

Cancer went in the hole. It was a bad idea to go alone. And now he's trapped.

Something drools at his feet. A naked figure choking on a jawbreaker of green stone, a jade ball gag strapped to the lipless mouth. The skin is missing, so he can't tell if it's—you know, one of those two things you're supposed to be. No hair, no eyes, just raw red flesh. The dark sockets bulge outwards—chunks of shiny dark rock glimmering with the light of a sun that no longer exists. Those who survive are cursed moons, weeping with extinct radiance.

Bad movie but he can't turn it off. Black film rolls on white reels. Rivers of midnight oil. Moons of bone. The movie is called, *You Are Mine*.

Pale hands creep across his bed, wrapped in bandages or toilet paper. Just as the dirty nails are about to touch him, taint him, arms of muddy gold descend, sleek and strong. These ornate muscles fight above him like snakes swallowing each other.

He falls deeper.

Black dots on white. An ocean of guano. He touches the screen and his hand curves across the thick hot glass of the CRT. Static crawls under his skin. The flies are in his head.

He tries to turn the TV off. The tape won't come out. He reaches inside and it breaks apart in his hand, cutting him, he drags out endless black film and he can't get all the broken plastic out and now the dark shards are melting and he's in trouble.

He opens his eyes. A fly buzzes between his legs. He swats it but it chases his sticky brown fingers. Sweet metallic gross smell and he scrambles back and sees the chocolate bar smearing the white sheet and he tastes it now, staining his lips.



His first piss of the day is dark and foamy with dehydration. Stagnant, bubbles like bug eggs, swamp oozing into this clean suburban bathroom. He drops a shred of toilet paper in the bowl and it hisses in the ammonia-rich urine.



He is very thirsty at breakfast, drinking a big glass of chocolate milk.

MOM	I heard there was an incident in the park.
CANCER	A lot of people die in parks. It's normal.
MOM	What?
CANCER	They didn't respect nature.

She isn't listening. He pours another glass, ignoring Trembleuse's oinking sound.

Chocolate milk is nice because it tastes cold and pure like regular milk, but has an attractive brown color, silky and rich. And unlike most brown things, it's delicious.

MOM                      Remember to take out the trash.  
CANCER                  You got it...!

He bites back the word *mom*. He knows it's okay to use. But has he really earned it yet? And what if, when he said it, there was an uncomfortable silence?

Of course she would smile at him. Of course everything would be normal. But can you beat blood? A lot of it flowing these days, all the wrong ways.

Cancer pulls a fresh bag from the box and it wraps around his arm in a cling of static. He pulls it open with the sound of rain spattering on a plastic roof, or a box of noisy maggots that suddenly went silent.

A sweet smell wafts out. Vanilla, castor oil, and citronella. *Scented for Freshness*. The odor infused into the plastic is worse than the garbage itself, a rotting cloy that makes his chocolate milk gurgle inside him.

He thinks of the boy in the bag. Chocolate melting all around, dripping into his nostrils and gluing his eyes shut and drying in his throat like the chocolate shell they spray on ice cream, nice scream—

Cancer pulls the bag over his head. His breath rustles the plastic like something alive. This is the first second of death. This is what is coming for him. He has to understand. Or maybe he is only seeking what he deserves.

Something is breathing inside the bag with him.

He can't move. The plastic is hard and hot as newborn obsidian. His hyperventilation is like bubbles blown in molten glass.

The lungs are bags and breath is buried there, each gasp sealed away like a gold coin. A black cat sits on his face, rasping, *mine, mine, mine*—

He claws the plastic across his sweaty, sucking face. It catches on his upper teeth, then rips off, dark hair flying around him in a blaze of static.



Needles of rain dance on pink puddles. His bike skids through the rosewater universe.

In the fog, these could be any suburbs. But when the salty wind chews through this cotton candy, he'll still be trapped on the rim of an ancient wrath, a colonized

explosion in the middle of the ocean.

He pedals faster. He's late for everything. Camp is school is church. The atoll is not a major landmass with the decadence of provinces and cities. Everything must fit inside this hole. You fit, or you drown.

Where does he fit? When he watches a scoutlaga, each character has a primary trait. The intellectual, the jock, the girly girl. But he is iridescent, unable to call his color. Or maybe he's just black plastic.

**BEEP BEEP**

He squeezes the brakes but he's coming down a hill. His hiking boot skips on the sidewalk, trying to get traction, and he's forced to swing onto the curb and hop off his bike, stumbling onto someone's lawn. His bike skids, the sound of red paint scratching.

The ammonia truck blows past, splashing his bare knees with cold water.

*WARNING  
ANHYDROUS AMMONIA  
TOXIC  
FLAMMABLE  
DEATH WILL RESULT*

As he props his bike back up, he sees a guano-laden ship coming from the white isles where the bats shit. They mostly come out at night, but on this foggy morning he sees a few still circling and diving for fish.

He races against his heart, faster and faster, thinking of the trash bag from earlier. He can't believe he had a panic attack like that. It felt like his nausea, but worse. Sick new flowers blooming from his stomach.

Bang bang! Businessmen outside a bank, knocking on the glass. As he bikes past, they go silent. Luggage swells on the sidewalk, packed to bursting like trash collectors for the rapture.

The sun burns away the last of the fog. It shines on black plastic, prolapsed over the rim of garbage cans. Insects quicken in the heat, feasting on the puke in the street, and now they're chasing his sweat as he pedals uphill, into the mouth of the Defile.

Riparian watches sunlight pour through the vial of clear liquid. He fell asleep holding it in the front seat of his car. He still doesn't know where he lives.

He loves this vial of GHB. He doesn't know why they call it a date rape drug. It can be used for all kinds of rapes.

He first smelled it in fermenting fruit. How many putrid orchards has he crawled through, drunk on rotten pulp, flies stuck in his teeth? When he found out they synthesized the stuff, he couldn't believe it. Modernity has few pleasures, but the expanding categories of rape and rape science is one of them. And in a decomposing corpse, bacteria converts GABA to GHB. He's just jump-starting the process.

He likes that about this body. It knows all about the mechanism of putrescence. And now it will have the opportunity to create it.

He checks his arm. *Day 1* is barely visible, eaten away by sweat. He writes *Day 2* over it, then stares at the fresh ink over the faded marks. It gives him an odd feeling, but he can't place it.

His stomach growls, a humid amphitheater for the parasite's displeasure. He leaves his car to urinate. Grass dies under his stream, territory marked. This body I have stained, this earth I have profaned, even this horrible little puddle, it's mine, somehow, inexplicably, I cannot relinquish...

The feline rage is like cold gasoline soaking into his hair, his armpits, his clothes. Itching, polluting, maddening, middening, it is always there. If it has no target, it finds him. But it has—

He checks his arm. *KILL CANCER.*

I'm a surgeon?

He spins around, sniffing the air. Candy wrappers and burnt marshmallows. It was a scout. What was her name. His name? The threat. A boy hero. Cancer Cancer Cancer PRIZE.

He walks away from the blackened puddle, a whorl of insects dying around it. But his smell doesn't fade. It becomes worse, because it's coming from something else.

A man stands in the clearing. His hair glows like a molten crown of sun. His shirt is toxic yellow with red flowers, tacky tourist, tag still on. His smile spills red gums, plume of gingivitis like a speech scroll.

He comes closer and Riparian flinches.

Good.

Your body remembers.

The god-pathogen Xipe Totec, the flayed one, known in this year as Uriarte.

He always stole the blonds. One of his symptoms: the adoration of gold. Patron of goldsmiths. The word for that precious metal is teocuitlatl, “divine excrement”. Our shit passes through their hands and around their necks.

His blonds are pale and feverish. They show off his disease too well. A winter garden of rosacea. And this is a copper blond, turning red in the sun as if his disease penetrated every fiber. But he never wears them long. He adores the latest fashion.

His gold hair falls against Riparian’s obsidian strands. Withdraw and fall, withdraw and fall, two curtains kissing without lips. Why retreat? Does the night wind fear my splendor?

He peels Riparian’s eyelid back and the pupil darts like a fly, shrinking as it swallows too much of the fifth sun. Their parasites surge like two eels caged by abdomens, one spiraling, the other ready to bite.

Ah.

Ah.

Why did you pick this body? Dark-haired Capricorn and not very strong.

That was the point. He couldn’t defend himself as easily. He we he couldn’t we couldn’t stop it—

The eyelid snaps back. Uriarte smiles like he’s running over the president. Just a joke, brother.

Bring your ear close.

Uriarte tells you. A house where things are done. It has windows which close and a door that shuts. Vacation home for the tourist who has become his vacation. He is working on someone there. Filling their ribbon up. It is a tether which you can pull a kid goat by. Its legs go up and down. It can climb black glass at any angle.

A ribbon falls from Uriarte’s hand and your mouth is watering. One of their Halo Club angels. Terror pulsing echoes, a fatal sugar that teases your sinuses like boypiss cocaine.

He wasn’t a real blond. I kept pulling it out but I never found any.

(sniff sniff, prey pheromones pumping up the hill and he catches your nose stabbing the wind.)

Your boy.

Why have you not put him in a bag yet.

- He's a good boy. He follows the rules.

Then make him break them. And then we break him.

- We?

...

- He's not your type.

He's got a little blond in him. And there's more bleach in the maintenance closet.

Black plastic bag full of bleach screech on the beach—

It doesn't matter if you turn away. You can't hide the stink of your smile. Like someone ripped your face open, hunger like a wound, stupid and drooling—

(sniff sniff, Cancer's scent becomes a duet. His brother, a true blond. Uriarte leans on Riparian like a table, elbow digging in.)

Well, this is perfect.

One for you.

One for me.

Black hair for a black bag.

The blond I will keep in a box until.

(Uriarte raises his hand, holding it flat in the air.)

You must be this tall to ride.

(Jaundiced smile, yellow as his hair.)

Break him in the dark. Like a cask of honey wine.

The dark empties them out.

Twenty years I kept a battery.

Riparian pulls back. This is my hunt, mine—

He freezes at those paralyzing blue eyes, bloodshot.

Oh, Tezcatlipoca.

The strain of your disease. Has taken you a long way from your glory.

(pale fingers pick at his lip, peeling away a dehydrated strip.)

You are too sick to challenge me.

(another strip, less dead than the first.)

Your time has gone.

Your mind has shattered.

The spark of a dead sun.

(he seizes the lip itself, pulling it down to expose receding gums and dark brown roots. a nail digs into your periodontal pussy, into your rotten fucking creases, and in his cupped hand, his red smoking mirror, you smell all that you are. disgusting. repellent. death that can only hope to feed on life.)

You are the Night Wind. But I am Yohuallahuan, the Night Drinker.

The parasite curls inside Riparian, a cramp of genuflection, prostate prostration. Drool falls into his brother's palm, his rival strain. This hunger can never deny me.