

III

Their heights are measured as part of the staff physical.

Veau is 5'9 1/2.

Y is 5'10'.

VEAU

That damn half inch.

That's why I'm in the washing machine.

Y

Exactly.



Every time he enters the washing machine, he is alone in the dark water, and he is waiting. It is like waiting to fall asleep, except instead of relaxing your limbs, you are preparing to use them. A nightmare waiting in the wings.

He begins to sink.

Sinking.

Sinking.

He is never sure if he imagines the sensation. If it is the first trickle of Retz, or the water pressure is changing, or if the drum is rotating. He always thinks of asking, but it never seems important when he gets out.

Sinking.

Abyssal.

He always shuts his eyes. He doesn't know why.

The wind blows around his ears, as if he stood on a high field exposed to the sky. A scream from above.

His teeth appear first. Slapping in like a gag gift. His brain, a brick slammed inside a mailbox. His eyeballs, cracked eggs, yolk drooling into his skull.

TECHNICIAN

Are you connected, sir?

Y

Don't say that.

(his voice softens, warms)

How are you doing, Veau?

VEAU

I see the pineapples.

Y

That's wonderful, Veau.

VEAU

I see her.

Y

Stay in the greenhouse for now. We need to make a

few adjustments.



Sometimes the hair syncs up with his real hair. But they usually want blond. Auburn is an alluring compromise, except in certain cultures. Brown is safe.

(VEAU's bones are stretching. He makes gagging sounds.)

Y

Does that hurt?

VEAU

Don't worry. It's just pain-like behaviors.

TECHNICIAN
Y

(giggling)
How much was that?
Just getting him warmed up.

(Thudding and pulsing of the oscilloscope.)

TECHNICIAN
approximately ten to twelve.
Y

They will perceive you, uh. Perceive him as
Really? A solid thirteen, by my estimation.

TECHNICIAN
Y
VEAU

I'm not sure if I agree.
Well, how do you feel, Veau?
Uh.

structure and make him

Pretty small.
That is.
*(trying to remember the shape of words that cloak and
tall inside)*
Prepube. Essence.

TECHNICIAN
Y

Thirteen?
Try it. But a young thirteen.



He sits on the window sill, basking in the sun with the pleasure of a lobotomized cat. He had been worried about something but it doesn't matter anymore.

The radio is playing that song he likes.

A spretz of Retz spits sprezzatura.

He tugs on the hem of his shorts. The shorts tell him where he is. The shorts are a compass. Magnets torture him.

WOMAN Take your shorts...
 No.
 Down, but not off.

The trick to being a good victim is being very close and very far away at the same time.

The trick is it doesn't matter. It never mattered at all.



In the reptile house. A shadow blocks the ceiling. Terrariums on all sides like ovens. He watches something tear its skin off, ghost-white claws stretching from a torn belly.

He cannot feel pleasure. It would be unethical. But pain is close enough, legally speaking. It provokes the same gasps, the same arching of the back. And they can never tell the difference.



The woman is sleeping. He burns between the legs, burns like acid.

We didn't get any of that. The signal is shot.

Calm down, Veau.

You still have a physical copy of the recording.

Extract it. And we will collect upstream.



Can I have some cereal?

Knock yourself out.



He takes the spoon out of his cereal and washes it off in the sink. The cereal stuck to it doesn't move at first, then leaps away like scared insects, bits of dyed foam. Milk solids dissolve from the center, white corona fading to stainless steel.

He goes to the window and his lungs strain against the sill, nipples stunted parasites of innocence, genes without parents, patertrophic sternum swell.

He holds the spoon up. A horrifying angel descends from the ceiling. His reflection is upside-down. The face he does not recognize has been distorted once more, cyclopean and nephilitic.

This isn't real.

This isn't my body.

His reflection disappears. The handle of the spoon turns hot and wet. His mouth pops open, arm vibrating supersonic. He feels how much his eye always moved when he was sad. The inflation of his cheeks, the clench of eyelids. Tears burn down his cheeks. They smell like a nosebleed.

He flings his eyeball into the river. He goes back and drops the spoon in the cereal bowl. Blood swirls through the sour milk, another artificial color.



The washing machine pukes him on the floor. He tries to pull the gag out but his mouth just sucks on it, numb and tight.

He attacks Y calmly, efficiently, dark wetsuit fists sinking into the man's gut, bending him back over the oscilloscope, vital signs beeping and hooting and cheering him on. He smiles at his heartbeat, encouraged, and winds back for a brutal punch at that hawk nose.

Veau's brain bursts like a ripe fruit, nectar dripping from his ears. He can no longer remember his objective. His legs gelatinize to the floor.

He sees Y's hand on the Retz trigger at the other end of the tube, fingers connected to his brain. Geometry turns to blobs. Colors to sensations. Anger to confusion. He clings to Y's pant leg, to the familiar scent.

Y Are you going to behave?
 (saliva spews around the gag, bubbling onto his shoe)

Good.
I'm trusting you, now.
Relax. It's lockjaw.
You need to relax. Your. Muscles.

(Y rips the gag from VEAU's mouth. A volcano of drool, then gasping. VEAU buries his head in his knees and Y pats him on the back.)



His black wetsuit lays on the floor, twisted around itself. Gloves reach for the ceiling, spread in horror against an unseen force, fingers drained, wrists broken.

He can't turn on the shower. It feels like a xenological sister of the washing machine. Dark, feminine, upright, erect. An elephantine or giraffinoid groomer. The Retz itches on his skin from when the gag came lose. A sweet smell, an antediluvian perfume.

He searches the seams of the wall for the razor blade he hid last week. He reaches down into the black bristle of his crotch, pressing into the angelic pre-sexed hill of his pubic mound. He cuts into the half-inch of soft carpeting, crushing the gasp between his teeth. His finger slips in, grinding the fat into his pubic bone.

A red bolt cracks up through his torso, illuminating the pollution of his organs. His arm spasms, discharging like a gun. He slumps against the wall and a knob punches into his back, screeching as it twists. He gasps as the shower drenches him, dark hair blasted out of regulation. Water forms stalactites on his dry body, until the tension collapses and he melts into the flow.

His bladder sparks against his finger, swollen and eager from the hot water. Excruciatingly full of Retz.

I don't know your name. And you don't know mine.

But you do. You gave me a name, just like my parents did. Maybe you picked it from a random list of code words. But I'd like to think you thought about it longer than a second.

They named me before I was born. You gave me a name after seeing me. Not just my face. My vitals. Splayed out on paper. An ASCII anatomy. A dossier of my inky guts.

Veau is something you own. A responsibility. A legal fiction. A puppet. A bladder. A distant swelling, and release. We are drain men. We live underground. We vanish on the weekend.

Veau.

Barely a word. A breath of air. Steam from the mouth. You say it when you breathe.

Veau's cock rises below the slit, violently intersexual and parodic. He touches it and his whole body turns stiff and his cock goes soft. He is hollow. He is the wetsuit.

He trembles against the wall, blind with spray, the cherry stud of his eyelid surrounded by clear mates, drops of dew. Watery blood trickles down his cock, from the baby cunt stinging above his numb organ. He grips the razor until his heart bursts in his fist.



(The wall rises above him, towering rust. He places his hand down and the ground expands around it. Hairy knuckles, jar-opening fingers. Decapitated. Alien.)

Y When you give me that dark, pregnant look, I can tell.

VEAU Tell what?

Y You don't want to let on.

(Crackling of black ice.)

VEAU Just a little veautigo.

(His nose drips. His eyes itch. He stares up with flushed rims, and a smile breaks his congested face. The tension and nausea he had been feeling for hours is suddenly relieved by the sound of Y's voice.)

VEAU I did a good job.

 Didn't I?

Y You did a fantastic job.

(VEAU sighs, and his body relaxes.)

VEAU I'm hungry.

Y Oh?

VEAU Can we get food?

(Y's face is cold, irritated. Then a smile forces through and he jerks his head at the street.)

Y Sure. Let's get you something to eat.



(He hands KORE the pint and watches her drink, lapping quickly with foam on her lips.)

KORE At that age. Oh god. We'd just moved in. I went door to door and asked the neighbors if they knew what the birds were. The ones you can hear in the morning. Just before the city wakes up.

 No one knew. It was like they hadn't heard of birds before. Do you know how loud they are in the morning? How do you hear them every day and not wonder?

(VEAU can't imagine doing something like that as a child. Jealous admiration.)

When he thinks of that time, for some reason he sees himself doing ordinary things. A child who existed in parallel to him, acting out the life of a child that was shown to him through the windows of other houses, or commercial breaks. The child through which he says, haha, I remember those days. He has perfect memories of things that never happened. His legs are made of glass.)



Y is being interrogated by the erogator.

Eyeless boys stare across the laundromat, a backdrop of nubile mannequins. Syphilitic cigarette burns, an acanthosis of *S. chartarum*, suction tubes for semen.

Y Ten. Thirteen. Sixteen. He's a professional.
EROGATOR Right. Age is just a number.

The erogator is a bosslike waveform who passes through buildings. He reads the stock questions like each one is a highly graphic transcript of you violating a child. He was a smoker during the war. A cigarette butt in every mass grave. That was a long time ago. The water under the bridge is full of black mold and gold bands. He was never here.

Y is speaking too quickly and giving too much detail. He recognizes in himself the weaknesses he would look for. He feels like the Veau in this scenario.

Veau. A relaxed exhalation. His voice grows slower, calmer. Soft-spoken, warm, but not too warm. Talking to your child or your boss. Someone you love unconditionally, or not at all.

EROGATOR At any time, has an agent, in the guise of a boylike, spent more than 24 hours in the field?

Y Not consecutively. But we allow for transport and signal downtime. I wrote down the—

EROGATOR Fine. At any time, has there been actual coitus between a boylike and an adult?

(ice sweats under direct light)

Y Of course not.

EROGATOR Can you guess how high your success rate is, compared to the others?

Y I don't know. Probably a bit higher.

EROGATOR Nearly double.

Y I'm very happy to hear that.

EROGATOR And you'll tell me this double came from adhering to the same strict rules as the others.

Y There are always edge cases, in our work. Make-the-call *(he echoes a signature phrase from a foreign copshow)*. But no more than anyone else.

EROGATOR If you had to defend yourself in a future hearing, what would you say?

Y To what question?

WHAT IS THE SECRET TO YOUR SUCCESS

My my. The air's so clean in here. Let me just lean into the mic.

Y Close rapport with my agent. And discipline.

Whatever a man does is right, until he fails.

(The erogator drums on the washing machine.)

EROGATOR Keep up the good work. Don't log this visit.



(The shower sprays at full force. VEAU feels like a pet rock, smooth and hard and unfeeling, darkened by wetness.)

The man barely even looked at him. Was surprised when he got close.

Was he even a rast? Or was it a bulletproof execution? The body of a young boy and an old man. A political enemy dies, not as a martyr, but as a pervert.

What are you doing with that ice pick?

The lake is frozen. Dark with cloud shadows under an empty sky. Moldy boots in a dacha closet. A cuckoo clock. A book on birdwatching. It seemed important to know the names of the birds. But it wasn't his reading level. And the page was turning red. Ornithology in heaven.

What better way to sculpt an unquestioning death squad? The skills of men, and the servile bodies of children.

Spinning in the centrifuge. Colors bleed.

He knows this to be a paranoia of the Retz, but the beautiful logic of it fascinates him. The boy, the silencer. He's screwed on. The blast reverberates. Vanishes. The virgin gun.

Maybe they manufacture the rasts too. A machine of perfect tension, infinitely self-sustaining.

(VEAU scrubs imaginary blood from his arms until he finds it.)



(Y clicks a cassette into the wall of tape decks and it begins to spin.)

Y Hysteresis. It means deficiency.
VEAU I see.
Y *(warming to his subject)* The iron remembers when a field acts on
it.
VEAU A crude form of intelligence.
Y Not really.
is required to change that memory. And conversely, permeability is how much power
change the memory. Anyways. Coercivity is how much power
VEAU *(no)* Are you following?
Yes.

(the clack of loading a tape into the next deck)

Y And remanence is how much of this
memory remains when you take everything away. You can remember this because,
remanence, remains. Remanence, remains.
VEAU Is there any particular reason you're
telling me that, or...?
Y No reason. I just like dispensing random
facts.
VEAU ...
unusually calm? Do you get pleasure out of appearing
Y *(silence)*
your state of mind than mine. Perhaps that question says more about

(The scribble of Y's pen, and the whir of his desk fan.)

VEAU sits there and watches him. Y keeps working, but his movements are self-conscious. He finally looks up.)

VEAU Tell me about the devastating failure.
Of the program.
Y I'm not supposed to tell you.
VEAU Okay.
Y An agent was captured.
VEAU That's impossible.
They don't know where we live.
Y The agent was trapped in a boy.

(silence)

VEAU

Are you all right, Veau?
Why do you have that fan on?
It's freezing.

(Y turns the fan off. It slows until individual blades are visible—)



Bargain bins full of VHS tapes; low-budget videolaga, bootlegs, rastblast. Videos play on TVs of various sizes, some small as a microwave, others big as washing machines. Movies about pederasts being hunted down and killed, very popular.

They stole his recordings somehow. These are all him. He's the boy in the screen.

Y's voice simulates in his head. *They're just movies.*

See?

Scum like you don't deserve to walk the earth. Weak, limp-wristed, disgusting. Mutilation to the penis, the anus. Strong, hard men with guns, and sometimes machetes.

Why do I see myself being killed by those same men?

When I see these images, there is only fear.

HAWKER If you want to watch. You have to pay.

(VEAU walks away quickly. Shotgun sounds, badly distorted. The moaning of a depraved animal, going on a bit too long.)



(VEAU bites into the kiwi and the prickly hairy skin scrapes his mouth. He suddenly feels very bad. He spits pulp into a napkin. Acid eats his gums, bits of skin stuck in his teeth.)

Y Are you all right?
VEAU Kiwis are just fucking disgusting. You know?

(As they pull on their jackets in the doorway, cold air blows from outside. The greasy miasma of the bar is pushed away and he can smell Y's shirt. A certain spice, or a cinder of burning brain, neurological damage in place of whatever everyone else would smell.)

VEAU If you met me as a kid. What would you think?
Y What kind of question is that?
VEAU Just one of those what-if questions people pass their day with.
Y How much have you been drinking?
VEAU You probably have it all measured out in your head. Why don't
you tell me?
Y Too much.
VEAU See? You're a savant.
Y You need to find a girl to spend the weekends with. Or you'll
get sick.
VEAU I would only date a woman if she removed her reproductive
organs in front of me.
(pause)
And then dressed like a little boy.

(silence)

(both men laugh at his funny joke)



Veau crosses the pedosphere, slipping on black ice.

Someone grabs his shoulder. You're drunk, Y says. Veau looks at the black hand on him, digging tight. Did you just keep me from breaking my skull? Hey, why do they get cigarettes. Look at all those butts on the ground.

Careful. They're contaminated.

It is self-evident that the pederastic hyperfluid pervades (PERV-AIDS) all time and space, penetrating via an effluvia of sodomitic emissions which accrue in the cracks of sidewalks and schoolboys. This is very probably what they mean by microplastics. All developing nations are like developing children, and we must resist the georastic intrusions of cosmic molestation (the deep mole station from which tectonic gropeforms—

A kid runs around the corner, nearly colliding with them. Middle school kid in a SWORD jacket and Hypress trainers (bootleg, Veau observes with disgust).

VEAU Watch out for your fucking kid. Cover his ears, I'm talking to you.

THE KID'S MOTHER Sir?

VEAU If I wanted, I could ruin his life in a second flat. You think you're safe on Sunday night? I could get him behind that shed. Bam.

THE KID'S MOTHER Sir!

VEAU There are perverts everywhere.
Get your kid on a fucking leash.

Y I apologize for my colleague. His views do not represent
INNOCENT.

THE KID'S MOTHER You work at INNOCENT?

Y ...
No.

Good evening.

VEAU They have special viewing machines. You have to be careful. I'm so sorry about this, we're drunk. He bought me drinks. I'm just trying to unwind. Please have a great night, ma'am. Hey, kid. Have a good life. Have an amazing life, okay? You're the best. You deserve everything.



The bus stop shelters them from a sootblack rain, rising and falling on building vents. The gutters are full of glass but people keep parking here.

Y You're acting like a brute.

VEAU None of them understand. We know what's best for them. If

they would just fucking listen...

Y She was afraid of you.

VEAU No...

Y All she sees is a cop.

VEAU I'm no cop. C O P. Core of Pederasty. C O P. Child of Penis. C O P...C...when was the last time one of them crawled inside a washing machine?

Vulcanized silence of the city falling off the inner coast of black ice full of frozen mice their tails spermlike and bodies preserved like nursery rimes, you thought mice were baby rats and it broke your heart, kindergarten an empty cage full of shavings, the wheel spins and you eat your pellets, the wheel spins and you suck on your feeding tube. You receive a cassette for xmas with sonar anthems and you forget that mouse and the condemned belltower rises above the old city mold pretty, waiting for demolition day to be blasted into the maternity ward on Fifth and Third, and freedom is coming, freedom is coming. This bus is always late. Someone wrote a wish in spray paint and it reads like black mold.

Y This isn't the gentle Veau I know.

VEAU What?

The bus rolls in. He stares at the ground, stupid and drunk.

VEAU I'm sorry.

Y You have your card?

VEAU I think so. Yes. Right here.

Y You'll get some sleep now?

That hand touches his shoulder again, but lighter. The heaviness has gone inside him and the world outside is fast and far away. He wishes he had busted his skull. In another few seconds, he would have really shown that kid something. An important lesson for all time.

He reels in his seat, forcing Y to grab him with both hands to keep him upright, and say something to the bus driver, like just a moment.

VEAU Yes sir. I'll go right to bed.

He gets up quickly, suddenly taking pride in his actions, impaired as he is. He climbs bruised into the bus, forced to take his own ambulance. He flashes his bus pass and doesn't sit, standing straight and clear-eyed so Y won't worry. He can't see if Y waved, or lingered. The glass is dark and he's drowning in it.

