

4.

The year was 1984. The Republicans were back, again. It was a warm May morning, and the windows were open. There was a smell of potatoes.

There were beggars on the street, rich in castles, plagues on the rise. The middle ages had returned. It was not a pretty sight.

Speaking of holes, I was experimenting at this point with holes mineself. You've heard of wall of sound? This was wall of words, with holes in it, through which could be glimpsed a real person, nor is there any point in pretending this person was not you, for if I was not ashamed to wear my hair for you, etc., well! I might as well admit I spied on you through holes. Yet the holes themselves began to interest me increasingly. I began to focus on the elimination of words *per se*. Yet, as even Rudy could see in a flash, if I wished to eliminate words *per se*, why not eliminate the middle man and don't start typing to begin with? As "transcend" was a word that had no equivalent in his language, I did attempt to compare the whole business to a thought balloon. But even as I spoke, I saw the writing on the wall, and I needs must interrupt mine conversation with Rudy to copy the words off and get them down on paper. For I had recognized that the point was not to eliminate words *per se* but to prise them from the page, to make the printed page a springboard or launching pad above which would float its contents, somewhat blurred, thus you could escape. As you may well imagine, this was rather difficult and took many revisions, and the furthest loft I managed after four years was 1.5 mm off the page, which, at that height, and at that rate, well, you may ask was it worth the trouble. Yet often failure holds the key to success, generally refusing to let it out of its sweaty little fist, or dropping it down a subway grating, or baking it in a pie which gets inadvertently eaten, nevertheless, there it was.

I had found that by raising certain expectations (and here I refer to tone), then pulling the rug out, I could create, briefly, a sort of free fall, you see, in which the words were neither on the page nor in the space between the ears. This had to be done brusquely, in a great rush, or the effect was lost. In the course of this labor, I had sometimes remarked a peculiar and indeed impossible phenomenon. I had been typing, and noticed on the page certain large blanks which I felt certain I had not laid there myself. I placed myself at various angles, and occasionally those spaces were not; yet, when I did move otherwise, they were. Through memory, I did reconstruct the words in those blank spaces once more. I did reflect: in each case, I had constructed a sentence with words designed to nullify themselves, as: *the, or, when*. Placed in a certain relation to one another within a sentence (or I could do so within a paragraph) those which were similar as *then* and *her*, with certain mistypings, as *ther* for either of those (or for that matter *their*), within a certain rhythmic construction, would cancel one another out and, this is what is

Heh, heh.

Well! I would say: and this is where my story begins. Except you would say, oh rilly? What was all that cheap/tail/kidney/!@#\$\$%^&*() business in, poddin me, chapters 1, 2, and 3?

"Rudy! Come quick! My room's been mugged again!"

Rudy did follow me across the courtyard. Up the stairs. To mine rooms. The smell was stronger than ever here. The windows were closed. The door had been locked. The window bars remained. Yet mine papers were gone.

"You bin recyclin'!"

"No! I swear!"

Rudy did survey the scene. The Royal remained. The stove remained. The papers were gone. Rudy did conclude: "There's yer audience. Thieves."

It was a start, certainly.

Yet I had mine doubts. Well! Perhaps it would be useful to retrace mine steps during the preceding time.

I had been doing that heh, heh business the preceding evening as mine work drew to a close. At the same time, I was thinking of you and working on what I hoped to be a thriller, very mean-spirited, too, with plenty of vomiting right at the start. Later I had give up, you see. I put everything in piles. One pile: heh, heh. Other: thriller. I showed Rudy where the piles had been. In one pile, quality, but worthless. In the other, trash, but cheap. On the one hand, invisible narrator and the like. On the other, escape fiction. We did approach the table where mine piles had been. Invisibility, escape.

I had aged by now, mine breasts were long. You've heard of long of tooth? I was long of breast. Rudy had always been long of tooth. So he looked about the same. He was so moist, you see. But I had lost my youth, prematurely, yet by chance I noticed that the age I did resemble was that on mine papers. The State says you are this age, you are. I say these things, they're not. Perhaps Rudy was right after all about marriage . . .

I waved mine hand about to show Rudy. "Right here!" Yet at this moment, the hand I waved about the area where the piles had been did disappear.

I pulled it back, with some difficulty, as that area did draw me in. Mine hand did reappear.

"Yer a real character," Rudy did say.

Well! I tried again. Same thing.

Next, Rudy did experiment, waving his own hand. His own hand did disappear. He pulled it back, with difficulty. "You bin muggin' yer room yerself."

"Rudy! What would be the point?"

"You would not press charges."

Still.

Then he took a step forward and disappeared altogether.

"Rudy!!!! Oh, God! Where are you?" For the Royal remained. The wall remained. The papers were gone, and Rudy was gone. "RUDY!!!!!!!!!"

"I HAIN'T DEAF!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Well, fine. He was invisible, though. Which was bad enough.

"Rudy! Try to tell me where you are. Oh God! I will try to get you out of this."

"!@#%^^&*()_+!"

"Oh God!" For Rudy had evidently relapsed to his original language, which was a kind of panic reflex, I believe. I had to think fast. I could speak a kind of pidgin in Rudy's language, as, "Wot th'?"

"O"

I tried again. "Wot th'?"

"

[]"

"Wot th'?"

"

{ [] 0"

By such means, I got Rudy's bearings, whatever that might mean with Rudy, and I did manage to approach, holding onto the window bars with one hand and making stabs with the other. Imagine my relief when mine hand did grab something, Rudy, and pulled him out. He emerged saying, "Heh, heh!"

Naturally, I was crazy to try, too. So, Rudy held onto the bars. I gripped his hand and went in, disappearing. He pulled me out. I emerged saying, "Heh, heh!"

We went in together, tying a long piece of sheet between mine ankle and the radiator. Naturally, we used this setting for sex, which, once we'd managed to find each other, was indistinguishable from visible sex, in fact, on reflection, slightly inferior, the only fun being that we kept unintentionally having sex with body parts we had not had in mind, and when we tried again on the outside later, the principle did remain, which did enhance our repertory, but it was so much preferable when this was visible, what was the point? Other than saying "Heh, heh!" which continued to amuse us--in fact, it was arguably the best part, for it was out of our control. We did tie ourselves to the radiator and go in many times, first more than once/day, then, as the novelty wore off, daily.

Yet within a few weeks, I was in a depression. "It is useless."

"Well," Rudy said. "It is art."

I saw his point, for art is useless, so I was back where I began, and worse, for mine old drafts had disappeared.

"You c'd sell it t' th' mil'tary."

"I was afraid you'd say that, Rudy."

After a gracious pause he did remark politely, "It is interesting to think about it."

That was all I needed. "It is not interesting! It is a cheap trick!"

Yet interesting it was. It cleaned the brain out, like a toothbrush. Naturally, no one wanted it. No one would want to buy something like this. For it was nothing, and nothing is free. This was not some preliterate society. I would have trashed the whole thing but Rudy said save it. He was as bad as Mother. Save it where? It was invisible, yet real. So it had, I believe, mass. Yet who could tell?

For years those who had seen mine work did not see anything in it. You could not see my characters. You could not see the point. My work had nothing in it. Yet it drew you in. Now all this was literally true. My work looked like nothing, and nothing was what it was. Yet how would anyone know the difference? For this looked like nothing, and was. That was th' problem. Yet it was not rilly nothing. I believe. Yet it bore such a near resemblance to nothing,

big deal.

"Why pay for it?" I did ask. "If it produces nothing but what you put in yourself, it is a gyp. It looks like nothing. It *is* nothing."

"We c'd have a guarantee! If it is something, yer \$\$ back! No questions!"

And we would call it [].

Yet the buyers, they would ask the questions. And who could answer those questions? Was it something? Or was it nothing?

"It c'd be air," Rudy pointed out. Yet did air conceal? So it was not air. And this was fortunate, for you could not own air. Yet. "It c'd be space." Well, that was true. So I could own it. Sell it, too. Yet who would buy?

I thought Rudy might trade it, but then I begun to realize it was rilly something and might actually have a market. Yet it would take some explaining.

Nor could I put it in the mail to mirna [sic]'s friend, for, while I had no clear idea of its volume, it was certainly too large to stuff in a mailbox. Moreover, when mirna [sic]'s friend received this item, naturally she would throw it away, and I only had the one. I would have to bring it up mineself. So now I needs must decide what to wear. Be myself. I wore my enormous mittens. I wore my small coat. I wore my own red nose. I put the item on our handcart and walked, as I doubted I could get the handcart through the subway turnstile.

I had not been above 14th St. in 6 yrs, and as I passed 23rd St., I was scared, for zombies were everywhere, whilst I did drag mine handcart toward that old address, taking the freight elevator.

But nothing remained. The office was gone. mirna [sic]'s friend was gone.

Well! I dragged the handcart to the office of mirna [sic] herself. She was gone, too. Her office remained, though. Simon & Schuster, I believe. I began to cry.

The elevator man did tell me where a friend of mirna [sic]'s friend could be found. I called her on a pay phone. This friend was gone, too. Well! Publishing, you see. But the person who answered told me where mirna [sic]'s friend had relocated. I made another phone call. 25 cents per! mirna [sic]'s friend was at lunch. I did track the restaurant down, which was a green and shiny place.

It had begun to snow. I come in with the handcart. My giant boots. My mittens. My scarf. Well! mirna [sic]'s friend took one look at me and there went her eyes. They did stop and go dead.

"Perhaps you remember me."

Unfortunately, she did.

"Look, this is a rather remarkable project."

And in her eyes I saw something. But it was a watch ticking. It was over.

"You can't see anything in it. But it is there!"

A depression had seized her. I could see that. She was just dying to be rid of me. I could see that. Just dying to. The restaurant noise. I did smile at the waitress. Why hate me so?

She was going to call a cop. I did leave. But on the way out, I shoved the waitress in [], from ill-temper. And all did say, "Where is she?" or "Mine check!" "Mine pesto!" (For it was the 80s.) I had done this through words.

It was not the waitress's fault, though. And in the end I did repent and pull her out. She

though, to steal from myself. And if I would steal from myself, which was, arguably, impossible, the laws of logic and even space were defied. Thus, storage was possible.

And Rudy understood this. The point was how to sell it, for it was invisible. Naturally, we looked like crooks.

We changed the name from [] to Hide 'n' Save. We took it to the Closet Store. They threw us out. The Door Store. They threw us out.

I fell into a depression which lasted approximately 2 mos.

I told Rudy I wished to give Hide 'n' Save away. But Rudy said no, we've come this far being cheap, why stop now, and I could see his point. Rudy went off to trade it on the street, but no one would bite. I suggested drug dealers, naturally, or married persons having affairs, certainly. It had a subversive element. No one would trade.

Speaking of street, the street had changed. Holes were being filled. I did spend more time on the street, for here it was that Rudy and I did set up shop and Hide 'n' Save was most useful, for when the cops did check for license, with a little notice, we climbed inside. We didn't like to do it in plain sight, naturally.

Well! It happened that one day Rudy's trading brought us south and west, through an adjoining bohemia which was neither free nor cheap but cost a bundle. Passing a window, I suddenly stopped dead in mine tracks. For I might have been staring straight into Rudy's closet. This was evidently a gallery, named Grantleigh Stone. Yet here were Spalding Balls, a tire, an egg cream replica, etc. Well! I begun to think fast. The next day I was down with the handcart, and on it mine piece, which having some relation to both the concrete world and art was now called [Hide 'n' Save]. I rilly did think mine ship had come in at last. What they displayed here was figuratively nothing, but I had gone the whole hog, you see. Well! I come into Grantleigh Stone with the handcart, mine coat, mine mittens, etc., explained the nature of mine work and threw a Spalding into [Hide 'n' Save] by way of demonstration. They called the cops.

I had done something technically impossible. For legal purposes, therefore, I fell into one of two categories: 1) criminal, 2) nuts. As I elected 2), Graftleigh Stone elected not to press charges, particularly as I produced the missing object, naturally replacing it with a nearby stapler which was much to Rudy's taste. A cop said, "Did I see what I just think I saw?"

"Evidently not," I did reply, "for it was technically impossible, or you are nuts, too." Then I threw mineself out.

There was a skid down the street. I stapled mine coat to it, climbed in [Hide 'n' Save], and wept. Then I wiped off, dried up, pulled mineself out, heh, heh, and dragged us all home.

For I had worn my hair just for you. I did the things you liked to do. I told the truth. I had told the truth about it not being the truth. I done the things I ought to have done. I left undone the things I ought not to have done. I had fallen in a depression. I had mopped the hall. I had done something that was technically impossible, invisibility being the least of it, for it was art yet served a purpose.

Yet, to you what I had made was nothing, and you were right. Nothing is what a [] was. It was useful, but it was nothing, nothing is free, so it was not worth value. You did not wish nothing to be useful. You wished something to be useful, and art, forget about it. Nor could I blame you. For, as I believe I mentioned, if you forgot about [Hide 'n' Save], well, I ask you,

how would you find it?

For I never forgot *you* and even then had difficulty finding you. I had made the invisible narrator. I had made invisible art and/or craft. But I had nothing on you. Talk about invisible! I begun to think we were two of a kind.

Who were you? How big were you? What could you hold? Did you have a yard? Were you healthy? Did you walk to the pool? Did you bring your towel?

I would have given you a towel, had you forgot it. I would have done this for nothing. You did not care, did you forget your towel. I would have sold you a soda from a little stand. I would have give it you for a nickel. You did not want it for a nickel. I would have given it you for nothing, for the pleasure of watching you drink. You did not wish it for nothing. You did not believe in charity, for in this respect you were cheap, though on the whole, not. However, you certainly weren't free. You were busy. Nor could I get you on the phone. The 90s were on their way. There was no time. Time was there none.

Well! Speaking of time, to make a long story short, one day I produced another [], I can't think how. The real problem had always been the escape fiction. Invisibility was more mine line. On this occasion, by chance, having laid down a copy of a piece of trash called *Jailbait* near several experiments with holes in wall-of-word, I discovered another [], and though I believe its capacity was limited, by the same token I could train this one to float. And before long, I had made another. None were as capacious as the original, which remained up near the Royal, like a dog near its master. I had found it was unnecessary to write trash for the narrative pull, I could use anything with a good strong narrative, anything Rudy found in the trash. I would merely lay it on one side of the Royal, then fiddle with wall of words, make two piles, go to bed, and call back, in the morning.

So. I made another [] and brought it to 2C, and Rudy kept his things in it. And this was good enough in a way. I put the socks, rubber bands and empty cans and other ordinary refuse in, when we had guests. When the guests went home, we took them out again. I had done this through words.

Thus I would never have to tidy up again. Yet I had never tidied up before.

I made a small [], using a Con Ed overdue notice for the narrative pull, and brought it with me when I cleaned the hall, stashing mine mop and pail in it. At first I felt uneasy about these uses, till I realized this was my dream come true. For I had eliminated the distinction between art and a broom closet, with this exception: a broom closet was visible.

I made a [] for Forhan, and I believe he was careless, for soon after, Zizi disappeared, and though Forhan disclaimed responsibility I did not entirely believe him as he had had a religious conversion and was currently a Nebulite, which is to say he believed in the space between things. Effect disappeared at around this time too, but he was a very old cat, and perhaps died only.

Minnie, the super, died, and I became super, mineself, putting out the garbage, sweeping the front area, and receiving many violations from the EPA, which did read: "I did see 1 cigarette wrapper on the curb. I did see rat feces under the front steps," and the like. New persons did move in, the Nabanasayamas, the Roots, the Ngs, the Mnts. We of the old guard were few, as Rudy and mineself, Forhan, and Sirgash. The 80s were drawing to their end. Even the rich paid more and ate less. Persons lived in the streets and parks. And I? I was superwoman. I had

eliminated the distinction between art and a broom closet.

This was the old way. You made a thing for your family and community. Those who understood its use took it for granted, as it was merely useful; moreover, they could not pay. Those who could pay did not wish to do so, for to them what I had done just looked like nothing, and nothing is free.

I threw myself into mine work but always returned, whilst the work regularly disappeared, to mine delight, though nothing matched the vortex of [Hide 'n' Save]. The new ones were invisible, certainly, yet did not draw anyone in, and I gave them away, I believe, for it was hard to know if they remained, as no one could see them in any case. They were still useful for storage, yet required certain organizational abilities, for it was essential to keep lists of where things had been stored, otherwise they were lost, moreover while they were evidently nothing, yet they retained mass, and could occasion minor accidents.

Mine neighbors used them for storage units, thus everyone looked like they owned nothing, yet they owned invisible storage.

So, these persons looked like they had nothing, yet had something, yet certainly, these same persons might have preferred it the other way around. Still, as what I had achieved was technically impossible, I had not the heart to stop, for it was art that served a purpose, yet was by the same token not worth value, nor was I.

So! In Mother's time, the time of the old bohemians, pathetic wives and girlfriends supported artists who were worth nothing. This was the new day. I was that artist who was worth nothing, and I was those pathetic wives and girlfriends too. We certainly had come a fur piece. We must do what we never did before, and we must do what we did before, too. We must be superwomen, you see. We were everywhere.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Well! Years had passed. Speaking of superwomen, it is Trix, mine old comrade, looking unrecognizable as, presumably, did I. Well! I only had her word for it that Trix she was.

Trix and I did compare notes. Unfortunately neither of us had the faintest understanding of what the other was doing. I believe she was an investment counselor. And me, forget about it. Oh! Remember our third comrade, Luka D? Just as drugs had helped me find mine way to Rudy, drugs had helped Luka D find her way to become a technical writer, whose subject was science. Nor could Trix and I understand what Luka D did, for her specialty was neutrinos, whose existence is proven by the explanation that there is no other possible explanation. Science, you see. Bonnie D had disappeared.

Speaking of Mother, mine had evidently contacted Trix in hopes of contacting me, for she wished to reconcile. We had become estranged after mine marriage, for she did not believe in marriage. Old bohemian, you see. She was dying. So.

Well, when Trix was gone, I did confer with Rudy, and with his blessing did load a medium-size [] on a handcart, and whilst not necessarily going to hell on it, I did go west, even to the heart of the old bohemia, with its smell of cheese rinds. At this time I had not left mine quarter since mine terrible trip to Graftleigh Stone.

And many were the memories that assailed me, though of this my childhood home precious little remained. Even when I had last wandered in these parts they were not cheap, but

now, forget about it. And there were old bohemians, too, very old, wearing berets and the like, and lining up for free dinners at various centers, and holding coupons in their trembling hands. I did walk almost to the river, where I climbed a sagging stoop to the old rent-controlled apartment. And talk about free. The front door had no lock. I let myself in, and every inch was full of her savings, you see. For there were broken lamps and unmatched buttons, old ketchup bottles. A chair with half a rocker leaned against a large marked box. A sari did lie in a heap on that chair. Mine mother was inside.

"So," she did say.

Well! We were both on our best behavior, you see.

"Tell me about your husband."

"He's not rilly my husband."

"Oh, I see."

I decided not to mention his tail. "He is a trader."

"Stocks?"

"I believe there were some sheep once." I decided to change the subject. "Tell me about yours."

"Your father? Came into my life like a hurricane and left nothing behind. Except you."

Well! Er. "Mine rent is \$73." It had gone up.

Though weak with illness, I could see that she was most impressed. Hers was \$125, you see. She added, "You still talk that funny way."

"For I am a hippie, mother. But don't tell Rudy."

"No, I won't." Nor did I think she would, as the two had never met, nor would they recognize one another if they passed on the street. Finally, she gestured at the handcart. "What's all this, then?"

Well! It was a little hard to explain. Yet she grasped it quickly, for the odd thing was, it represented her two great passions, art and storage. The difference between her and me was, to her they were not the same. She was on her best behavior, yet I knew she was dying to see if it actually worked. I put in an old dress pattern. I put in an old dress. Talcum powder. Crackers. There were a few safety pins here which I did pocket, as, one never knew. Bobby pins, no. One knew about bobby pins. And there was the lid of what had apparently been a tin of cold cream.

"Hold on!" It was mine old papers, from mine youth. I separated these and lay them on the handcart, which was empty now, though who could tell.

Then I went back to the []. I threw in a rubber item, evidently from some sort of hydrotherapy indulged in by a friend named Plaidy, who had played a prominent role in mine childhood fears. Well! There were broken baskets containing other broken baskets. Here were bills from Wanamaker's, dated 1952. A charcoal portrait from mine mother's youth. She clapped her hands together with delight. Finally, at her urging, I put in the whole shebang. A rolled canvas. Socks, naturally. Fuzz, evidently. A pair of white gloves. When it was all done, she was radiant. "So! These are my walls!"

Well! Now that we'd seen 'em, I had thought she might have preferred things the other way. However, mine mother was on a roll. She said, "Put me in."

"Mother, I cannot guarantee you will come out."

"I'm dying, you see."

"Still. You would be invisible, yet . . . "

But she was way ahead of me. "When I die, the rooms will decontrol. Unless, perhaps, there was such a smell that no one would want them . . . "

Well, I saw her point. "Perhaps we are not so different after all."

Well, so. This was the way she wanted it.

"I am proud that you have done this," she said. I put in several large cans of beans, crackers, and Chianti wine. Then in she went. "Wait!"

And I did think she had lost her nerve, but there was no can opener, you see. I did find 5 or 6 in her kitchen. I put them in. And as I let myself out, I could hear one turning. So.

So I did drag mine empty handcart down her old stoop, always heading east, and by the time I got there, mine mother had died, and the old bohemian was me.