

# IV



*If a child is doing a sum and does it wrong, the mistake bears the stamp of his personality.  
If he does the sum exactly right, his personality does not enter into it at all.*  
— Simone Weil

Veau saw it in the supermarket. The cover of the tabloid magazine—

*[CELEBRITY NAME] WAS A BEAUTIFUL CHILD  
JUST LOOK AT HIM NOW*

What could they mean?

COULD A CHILD HAVE GROWN UP?

What a ghastly shock. What an unexpected turn of events. How can they forgive him?

*JUST LOOK AT HIM NOW*

He forgot about it until he got home, then the silence brought it back. What do they expect? Taxidermize the brats? The image of himself, stuffed and mounted, and for some reason in Y's house, which forces him to imagine Y's house with a peculiar architectural shiver, *deja veau*, the delusion of hallways (hot and stuffy? austere or cold?), and a sudden burst of carpet and hung-up coats and how Y prefers his temperature, in a room or in a teacup.

He can't get inside his handler's seamless exterior, but he can break into his house. Walk around inside that mind. You have to live somewhere. Have to come to rest. You will be weak, you will let your guard down, you have a toothbrush and a nightstand and a—

Veau, taxidermized in the corner of a moody living room with a fireplace and a fur rug, and a suit of armor, why not? No. Y would live conservatively. Sitting on a breathtakingly average surface, coolly regarding the one concession, mission-critical, of Veau preserved in plasticine, obscene, no, angelically castrated, even the nipples removed—

That's what you want, you faggot. Isn't it? These thoughts belong to you, not me. I've successfully visualized your degeneracy...

Veau has a shoe box full of childhood photos. It was mailed to his apartment like a bomb. A weapon, to get him to come home. Only now does it have the curious quality of itself. He stares at this scrawny stranger, this adolescent cocoon that was so violently ripped open to produce the man at this kitchen table.

He starts touching himself, and touching himself. One hand in the pile of instant film, the other in his pants. This stupid dark-haired boy with the cherry angioma on his big nose like a bug bite. Red dots on his face like tinier versions of red eye; things he was supposed to see, stunted and blinded before they could bloom. Cheeks flushed from the mold of winter. A flash of overexposed mucus, pornographic across his lips and chin.

With horror, he feels wetness in his palm, as if that money shot snot were invading him through the glossy film.

I forgive you, he whispers, and keeps stroking. For some reason, he wants to show these images to Y. What a laugh it would be. Can you believe it. Can you believe I was that small?

His face hits the table and the photos hiss like oil, burning his skin, sticking to his lips, his cheek, and by now the snow on his boots has melted into puddles, and that's when the mold comes out. His sinuses drip on the dead teens, a vibrating bacterial slime, and when he tries to wipe it off, the mess from his lap smears it. White ejaculate like clean snow, impossible and extinct across his sad little face.

*JUST LOOK AT HIM NOW*



We've set up a front line against our own kind. The less developed of our species.  
Every mother gives birth to an enemy combatant. Every school is a prison camp.

Set your watches. You only have a couple decades to kill that kid. The corpse is called  
an adult.



KID

KILL INDIVIDUAL DREAMS



KIA

KILLED IN ADOLESCENCE



KIA

KILLED INTO ADULTHOOD



Y has new gloves.

What kind is that?

Kid leather.

Silence.

They laugh.



Y

VEAU

Y

diameter. Full of ink.

VEAU

Have you seen my pen?

What did it look like?

Gold tip. A round, smooth cap. About 10 millimeters in

Not off the top of my head.



Veau dreams of school. A, B, C, stamped on his report card. Graded like a piece of meat.

The mold is squealing. The door won't open. He opens his mouth and blood fills it, or something worse than blood, a dirty low fluid, gravity brewed. Swallow it all and no one has to find out. Yes. Okay. I'll do my best. Report card clenches in his hand. I'm sorry for letting you down.



VEAU I'd like to report a crime.  
Y Oh?  
VEAU The crime of molestation.  
Y Oh.  
...  
Tell me more.  
VEAU My mother touched me at a very young age.  
Y That's very serious.  
VEAU Yes. I was enveloped on all sides by her vagina. Possibly the  
most thorough molestation in history. Like a car wash.  
Y I suppose this transpired at the moment of birth.  
VEAU Yes. She was very quick about it.  
Y Premeditated.  
VEAU Yes sir.  
Y ...  
You're such a polite man when you're not talking to me.  
VEAU Yes sir.





Every time he tries to flee this emasculation, he is pulled back. Because the very thing that emasculates makes him more of a man. To have money, an apartment, the status of a government job while the economy is crashing—to be a man, he becomes a boy.

Because nothing is more emasculating than being broke.



*(Shivering in the alley, post-mission.)*

VEAU                    Object permanence. That's how they got me. The bastards.  
*(He notices Y looking at him.)*

I have tiny hands.

Y                        It's a temporary side-effect. Your perceptions will return to  
normal.

VEAU                    When I get married, I'll have to explain this to my wife. That I  
can't wear an ordinary ring.

*(silence)*

I will have to travel to the land of the gnomes. And beg their  
favor.

...

Y                        Do you worry about your free-association?

VEAU                    Just making fun. Making light.

Y                        Well. These days. We need that more than ever.



*(Testing the fit of the wetsuit. Stretching their dark hands between each other, checking for the tiniest hole. In this pseudo-nudity, his posture contoured, he feels simultaneously vulnerable, yet stronger than Y. Athletic, weaponized, absolute purpose compared to Y's tired suit-and-tie slump. But those brilliant glass eyes don't let up.)*

VEAU                    What do you mean, a failure in my functional fixedness?

Y                        Using a rock as a pet.

And you were using that cup as a kind of...I don't even know.

VEAU                    So?

Y                        Functional fixedness plateaus around age 7. You shouldn't be  
experiencing that big a drop off the clock.

VEAU                    I'm naturally creative.



Functional fixedness. Veau looks that up. Loyalty to the original use of the object.  
When you become an adult, an object can only be itself.



*(Extremely drunk, trying to piss in this alley if he can tell it apart from the rain coming down black and loud and bursting into white sparks, and Y is looking out for him, or maybe finding his own place to urinate, and that's the difference between Y and him: Y urinates, he pisses.)*

VEAU                   A failure of functional fixedness.  
                          *(he says it like a limerick or nursery rhyme)*

Y                        What?

VEAU                   Would that be like when I take your pens and shove them up  
my ass?

Y                        *(beat)*  
                          Exactly.

*(VEAU is proud of that beat. The slight hesitation he won from his handler. Then fear. Y could report him. He could lose his job. He wasn't shoving them, really. That would hurt. He knows how it hurts. It was the feeling of an inflexible object inside a delicate area, probing the exact dimensions. Stiffness, sweltering, summer at all costs. The suction of his body pulling it in, forcing him to keep tugging it out, and each pull sending a twinge through him until he bursts into the grout. Head down just like this, nose flushed red but not from liquor, dark hair streaming with water gasping. But a joke, really, like fucking with your roommate's toothbrush.)*

Y                        Your little candle problem.

*(Y cuffs him over the head and he takes a swing. A hard fucking fist, much harder than Y's tap, but it misses, and he nearly swings himself to the ground. Y laughs, and he laughs too. He doesn't remember what they were talking about. He yells the name of their favorite restaurant; greasy food, cheap, open all night, and they strike off together like schoolboys.*

*These rebellions only transpire in the wave crash of washing machine, liquor, or rain. Most of the time, their interactions are very dull and courteous. There is an atmosphere of "blowing off steam" that seems to transpire most acutely in the presence of actual steam, from the laundromat or the gutters or their chapped lips in this cold black winter, smoke without cigarettes. He needs a light.)*



*(VEAU sets down another tray of drinks. Egg wine for him, and mead for Y.)*

VEAU Do you think they would ever ask me to enter the body of a bug?

Y Why would they do that, Veau?

VEAU To hunt the pederasts of the bug kingdom.

Y ...  
I'd like for you to stop drinking.

VEAU ...?

Y I would like for you to take a break.

*(VEAU laughs, then trails off)*

Y *(serious silence)*

Can you do that for me, Veau?

*(The drink pounds warm in VEAU's head. He feels suddenly nauseous, and ashamed.)*

VEAU Yes, Y.



He wakes in a worm's body.

If we can craft the breathtaking crevices of a boy according to antediluvian pederastomorphic specification and haloform proportion, how trivial to make a crude dildo of slimy circumcised meat pulsing and undulating without a face. Drown in your own nerves. Drown without death.

*You must infiltrate the colony at the earth's core. Subterranean rasts of the hollow pedarchy. The heat will scorch your belly. They wear special iron boots to cope with this vulcanism. They will step on you. You will be cut into sections. They will thrust into your annelidin sheath, gripped by your aortic arches, the tight red licorice of your hearts.*

He is awakened by the rumble of snowplows, pushing aside the moldy black snow like the night physically crumbled into the streets.

He has a headache and the sweats. He walks outside in his underwear at the perfect moment to step in front of the plow. He sees the dark slush rolling against the blade and he wants to crawl into it like a blanket.

He starts drinking again.



At a museum, one of the few remaining. The chamber is dim, the little light of this season directed against the far wall, slanting from high windows. Of all the paintings in this dark and lonely structure, Y chose this as the meeting place.

DIVINE  
LOVE  
CONQUERING  
EARTHLY  
LOVE

*(There is so much light in this painting, and so soft the gradient as it falls into darkness.*

*After so long seeing nothing but billboard ads, commercials, propaganda, spraytanned pornomeat, office calendars, newspaper comics, business cards, junk mail, mascots, graphic design, beer coasters, liquor signs, dogs playing poker, it hits him like a washing machine to the face.*

*A boy lays on the ground, with a winged boy alighting above him. VEAU's head tilts, to take in their expressions. The boy above seems so tender, until VEAU notices the hooded eyes and the aquiline nose and the barely parted lips which seem almost predatory. But the hand is reaching so delicately, with such care. Wait. It rests upon a rock, barely visible in this light. It is not reaching for another, it is supporting itself.*

*VEAU squeezes the pet rock in his pocket. Fingers cast apart, light and shadow held between them like a lyre, playing all the universe on the strings of his heart. His entire life feels like a waste.)*

VEAU                      He's so, ah. It's so beautiful. This painting.  
Y                              Yes.  
                                    I'm glad you could see it.

*(VEAU wipes his eyes, afraid of his tears becoming known. Salt into his knuckles.)*

Y                              Eros is killing Cupid.  
VEAU                        I thought he was helping him.  
Y                              Interpret as you like.

*(There is a devil on the left side. Wasn't EROS rescuing the boy from him?)*

*Oh. He was transfixed by the grace of those fingers, he didn't notice what they were carrying. EROS is grasping an arrow. Preparing to strike the boy with a radiant bolt of annihilation—)*

Y                              This is the second version of the painting. The first is held

across the border. In the other city.

*(The city that was split into two cities. A fortress for the values of our enemy.)*

In the first version, he is wearing armor.

*(VEAU shuts his eyes and allows Y to paint across his mind.)*

The armor covers his body down to the ankles. But in the second version: his wild leathers let the sun in.

*(VEAU opens his eyes. The bare thigh of the boy, of EROS, looks even more luminous than ever. Even in this dark museum, it glows as if lit from within.)*

In the first, EROS's face is crude and heavy, lacking the subtlety and light you see here. And in that version, the devil is hidden. It is only here, in our city, the true city, that the devil can be seen. His ugliness. His lechery. Exposed to all.

*(Y tells him about the mission. Domestic, local, highly sensitive. We can see the building and the people from here, but better not, let me describe it. Too easy to take this strong adult body, and what? The instinct of a preemptive strike.*

*VEAU finally notices, the boy on the floor also has wings, pinned under his body. Why should EROS thrust that arrow into someone so like him? Shouldn't EROS ask, will you come to the sky with me? Earthly love conquered, and lifted up.*

*He wants to reach out and touch the oils. To know their texture. Such old paints, fixed into the shape of someone so young.)*



Y You're shivering.  
VEAU It's very cold.  
Y That's because you keep forgetting your jacket.  
I never see you with it anymore.  
VEAU I'm forgetful.  
But not as a serious medical side effect of the extreme drug  
regimen you dose me with.  
Just forgetful.  
In general.  
Y You can quit at any time.  
VEAU *(silence)*  
I'm just cold.  
Y If I give you my jacket, it won't teach you anything.  
VEAU I don't want your jacket.  
Y Then you'll be cold.  
VEAU I'll be cold either way.

*(Walking down the hallway together. The smell of the cheap perfume they spray all the  
womanlikes with. Government standard-issue, but a dupe of a pretty good department store  
brand so some of the women take it home with them.)*

VEAU There's a boy in Semi Nova.  
*(silence)*  
I could take it out for a few hours.  
Y No one told me about a mission in Semi Nova.  
VEAU Not a mission.  
Just to spend some time in the sun.  
It wouldn't harm anyone.  
Y That would be impossible.  
VEAU What if I killed someone? Then could I?  
*(silence)*  
If I kill, say, a pederast, pedestrian, pediatrician, something like  
that. Can I enjoy an hour of fucking sunlight?  
Y I wish there was something I could do. But it's government  
hardware.

*(VEAU follows him into the elevator)*

VEAU *(low, bitter)*  
You're so hard on me.  
Y As Schiaparelli said. Never fit a dress to the body, but train the  
body to fit the dress.  
VEAU What's that supposed to mean?  
*(His red-rimmed eyes burn. He scratches them, making the skin  
even redder.)*

Y Can Retz cause withdrawal?  
It shouldn't.  
VEAU A lot of things shouldn't happen.  
But if they didn't, we'd be out of a job.

*(Floors ding past. Someone drew a penis on the ceiling. The smell of stale takeout from the tiny shop everyone gets breakfast at, a thousand steamy breaths of starch.)*

Y Drugs weren't part of it, at first.  
But ours is a nation of masculine men.  
They react violently to being used.  
VEAU *(moving closer, jaw tight)*  
Is that right.  
Y Retz is a chemical screen between you and the unthinkable.  
VEAU Not so unthinkable.  
I find myself thinking quite a lot about it, actually.  
Y You're standing very close to me, Veau.  
VEAU We were equals when this started.  
Y Colleagues.  
VEAU So treat me like one.  
Y Your pet rock misses you.  
VEAU Who told you that?  
*(silence)*  
You ratfucker.  
Y Good night, Veau.  
VEAU Good night, Y.

