nasatir's apartment. A quick look around suggests that this is indeed the Doctor's apartment, and not a doctor's office in the normal sense. A 60s abortionist-style setup.

NASATIR

This is very exciting.

TENSER

Is it?

NASATIR

Seeing you here - it's like a lightning bolt from the blue. It strikes you very hard and very convincingly. Let me take your coat.

Tenser hesitates.

TENSER

I'd prefer to keep it on, if you don't mind. I get cold.

NASATIR

(shrugs)

If you don't mind staining.

(gestures)

Please.

INT. DOCTOR NASATIR'S APARTMENT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Nasatir leads Tenser into his kitchen. He gestures towards the KITCHEN TABLE.

NASATIR

Please. Just hop up on there and expose your abdomen.

Tenser finds a plastic step-stool at the foot of the table. He steps on it and sits, starts opening his coat, his vest, his shirt.

TENSER

Tell me about the lightning bolt.

NASATIR

Saul Tenser and the Inner Beauties.
It's a marriage made in heaven.

Nasatir now starts to PROBE Tenser's very scarred abdomen.

NASATIR (CONT'D)

Perhaps you'd better lie down.

TENSER

(lying down)

The Inner Beauties.

Nasatir draws a LINE across Tenser's abdomen with his very long, elegant index finger.

NASATIR

I propose to install the rip-lock here. It will give you maximum access.

TENSER

Access to what?

Nasatir laughs, then turns to his kitchen counter top where he finds a sewing kit box. He opens it and removes a device that looks like a PORTABLE HEM-STITCHER, only nasty. He turns back to Tenser and begins to apply the device to the proposed cut line on Tenser's abdomen. BLOOD flows.

NASATIR

For a man of your experience, this will be nothing.

And in truth it does seem to be nothing to Tenser. He barely seems to notice the surgery he's undergoing.

TENSER

I believe I'm here to discuss my political problem.

NASATIR

I wasn't aware you had one.

TENSER

I wasn't either, but Adrienne Berceau seems to think I do.

NASATIR

Ah, Adrienne. She's so dramatic. Listen. Me, I'm just a mechanic, an installer of doors and windows into the future. The politics will come soon, when you are registered.

TENSER

Registered for what?

NASATIR

(a kindly, bemused smile)

He doesn't even know.

(pause)

For the Inner Beauty Pageant. I'm sure you'll be a contender.

INT. TENSER'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Another kitchen. Caprice finishes a fairly conventional meal while Tenser watches, prods his new RIP-LOCK, which is basically a plastic zipper built into his flesh.

TENSER

How's the Sark coming along?

CAPRICE

Our SleepWare friends are very...
how can I put it? Very playful.

TENSER

Is that a good thing?

CAPRICE

They love it to death, that piece of
machinery. They literally salivate
on it. They won't hurt it.

(indicates rip-lock)

What's this? Cut yourself shaving?

TENSER

I seem to be a contestant in the
Inner Beauty Pageant. It's very hush-
hush. Might not be quite legal.

CAPRICE

(touching it)

The things you drag home.

TENSER

I'm going to enter in the category
of Best Original Organ Based On No
Known Function.

(indicates rip-lock)

This is like a raincoat for internal
organ flashers.

Tenser arches back over the edge of the table and RIPS open
his rip-lock. Sure enough, we see internal organs pulsating
and quivering and juicing. Caprice is excited. She delicately
touches.

CAPRICE

(excited)

Wow. A whole new world opens up.

(depressed)

Wait a minute. Have we just been
made obsolete?

Tenser zips back up and sits up.

TENSER

No, of course not. This is just a
functional thing. It's a zippered
fly or a velcro flap. It's not art.
It's not sensual.

(MORE)

TENSER (CONT'D)

Remember what our Registry friend said: sex is surgery. A zipper can't replace our Sark.

CAPRICE

I think she said, "Surgery is the new sex." Besides, velcro has its own sex appeal.

Caprice sidles over to Tenser and we hear the sound of a rip-lock being UNRIPPED.

TENSER

Careful. Don't spill.

She goes down on his access flap, out of frame. Tenser's head rolls back and he moans in ecstasy.

EXT. METROPOLITAN PENITENTIARY - DAY

Tenser stands outside what seems to be just another bland low-rent highrise.

After a beat, he enters the building, and we read a small, embossed metal plaque that reads: METROPOLITAN PENITENTIARY, and below that a plastic sign that reads: PLEASE PREPARE IDENTIFICATION.

INT. METROPOLITAN PENITENTIARY. INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

Tenser sits across a lunch table from a woman we have seen before - DJUNA DAUGHTERY. She looks even more tired and frazzled than before, but still has the same CRAZED intensity in her eyes and body posture.

The prison interview room is low-ceilinged and depressing in its total lack of drama or danger. It looks like an office lunchroom. There are two other interviews going on in the room, family affairs, both very subdued.

DJUNA

He ate a plastic wastepaper basket.
What would you do?

TENSER

I wouldn't kill him. A little kid.
My own son.

DJUNA

(contemptuous)

But he wouldn't be your own son. He
wouldn't even be a little kid.

TENSER

What would he be?

DJUNA

A creature. A thing. A thing my husband invented to torment me.

TENSER

A thing that can eat a plastic wastepaper basket.

DJUNA

Eat it and enjoy it and eat nothing but plastic and weird synthetic stuff.
(maniacal laugh)
He would take that watch that you're wearing and he'd have it for lunch.

TENSER

He could digest plastic?

DJUNA

He had this weird, thick white drool that he'd slurp over everything. It was like acid. It'd dissolve any kind of plasticky stuff. It would sting if you got it on your skin. Didn't bother him, though. That lizard.

TENSER

Your husband is Lang Daughtery.

DJUNA

Was. Was my husband. I've disowned him. Fuck him.

TENSER

He invented your son?

DJUNA

Yeah. That's how I think of it. And here's another thing I think of. The thought of that slimy worm growing in me still makes me sick. I'm glad I didn't know it at the time. I would have gone crazy.

TENSER

The police tell me they haven't found the body of your son Brecken. I get the feeling they don't think you really killed him.

DJUNA
I confess and they don't believe me.
(laughs)
The perfect crime.

TENSER
You confessed.

DJUNA
Yeah.

TENSER
Why?

The slightest hitch in her voice. The slightest TRACE of regret. But only slight. Tenser thinks that she's the non-human.

DJUNA
I'm guilty.

TENSER
Where's the body?

DJUNA
Lang has it. Unless he's thrown it away.

TENSER
How did he get it?

DJUNA
I left it for him. My little divorce present.

TENSER
What is Lang going to do with the body?

DJUNA
Maybe him and his cannibal friends are going to eat it. Who the fuck knows? Who the fuck cares?

TENSER
His friends are cannibals?

DJUNA
(laughs)
If you're a Barbie Doll, then they're cannibals.

TENSER

If the police found Brecken's body
and did an autopsy, what do you think
they'd find inside it?

DJUNA

(laughs)
Outer space.

INT. SPA BEAUTY SPA - DAY

In the vast, marble-tiled space of the Spa Beauty Spa, amid the deep hair-washing sinks and the leather pump-action swivel chairs, the performance artist ORLAN (NOTE: an actual performance artist) lies draped on a classic chaise-longue with her FACE OPENED UP by a plastic surgeon.

IMPLANTS in her forehead, her cheeks, her chin; collagen in her lips, her brows.

On small screens mounted everywhere we see the various SURGERIES that preceded this one, and the models of CLASSICAL feminine beauty upon which her performances are based.

We see the chin of Botticelli's Venus, the forehead of the Mona Lisa, the eyes of Gerome's Psyche, the lips of Moreau's Europa: all images isolated by computer and mapped over images of her own face to indicate her surgical destination.

Other screens and speakers pump out challenges to notions of female beauty, human aesthetics, sexuality.

And Orlan herself speaks - with difficulty - as the work goes on.

ORLAN

My art is carnal art, not body art.
Art is a matter of life and death.
Being a narcissist isn't easy when
the question is not of loving your
own image, but of recreating the
self through deliberate acts of
alienation. I'm not trying to make
myself beautiful. On the contrary. I
am attracted to plastic surgery
because it is a fight against nature,
the idea of God, the programmed, the
DNA which is in charge of
representation. I believe the body
is not sacred, as religion taught
us, it is just a costume that can be
changed, a "ready-made" that can
easily be remade.

The crowd is relatively small, maybe thirty-five people, not kids, educated, well-dressed. There are many cameras in evidence, but few retro-cams, mostly ring-cams, earring-cams. A SERIOUS group, not there just for fun.

And they are thinking hard as Orlan and her crew quietly DELUGE them with images, concepts and blood, and among those thinking hard are Caprice and, somewhere at the edges, Wippet. No Timlin, no Tenser.

INT. SPA BEAUTY SPA - LATER

A low-key but intense post-performance party is in progress, with a very small group in attendance. One couple is engaged in some PLAYFUL desktop surgery involving FEET, but for the rest, it's drinking and conversation.

Wippet has corralled Caprice, but she's really got her eye on Orlan, who is surrounded by her crew and a few hangers-on.

WIPPET

Where's Mr. Tenser?

CAPRICE

(distracted)

He's doing some research. Where's your friend Timlin?

WIPPET

She was intimidated.

CAPRICE

By whom?

WIPPET

We've been forbidden to mingle. It's now become part of the job description. I'm risking my career just being here, but I can't stay away.

(mischievous smile)

I've got the fever.

Caprice can see that Orlan is about to make an exit.

CAPRICE

Forgive me. I've got to talk to her before she goes.

Wippet smiles and takes another drink from the washstand which is being used as an impromptu bar. He's nervous and he's looking for REGISTRY SPIES, but he's not going to leave.

INT. SPA BEAUTY SPA - MOMENTS LATER

Caprice talks to Orlan, who smiles, touches her arm, responds to her with great warmth. Orlan has a heavy French accent and, at the moment, a very BRUISED and STITCHED-TOGETHER face.

ORLAN

You have no idea how hard it's been for me to find plastic surgeons who understand that I do not wish to be made more beautiful.

CAPRICE

Surgeons tend to be very focussed and unimaginative. It's considered a strength.

(pause)

I was a surgeon myself. Not cosmetic surgery. Trauma.

ORLAN

(enjoying the word)

Trauma. But that's very provocative. I enjoy trauma. What I do to myself is very traumatic.

CAPRICE

Is it? You seem so peaceful, so beatific while your surgery is going on. Watching you suddenly filled me with the desire to cut my face open.

(coy sip of her drink)

It was a feeling that shocked me.

ORLAN

(flirtatious)

A desire to be open is often the beginning of something new and exciting. Perhaps you would like to join me and the troupe at the hotel later this evening?

INT. TENSER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Caprice has come back from her Orlan evening with a slightly MODIFIED FOREHEAD.

She sprouts TINY HORNS on her brow, just below her hairline, like antler buds on a young deer. Tenser examines her stitches, presses around the horns. (NOTE: The stitches and redness will disappear in a few scenes, but the buds remain until the end.)

TENSER
(examining her face)
A desire to be open?

CAPRICE
Metaphorically. Emotionally.
Artistically.

TENSER
You want to take over the Brecken
show.

CAPRICE
I want to perform the autopsy. I
want to perform.

TENSER
Well, this is new.

CAPRICE
Yes, it is.

TENSER
You were too shy before.

CAPRICE
I'm not too shy now. I think. Will
you have something new for the show?
We could definitely work in a Tenser
extraction. Double Autopsy.

TENSER
I do have something cooking. Maybe a
few things. But I'm happy to let
them stay inside for now.

CAPRICE
That might not be healthy.

TENSER
We could extract privately if it's a
problem. Doesn't have to be a
performance.

CAPRICE
Don't let it go too long.

TENSER
How was Orlan's show?

CAPRICE
It was brilliant. She's exhilarating.
(pause)
She says hello.

TENSER

Hello.

CAPRICE

I want to do more than perform. I want to construct. I want to construct the Brecken show.

TENSER

It already has an innate structure. A murdered boy. A very strange boy. A public autopsy. Some surprises.

CAPRICE

I want to work with it. It's juicy with meaning.

TENSER

You'll have to meet Daughtery, the boy's father. You'll have to convince him.

CAPRICE

I'll convince him.

INT. GOVERNMENT BUILDING. HALLWAY - DAY

Tenser stands outside the door labelled N.O.REGISTRY. The door opens and Wippet is there. Wippet smiles a huge, NERVOUS smile.

WIPPET

Saul Tenser. Come on in.

INT. NATIONAL ORGAN REGISTRY OFFICE - DAY

TENSER

What's up?

WIPPET

I want your advice as a neo-organ generator. I want to show you our safe room.

INT. NATIONAL ORGAN REGISTRY OFFICE. SAFE ROOM - DAY

Another room that looks like all the others - and yet, there is something about it.

WIPPET

This is where we archive our more provocative material.

TENSER

I thought it was all provocative.

Wippet turns to face Tenser. He is GIDDY and childlike and excited, flushed.

WIPPET

You, you provoke us. You provoke me.

(giddy)

I'm so glad you're with us. It makes such emotional sense.

TENSER

Who's us?

WIPPET

(giddy laugh)

I'm the one. I'm the Registrar for the Inner Beauty Pageant. Shhh. Don't tell.

TENSER

Registration seems to be your strong suit.

WIPPET

I think you've got a good chance to win your category. If I were you, I'd even go for Best In Show.

TENSER

I'm not sure I'll have anything to show. I might have to fake it.

Wippet's face clouds over. There is suddenly an element of DANGER there, something we haven't seen before.

WIPPET

(a sea change)

Speaking of faking it. I said it makes emotional sense for you to be with the Inner Beauties, and it does. But you know, it doesn't make logical sense.

TENSER

No?

WIPPET

No. The Inner Beauty Pageant is all about acceptance. Acknowledgement. Aesthetic empowerment.

(MORE)

WIPPET (CONT'D)

You, Saul Tenser, you're all about anger, rebellion, rejection by scalpel.

TENSER

Sounds exciting.

WIPPET

Oh it is. You are exciting. The excitement of the scorched inner earth. But I have to ask myself, why would Saul Tenser want to join an event which celebrates the inventiveness of the new human body, when he's made a career out of rejecting that body, hacking it to pieces in public, raging against it?

Tenser pauses, turns as if to leave, hand on the door handle.

TENSER

This has been a mistake, hasn't it? You're right. I'd be a fish out of water at your little secret event.

Wippet lunges towards Tenser MELODRAMATICALLY, almost grabs his hand, doesn't, begins to sob, hands to face.

WIPPET

(sobbing)

Don't go! We need you! We want you! It'll fall apart without you!

Tenser is taken aback. He has to work hard to keep from LAUGHING.

TENSER

What if I win for best original organ and then I rip it out in public at my next show? Wouldn't that humiliate your group?

Wippet regains his composure with surprising swiftness, only a few stray snuffles.

WIPPET

(regaining composure)

It's star power. We'll settle. Whatever you want. And maybe, yes, maybe, you'll begin to see it our way.

Tenser lets go of the door handle.

TENSER

So, OK, we rewind. I'm here to register for the Inner Beauty Pageant.

WIPPET

Yes, exactly. Well, I'm the one who's going to certify your rip-lock. Dr. Nasatir is lovely, isn't he? A very refined and elegant man. And once we've done that, we decide what category you'll compete in, and how you'd like to present yourself. Can we burrow through those layers of clothing, please? I'm so excited!

INT. GOVERNMENT BUILDING. HALLWAY - DAY

Tenser walks down the dismal hallway towards the light, the front doors. Halfway down it he is INTERCEPTED by a sprightly Timlin, loping like a gazelle.

TIMLIN

Mr. Tenser? Saul?

TENSER

Yes? Oh, it's you.

TIMLIN

Could you come into my office?

INT. NATIONAL ORGAN REGISTRY. TIMLIN'S OFFICE - DAY

Timlin's office is just a variation on the government theme. There are three chairs in her office, but they don't sit. They pace, they dance a slow PAS DE DEUX.

TIMLIN

You were just with Mr. Wippet.

TENSER

I was.

TIMLIN

I'm very worried about him.

TENSER

He seemed to be in fine form.

TIMLIN

It's a very dangerous form that he's in.

TENSER

I don't understand.

TIMLIN

In our line of work it's very easy to be dazzled by the glamour of the performance world, the charismatic people we meet, like, well, like you.

TENSER

I see.

TIMLIN

Do you?

TENSER

Maybe not. Tell me.

TIMLIN

This is our world. This office, this building. From the centre of it, deep within it, a beautiful white light emanates outwards. That light is you, what you create, and those like you.

Timlin gets physically closer to Tenser as she speaks. He slips subtly away, but she subtly pursues, as though drawn by his GRAVITATIONAL PULL.

TIMLIN (CONT'D)

It is hard for us, drab little bureaucratic insects that we are, not to be drawn into your powerful gravitational field. Hurtling towards you, plunging into your black hole that pulls all light into it. We want to follow that light, fuse with that light.

TENSER

Has Wippet done some fusing, do you think?

TIMLIN

He is drawn to inner beauty.

TENSER

Is he playing games with subversive groups? Is that what you mean?

Timlin begins to cry, collapses on Tenser's chest, hugs him, nuzzles him.

TIMLIN

I'm so fond of him, but I think I
might have to turn him in.

Tenser kisses her temple in a soothing, brotherly way.

TENSER

(kisses her)

Don't do that.

(pause)

How safe is this room?

TIMLIN

Totally. You can be open with me.

TENSER

Yeah. Open. Have you ever run across
a neo-organ, or rather, a system of
neo-organs, that had a digestive
function? A system that could digest
synthetics, plastics, that sort of
thing?

TIMLIN

No. That sounds interesting, though.
We've only seen single organ growths
here, like yours. Of course, nobody
knows what would happen if those
growths were allowed to accumulate.
Do you think they actually could
develop - oops, I almost said evolve,
but I didn't - develop into an actual
organ system, like the nervous system,
the circulatory system, the
lymphatic...?

They have become TANGLED UP in an awkward, half-embrace.

TENSER

You're very good with human
physiology.

TIMLIN

Do you think you'd ever let me be
part of your show? I'd love to be in
that Sark module with you at the
controls.

TENSER

That would definitely fall into the
category of New Vice.

TIMLIN

That's where I live.

Timlin grabs Tenser and sticks her tongue down his throat. For a moment, some SERIOUS KISSING ensues, but Tenser finally pulls away.

TENSER

I'm sorry, I'm just not very good at the old sex.

INT. DOCTOR NASATIR'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Doctor Nasatir is in his apartment eating dinner. He is in a SLEEPWARE BREAKFASTER CHAIR. It fidgets and adjusts as he struggles to eat with the by-now-familiar odd eating implements.

There is a KNOCK at the door. Annoyed, Nasatir levers himself out of his chair and goes to the door, opens it.

It's Router and Berst, TOOLBOXES in hand, ready for work.

ROUTER

Doctor Nasatir?

NASATIR

(wary)

Yes?

BERST

Router and Berst of SleepWare.
Authorized technicians.

ROUTER

You called us, we're here.

NASATIR

(confused)

Did I call you?

BERST

A paradigm shift in your BreakFaster chair.

NASATIR

Yes, that's true. But I'm just eating now.

Router and Berst smile and nod at each other.

ROUTER

Perfect timing.

EXT. RURAL TRAILERS AND ACCESSORIES - NIGHT

Somewhere in an industrial wasteland set down in the middle of the countryside, we look at a nondescript INDUSTRIAL PLAZA.

We follow Daughtery as he walks towards it, eating a purple candy bar. He comes to a slab-steel door marked: RURAL TRAILERS AND ACCESSORIES. He knocks on the door. It is opened by a slight, bearded man - TARR. They shake hands warmly.

DAUGHTERY

Tarr.

TARR

Lang. Everybody's here.

INT. RURAL TRAILERS AND ACCESSORIES - NIGHT

A group of about FORTY PEOPLE are sitting around at a series of steel workshop tables. They are all quietly eating MEALS on paper plates. The meals, prepared by two solemn men and one woman, are basically chopped-up purple bars and some other strange, SHINY SYNTHETIC MUSH. There is a RITUAL feeling to this eating without any obvious trappings of ritual.

Humming along around them is a grungy, man-powered ASSEMBLY LINE which is producing these meals and MANY VARIETIES OF PURPLE BAR - some are bread-loaf sized - along with vats grinding up the basic ingredients, spouts pouring the stuff into molds, fixers which dry the resulting bars out, and a hand-operated vacuum-wrapper which sucks the metallic plastic wrappers around the bars and seals them.

TARR

Why don't you take a load off? Toss that mini-bar and have some mush. It's a new brew. Got some fabulous polyethylenes. You won't believe the snap in your throat.

DAUGHTERY

Tarr, if we have to move the commune, I mean, the whole operation, the assembly line, everything - how quick can it be?

TARR

You're expecting problems?

DAUGHTERY

I'm going ahead with the Brecken autopsy. I'm going to seal it tonight with Saul Tenser and his people.

(MORE)

DAUGHTERY (CONT'D)

Finally, what we're doing is going to be very public, and it's going to resonate.

TARR

You sure this is the best way? Putting your son's murder at the centre of it makes it very personal, Lang. Wouldn't it be better for you to get some distance on it?

DAUGHTERY

(a wry laugh)

I keep my son's body in my freezer. That's a distance of about five inches. And that's as far away as it's ever going to get.

INT. DAUGHTERY'S PLACE - NIGHT

We are looking at Daughtery's FREEZER, a large floor unit. Daughtery is standing beside it, looking out the window at the street. Tenser and Caprice are standing on the sidewalk looking up at him.

Daughtery raises his hand in acknowledgement, then lowers his blinds. He sits on his bed and waits. The room is small, dominated by the freezer. A cheap furnished room in a cheap hotel.

The knock at the door. Daughtery gets up and lets Tenser and Caprice in. Daughtery gestures with a laugh.

DAUGHTERY

(laughs)

Sit anywhere you like.

They sit, Caprice on the bed, Tenser on a metal folding chair. Daughtery leans against the freezer.

TENSER

This is Caprice. She's my partner.

DAUGHTERY

Hi. Yeah. I've seen your work. Beautiful.

CAPRICE

(instant glow)

Thank you.

TENSER

(pause)

I talked to your wife.

DAUGHTERY

(tense)

Did you? Why did you do that?

TENSER

I wanted to know what we were getting into.

DAUGHTERY

Do you know now?

TENSER

Not exactly.

DAUGHTERY

Maybe we should start with this.

Daughtery steps back from the freezer, UNLATCHES the lid and swings it wide open. The inside cold seems to breathe into the room. Tenser and Caprice exchange nervous glances. Daughtery catches it.

DAUGHTERY (CONT'D)

Don't you want to take a look at your raw material?

Tenser and Caprice stand up and drift over to the freezer. Inside, curled up in the foetal position, is the BODY OF BRECKEN, beautiful, blonde, icy blue.

Tears spring into Caprice's eyes. She turns away, sits back down on the bed. Tenser looks down at the frozen corpse, drilling into it with his eyes. Daughtery gives him a few more seconds, then gently CLOSES the freezer lid.

CAPRICE

(to Tenser)

I don't think we should do this.

DAUGHTERY

Maybe you shouldn't.

TENSER

But it's obvious that you really want us to. Why do you?

DAUGHTERY

I need to make a statement. A very public statement.

TENSER

Wouldn't a formal police autopsy
make that statement?

DAUGHTERY

(laughs)

It would be covered up. You'd never
hear a thing.

CAPRICE

(shaky)

Performance art is all consensual.
This would be different. This would
be... different.

DAUGHTERY

You'll have my consent. Brecken isn't
talking.

(to Tenser)

I'm sure you realize that Djuna
doesn't care what happens to her
son's body.

TENSER

I got the feeling she was obsessed
with his body. Especially his
digestive system.

DAUGHTERY

Ah, well.

Daughtery pulls out a purple candy bar. The wrapper has been
opened and folded back over the half that's left. Daughtery
opens the shiny wrapper to expose the purple bar itself.

DAUGHTERY (CONT'D)

(to Tenser)

Ever eaten one of these?

TENSER

Never seen one of those before.

DAUGHTERY

Go ahead. I think it'll be a
revelation.

TENSER

I'm very fussy about my food.

DAUGHTERY

So was Brecken.

(takes a bite)

So am I.

(MORE)

DAUGHTERY (CONT'D)

(chews)

Does the EatWare application work for you? I looked at those BreakFaster chairs from SleepWare in a showroom window once. The way they adjust every little part of your body to make chewing, swallowing and digesting easy. At one point in my life I thought they might be the answer.

TENSER

To what question?

DAUGHTERY

The eating problem that I have, that Brecken had... and that you have.

TENSER

You think they're related?

DAUGHTERY

You're a man who's fighting what he really is. You should let your body lead you to where it wants to go, instead of hacking it to pieces and displaying it in a hidden museum like the bones of an extinct animal.

CAPRICE

Saul would be dead now if he listened to that advice. His body wants to kill him. What we're doing is, we're making art out of anarchy. We're creating meaning out of emptiness.

DAUGHTERY

Are you? Has it ever occurred to you that you might simply be interfering in a fantastic natural process that you should surrender to?

TENSER

It never has.

DAUGHTERY

Will you do the Brecken show?

EXT. EXPRESSWAY - NIGHT

Under the expressway, Tenser meets Chaulk.

TENSER

Should I do the Brecken show? What does New Vice want to get out of this?

CHAULK

You have a new best friend.

TENSER

Who would that be?

CHAULK

Lang Daughtery. We want him. But we don't want just him. We want his group of freaks. All of them.

TENSER

I don't know anything about a group.

CHAULK

You'll find out about the group. He likes you. He trusts you.

TENSER

He trusts me to cut up his dead son in public. What'll that get us?

CHAULK

It could get you to the next stage, which is infiltration. We want to know everything there is to know about Daughtery and his plastic-eating comrades.

TENSER

Plastic-eating?

CHAULK

You don't get it yet? Were you ever really a cop?

TENSER

Maybe not. You talking about those purple candy bars?

CHAULK

Ever try eating one of those? One of our agents did. He's as dead as Brecken now.

TENSER

Poisoned him?

CHAULK

They're synth bars. Synthetic, man-made stuff. Toxic. Deadly. A normal human can't eat that stuff. But those people, they just munch away, no problem. They're evolving away from the human path, Saul. It can't be allowed to continue.

TENSER

We do the show and what? You raid the show, grab Daughtery?

CHAULK

No. You do the show. Daughtery loves you. He clasps you to his bosom. You go with him as his follower. You live with his commune. And then, when we tell you to, you let us in.

TENSER

Daughtery thinks the publicity from the show will blow the lid off something. Thinks it'll be the beginning of the evolution revolution.

CHAULK

There will be no media outlet at that show that New Vice won't control. It won't go anywhere.

TENSER

(shrugs)

OK.

CHAULK

OK. So.

(nasty)

The show must go on. Speaking of shows, where are we with the Inner Beauty Pageant?

TENSER

That show's not going on. It's been cancelled. Apparently a crucial Doctor Nasatir has disappeared. The organizers are having trouble finding a replacement. They're quite despondent.

CHAULK

That's a good sign. We've got 'em spooked. At least something's working.

(MORE)

CHAULK (CONT'D)

Too bad, though, in a way.

(coat-opening gesture)

I was looking forward to seeing you
do your inner striptease.

INT. ROUTER AND BERST'S SHOP - NIGHT

Router, Berst, Caprice and Daughtery are standing in a line, awkward, LOOKING at something with degrees of awe, sadness, wistfulness.

They are looking at BRECKEN, who lies locked into the Sark module, his beautiful blonde head still translucent and cold blue in death, his slight abdomen exposed.

ROUTER

He looks like a little ice doll.

BERST

He looks like he was never alive.

CAPRICE

(to Daughtery)

I'll need to know what to expect.

DAUGHTERY

You don't like surprises?

CAPRICE

There will always be surprises. But I need to be able to shape the performance. It needs to have a dramatic shape. Otherwise, it'll just be the surgery channel, and it won't have any impact. We're going to create music, and visual material on a series of screens, possibly spoken and acted pieces, all with meaning, with suggestion, with mystery and ambiguity, and with provocation.

DAUGHTERY

All of those things.

CAPRICE

And more. Because the audience will provide surprises. The audience is not passive. The audience is interactive. And feeling that and responding to it is where the spontaneity comes in.

Daughtery APPROACHES the Sark, circles it.

DAUGHTERY

(shrugs)

Then why don't you just cut him up now? This machine, it looks like it could put him back together again, no problem. Invisible mending, they used to call it. Dress rehearsal, with all the trimmings, no holding back.

Daughtery starts to play with some controls. Random tools begin to STIR alarmingly. Caprice takes his hands off the controls.

CAPRICE

Don't do that. You won't like what happens. You have to know what you're doing.

Tenser is there, having slid in like a ghost.

TENSER

I think that goes for all of us.

They look up at Tenser.

TENSER (CONT'D)

I think we have to do our autopsy show now, private elite audience. Let Daughtery do it. You guide him, Caprice.

CAPRICE

Are you serious?

TENSER

We can call the show Second Autopsy. I see it all now. It could be great.

CAPRICE

What's going on?

TENSER

What about it, Daughtery? Or is there some reason you don't want us to look inside the box in private?

CAPRICE

That's very cruel, Saul.

DAUGHTERY

No, no. I get it. It's all right. You've been doing your research, and you're mistrustful now.

TENSER

There are a few things you haven't been telling us.

DAUGHTERY

A few things. Does it matter? Nothing that'd hurt you. Nothing that'd spoil your performance.

TENSER

What about one of those candy bars you offered me? Would one of those spoil my performance?

Daughtery can't help but laugh.

INT. RURAL TRAILERS AND ACCESSORIES - NIGHT

We've been here before, only now it's empty except for Tarr, Caprice, Daughtery, Tenser and the purple-bar-making machinery.

DAUGHTERY

We're moving everything out. Mr. Tarr here's taking care of it. I figure the Brecken show will make us too hot. But this is how we feed ourselves. It's poison to anyone else.

TENSER

Yeah, nice.

DAUGHTERY

I was just playing. Seeing if you knew anything. Besides, it was natural for me to offer a bite. This is what all of us eat. You feel familiar to me. I wouldn't have let you have any.

TENSER

All of us is how many?

DAUGHTERY

Our own little cell, 60, 70 souls. But around the world, our network is vast. Really, the number's unknowable.

TENSER

And everybody's had the same elaborate surgery?

Daughtery lifts his shirt and shows his scars. So does Tarr. The same strange PATTERNS of microsurgical holes and subsurface tunnelings.

DAUGHTERY

Everybody, around the world. The procedures were developed over years of collaboration. There are variations, of course. Culturally unique versions.

TENSER

And you did it because?

DAUGHTERY

Because our bodies were telling us it was time to change. Time for human evolution to sync up with human technology. We've got to start feeding on our own industrial waste. It's our destiny.

TENSER

The end result is that you can't eat food.

DAUGHTERY

We eat modern food. We eat plastic. That's what we like to call it.

TENSER

If you found yourself in the open countryside, what would you eat?

DAUGHTERY

(laughs)

Each other. No, we couldn't even do that. Not pure enough plastic.

(pause)

Somebody has to lead the way to the future. And it's us.

TENSER

And Brecken?

DAUGHTERY

Brecken was the first-born.

TENSER

The first to be born with a plastic-processing digestive system. The first to be naturally unnatural.

DAUGHTERY

She hated us. Djuna. She stole Brecken away from us. She didn't really know what a gem her kid was. She couldn't handle it.

TENSER

He really must have been a gem. Because what you're saying sounds insane to me.

DAUGHTERY

Why? What?

TENSER

Are you saying that your surgery, the surgery that made you a plastic-eater, was somehow replicated genetically in your son? That surgically acquired characteristics became inheritable? You cut off your little finger and your kids are born without little fingers? That's not desirable and not possible.

DAUGHTERY

Brecken was our miracle child. He was everything we all wanted to be. That's all I can say. I can't say I understand the process.

TENSER

And our Brecken show?

DAUGHTERY

I wanted to someday present my son to the world, to show the world that the future of humanity existed and was good. Was at peace and harmony with the techno world that we've created. Now, all I can do is present the reality of his dead little body as a promise of the future. And I need you to do that.

TENSER

They'll try to discredit you. They'll say that it's a hoax, an alien autopsy. They do fear you and want to destroy you. You must be aware of that.

DAUGHTERY

The people who need to believe, will believe.

TENSER

It is an intimate thing, what we do. And it will feel like a violation for it to be done in public.

DAUGHTERY

I know. But it has to be done

TENSER

You're saying that when we open Brecken up, we'll see a perfect, natural child who was born with what amounts to a completely deviant digestive system. He'll have three stomachs like a goat. It'll be obvious that he's different.

DAUGHTERY

I don't know what we'll see. But I know he'll be beautiful, sweet and real and beautiful.

INT. VICTORIAN BANK - NIGHT

The setup for the Brecken show is basically as it was for Tenser's own performance.

Massive screens everywhere, all at the moment bearing the words FIRST AUTOPSY. Rubble architecture. Huge rooms with high ceilings all very open to each other. A forest of pseudo-Greek columns and architectural flourishes. No seats. Crowds swarming and schooling like fish.

And as before, there are tons of CAMERAS in evidence, from ring-cams to pro-studio to retro-coverage.

Amid the crowd we find Router and Berst, and Daughtery, and Wippet and Timlin. Timlin has a SURREPTITIOUS look about her. She is studiously avoiding eye contact with Wippet.

WIPPET

(to Timlin)

Surprised to see you here. Couldn't stay away?

TIMLIN

(evasive)

Guess not. Special event. Worth the risk.

And tons of audio coverage as well, because the retro-cameras don't record their own sound, so there are amateur boom-men and headphone-wearing Nagra/shotgun-mike carriers. Hot and sweaty and churning.

But there is a big difference here, and that difference is CAPRICE: it's her show, not Tenser's, and the lighting is cool and melancholy and simple, and so is the music and the imagery on the screens.

The SARK rolls out from behind a wall, but this time there are no S/M overtones, no straps and buckles. And Caprice appears, dressed very SIMPLY, no control-panel breast plate, no techno-frivolity.

Brecken's body is already LOCKED into the Sark, and so his reveal to the audience is over the screens surrounding the playing area.

The crowd goes quiet and still when they see the subject of First Autopsy: Brecken does look like a BEAUTIFUL ICE DOLL, and the Sark, lit starkly, its outlandish details standing out in high relief, does look like an eerie alien sarcophagus.

And finally we find TENSER, behind the wall, working with Isbister at the lighting, sound and effects boards, working the sliders subtly, sensitively, FOCUSSED on Caprice and in tune with what she says and does.

CAPRICE

We've all wanted to see an autopsy,
haven't we? We've all felt that the
body was empty, empty of meaning and
we've wanted to confirm that, so
that we could fill it with meaning.
Autopsia means a seeing for oneself.
Why First Autopsy? Because we know
there'll have to be a Second Autopsy.

Now Tenser comes out from behind the wall and takes his place at the Sark's controls, delicately STIRRING the machine to life.

And as before, from a bewildering variety of crevices, trap doors, sliding panels and iris-ing channels, a bevy of needle-scopes, insertion-scan devices, flesh cutters, saw-toothed probes, vise-like retractors and vibrating scalpels EMERGE. Ultrasonic spray nozzles to spritz clarifying solutions, suction nozzles to vacuum up fluids that would obscure vision.

CAPRICE (CONT'D)

If you want to do an autopsy, you
need a corpse.

(MORE)

CAPRICE (CONT'D)

Corporeal, incorporate, corpulent.
 Body words. Fleshy words. Brecken is
 our corpse. Brecken was a young boy
 who was murdered by his mother because
 of what was hidden in his body.
 Because of the meaning that was there.
 For her, the body was not empty of
 meaning. And now let us dive deep
 into the body of Brecken and, like
 professors of literature, search for
 the meaning that lies locked in the
 poem that was Brecken.

(MORE)

Daughtery paces around the edges of the crowd, anxious,
 emotional, VOLATILE, reacting to Caprice's words, the light,
 the music, the images on the screens.

As the crowd watches raptly, the surgical devices CONVERGE
 on Brecken's chest and abdomen, SLIT open his body in four
 different places, PLUNGE into the wounds, RUMMAGE around in
 his abdominal cavity.

As the tiny cameras SUBMERGE and Brecken's inner landscape
 is exposed, we see on the screens that his organs are a
 FRANKENSTEIN CRAZY-QUILT of crudely stitched-together parts,
 all garishly tattooed in the broadest possible Hong Kong
 harbour-sailor-style complete with HEART, KNIFE, and "MOTHER".

And the organs are not organs we've ever seen diagrams of
 before, they're not organized in any recognizable pattern.
 There are solid MEATY things where the lungs should be, and
 SPIRALLING entrail-like tubes twisting around everywhere in
 the chest cavity like monstrous PARASITES.

Even to a novice in anatomy, the jumble inside Brecken is
 aggressive, ludicrous, MALIGNANT butchery. There is a sense
 of purpose evident, but the purpose is to mock and horrify.

Wippet is horrified, and he recoils, turns to Timlin for
 support. But once again Timlin turns away, evasive, something
 odd going on. She won't meet his eyes, and she won't look at
 the screens.

Now the look on Daughtery's face, his body language: he is
 shocked, SHATTERED. He staggers away from the playing area,
 almost knocking Timlin over as he lurches past her so that
 Wippet has to catch her.

Daughtery finds a wall niche at the far end of the performing
 arena, installs himself in it, turns his back on his son,
 puts his hands over his face in ANGUISH.

Router and Berst have been TRACKING Daughtery, experiencing the show through him, and now his distress is their distress. They want to get close to him and comfort him, but they don't dare.

Caprice is momentarily stunned into silence, but the CROWD IS GOING WILD: they love it. Their APPLAUSE and shouts give her a few seconds to recover, and she begins to pick up the pieces.

CAPRICE (CONT'D)

(faltering)

So we see that the crudeness and the desperation and the ugliness of the world has seeped inside even our youngest and most beautiful.

(recovering)

And we see that the world is killing our children from the inside out. Here we have the anatomy of today's pathology. And we know now why we'll have a Second Autopsy, and a Third. We know that we'll keep diving back deep inside, hoping to find a different answer. But for tonight, let us not be afraid to map the chaos inside. Let us create a map that will guide us into the heart of darkness.

Daughtery still stands with his back turned to Caprice, listens to a few more of the words, then flees, almost bent double with the HORROR. Router and Berst exchange a glance, watch him go, then FOLLOW him.

Tenser sees Daughtery leave. He has the impulse to go after him, but he keeps working the controls, frantically ADJUSTING the autopsy module so that it can deal with a very non-standard anatomy.

The CLAWS and PINCERS now begin to remove Brecken's organs several at a time and place them neatly in COMPARTMENTS that extend on STALKS to receive them - part of the Sark's retrofitting by Router and Berst.

EXT. VICTORIAN BANK - NIGHT

Router and Berst TUMBLE out of the columned doorway of the Victorian Bank into the street, looking for Daughtery. He's there, HUNCHED OVER, sobbing on the grand granite steps.

They sit beside him, wanting to hold him but seemingly too timid to do it.

ROUTER
(gently)
That was hideous.

BERST
I feel so awful.

DAUGHTERY
(sobbing)
That's not what he was inside. That's
not what he was. She did it. She let
them cut my boy to pieces.

BERST
She?

DAUGHTERY
Djuna. The ex-wife. The mother of
the cadaver.

ROUTER
Djuna? No, she didn't. She had nothing
to do with it.

DAUGHTERY
Yes, yes. What you saw in there,
that was her message to me.

BERST
No, it wasn't. But I have a feeling
she'd approve of this.

Out of their overalls, Router and Berst each pull a small CHROME-PLATED DRILL with a long, narrow drill bit. Smoothly, without hesitation, they switch on the drills and force the bits DEEP into the back of Daughtery's head. The high-speed drills whine and JUDDER as they bite through bone, catch in Daughtery's hair, but they don't jam, they don't stop.

Daughtery PITCHES forward down the steps, blood spurting from the tiny holes. He lies sprawled there, twitching and jerking, then is still.

Router and Berst touch him with the steel-capped toes of their boots, then turn and scamper playfully back inside without a further word.

INT. TENSER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

In Tenser's bedroom, both Tenser and Caprice are feeling PAIN in their sleep, moaning, gasping, calling out.

Caprice sleeps in a niche carved into one side of the room which we might have noticed before.

Her bed is like a Japanese SLEEP CAPSULE, a duvet-lined womb complete with built-in lights and computer screens.

Tenser is no longer sleeping in his SpiderWeb, but is CURLED UP in a sleeping bag underneath it, as though he were afraid to get too far away from it.

Now they both cry out, almost simultaneously, and the cries wake Caprice.

She gets out of her bed and pads over to Tenser, falls to her knees under the SpiderWeb, shakes him gently. Tenser responds almost instantly, as though he were just waiting for a reason to wake up and leave the pain behind.

CAPRICE

You were in pain.

TENSER

Was I?

CAPRICE

What's it like?

TENSER

Physical pain?

CAPRICE

Yes.

TENSER

It's hard to be clear about it. It becomes part of the dreaming. And it mixes with the emotional pain of the dreaming, so it's confused.

CAPRICE

I almost thought... I almost thought I was feeling...

(pause)

Did you dream about Daughtery?

TENSER

Daughtery, and Djuna, and Brecken. They were all in the Sark together. A family autopsy.

CAPRICE

Who was at the controls?

TENSER

You and I. We both were.

They EMBRACE on the floor, on the sleeping bag.

EXT. EXPRESSWAY - NIGHT

Chaulk meets Tenser. Chaulk is SMILING ear to ear.

TENSER

You're smiling like the Cheshire cat.

CHAULK

I hear you had a great show. Great.

TENSER

Yeah. And I hear it went out worldwide. All media firing on all cylinders. What happened to your blackout?

CHAULK

Somebody musta screwed up. Happens in these big departments.

TENSER

New Vice is getting pretty big, is it?

CHAULK

It is now. Lotta people running scared. So many plastic-eaters running around with scalpels. Makes people insecure.

TENSER

They're pretty good with the scalpels, those plastic-eaters. Better than whoever did that hack job on Brecken's insides.

CHAULK

(big smile)

Yeah, so, OK. We've got a man inside. We got there first. Kid was pretty weird inside anyway, you wouldn't have recognized a thing, but the hell of it was, it was all natural. He was born that way.

TENSER

You wouldn't want everybody to know about that.

CHAULK

Couldn't let that out.

(MORE)

CHAULK (CONT'D)

Once that got out of the box, we'd never get it back in.

(pause)

Your friend at the Registry did the work. "Inspired by Caprice." We wanted to make sure that it looked like an authentic Saul Tenser construction. Well, maybe a touch more flamboyant.

TENSER

My friend? You mean, Wippet?

CHAULK

No, that strange little woman, what's her name? Timlin.

TENSER

I wondered why she was at the show. I guess she couldn't resist checking out her work.

CHAULK

(knowing leer)

She really wants to be Caprice for you, if you know what I mean. And I know that you do.

TENSER

If you wanted an authentic Saul Tenser, why didn't you involve Saul Tenser?

CHAULK

What ever happened to spontaneity and surprise? Your art can't encompass that?

TENSER

Daughtery's assassination was a surprise to me.

CHAULK

Assassination? Fancy word for murder.

TENSER

He was a leader. He had a cause.

CHAULK

Well, whatever it was, it was a surprise to me too.

TENSER

You've got a bad habit of not telling me things. Makes it difficult to function.

CHAULK

I'm telling you, we didn't know about it. Maybe his crazy wife got to him somehow. Dunno.

TENSER

Who is your man inside?

Chaulk pauses while he weighs the pros and cons of giving ultra-privileged information to Tenser. He knows it's a TEST of trust. Finally.

CHAULK

(pause)

It's a guy named Tarr. He was close to Daughtery. But he didn't pull the trigger. I can vouch for that.

TENSER

Well, it doesn't matter who killed him. It's going to make a martyr of him.

(pause)

Just what the cause needs.

CHAULK

(disturbed)

The cause? Sounds like you're becoming a believer.

TENSER

(wry smile)

If you're going to be good at living undercover, a part of you has to believe.

INT. TENSER'S BREAKFAST ROOM - NIGHT

Tenser sits in his BreakFaster chair. He is trying to eat but it's NOT WORKING. The chair is fidgeting like a crazed thing, trying to make the eating process happen. Tenser puts down his utensils, sits there.

The chair keeps working FEVERISHLY.

The door opens and Caprice comes in.

CAPRICE

Well, Saul, what do you think?

TENSER

I think yes. I think it's time to
try it.

Caprice pulls a PURPLE CANDY BAR out of her pocket and hands
it to Tenser. She sits opposite him, takes out a ring-cam
and slips it on, activates it. She smiles nervously.

CAPRICE

(nervous smile)
We're rolling.

Tenser PEELS back the wrapper, takes a bite, BEGINS TO EAT.

The BreakFaster chair suddenly STOPS its fussing.

It gets very quiet except for a contented, rippling HUM which
sounds something like a large cat PURRING.

THE END

