

“Brilliant, insane and utterly unique, A Greater Monster offers pure sensory stimulation, verging on sensory overload. The graphics, concept and narration are pause-worthy, and they all combine to create literary indulgence at its best—its most interactive. The narrator in A Greater Monster doesn’t hold your hand and guide you; he doesn’t ask you to like him. Instead, he delivers a sharp uppercut to your chin and asks you to stop cowering, open your eyes, and fight back. You will. He’ll make you.”

—**Jen Knox, author of *To Begin Again***
(2011 Next Generation Indie Book Award winner)

“I can’t express how brilliant my favorite scenes in A Greater Monster are. In this extraordinary work, Katzman pushes language to do things, which are truly astounding. This is where Artaud meets Williams S. Burroughs meets Lewis Carroll in an obscene, violent dissolution of character, plot, and setting. A Greater Monster dismantles the foundations of narrative, of the human subject as master and center of time and space, reason and language, and the word is transformed into image, into an indigestible thing that both resists easy consumption and is utterly entertaining.”

—**Carra Stratton, Editor Starcherone Press**

“Beautiful mystic-schizo DayGlo wordage. Poetic, peripatetic, and diuretic prose that befuddles, enchants, and amuses the reader at the same time.”

—**Lance Carbuncle, author of *Grundish & Askew***

“This is bizarro fiction at its most intense. It contains scenes and unique designs that seem engineered by some Mad Hatter and Chuck Palahniuk cross-breed.”

—**Lavinia Ludlow, author of *alt.punk***

*“After David David Katzman’s brilliant first novel, *Death by Zamboni*, a masterclass in the uses to which comic writing can be put, comes a novel that couldn’t be more different. A Greater Monster opens in a world that’s immediately and recognizably ours, a world of profit potential and financial files, before spinning off into a spiritual (and carnal) quest that reads like *Alice on acid*, while channeling every trash sci-fi nightmare *Creepy Tales* had to offer. ‘A book is a special idea’ explains one of the characters, and this book is certainly special, with language that doesn’t so much describe as enact the constant dislocation undergone by the narrator as he spins in the vortex of his own mind’s making. ‘Let us visit the imaginarium.’”*

—**Charles Lambert, author of *Scent of Cinnamon* and *Any Human Face***

“A Greater Monster is a highly creative and original story combining poetry, imagery, and prose—all working seamlessly without a break in momentum.”

—**Charlie Courtland, author of *Dandelions in the Garden***

A GREATER MONSTER

DAVID DAVID KATZMAN



BEDHEAD BOOKS

I have never seen a greater monster or miracle in the world than myself.
—Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, book III, ch. 11

I jerked awake from my half-sleep, still clutching Ganesh in my right fist, when I heard the moan. The room smelled of ashes and rosemary. Hit the power button without shutting down and clenched the action figure tighter as my computer whined to its death.

Nothing.

Put my ear to the floor.

Perhaps I hadn't heard it.

I returned to my chair and considered the elephantine god in my hand. *I'll take him to work as a sentinel to keep me company*, I thought. The rich olive color would bring some energy to my office, which was a black box within a large black loft designed to simulate a warehouse (while incidentally honing paranoia and cruelty).

Papers strewn across my desk. My financial files. Had a moment of disorientation—thought I was hanging weightless above them, a dancing spirit. All those numbers representing all that I have.

Could be erased in a flash.

“Take,” he said, holding out his hand. I inspected his dirty, wrinkled palm and the small black lozenge that sat upon it. A gift. The least I could do was allow him the honor of giving it. *Better living through karmaceuticals.*

We stood at the mouth of the alley, dead still. My clients would not have been pleased. eEye would not have sensed anything. Everything needs to keep moving. A breeze rippled across my face, curled down the back of my blazer. A freakishly warm December 21st. Mid-60s. The old man did not move. A monument to homelessness, a statue of failure, wearing a postman’s jacket over a shirt with the outline of a horse on it. Work pants, a dirty baseball hat with the swoosh logo, and sandals covered in what appeared to be dog shit completed the outfit. *Better him than me.* I grabbed at the pill. Turns out, I wasn’t as quick as an action-movie star. The moment I contacted his palm, the old man close-fisted my fingers and spit a glob of phlegm violently at my feet. His acid-green eyes met mine—“Why’d the chickens cross the road?” I scooped the pill and yanked my hand from his. “Why’d the chickens cross the road?” he repeated more urgently. I backed away, thrusting the pill into my coat pocket. The rough wool fibers rubbed like a Chinese finger trap. As I turned the corner back to the street, he bellowed, “Cuz he’s a goddamn backstabbin’ chicken’s why!”

I swiftly trod the well-worn sidewalk dirtied with graf and excrement, noting the quote near Halsted: **MURDER YOU ASS WHITES ESP. BLONDS** → Then further east a couple blocks: **KILL YOU WHITE LONG-NOSED ASSHOLE GOOFS** Mmmh, sorry you couldn’t make it like I did. Welcome to natural selection, loser. Shifting the pavement beneath my feet by walking in time. In a timely fashion. In my black custom-made suit. Took the flaunt way round. At Halsted and Belmont, a silver SUV almost hit me as I stepped out with the walk sign.

“Fuck YOU!” I screamed while flipping the bird at the slut behind the wheel. The blond-ass bitch looked straight through me. Indeed. On second thought, perhaps the angry proles were onto something after all.

Assailed by a syncopated rhythm: hammers echoing from a courtyard, scuffing of shoes, buzzing insects, a bus’s roar, distant sirens, dog’s bark, staccato overlapping of two languages, five conversations. An impassive

blue sky looked down upon me as I marched ahead penned in by concrete. Mangy mutt stopped in my way, craning up at me. Move along, rabid thing. It scampered off.

Touched my L card to the turnstile pad. Up the stairs. Had to squeeze past two deaf white-trash mullet-heads signing furiously at each other, almost coming to blows with their signs. On the platform. Checked out where the girls were. Over there, stood near the most attractive one. *Breasty McSweater, if you knew how much money I make, you'd want me*, I thought. But she ignored me. An ugly girl looked over at me, and I could sense her searching for eye contact—I gave it; she smiled tentatively. I put on my fat glasses. I could see through Fatty's clothes, skin, blood, and muscle. Nothing but a jiggling pile of creamy snot. Could I bag this fat? All the kids are doing it. The biggest bag of fat wins prizes, big fat fucking bags of fat prizes. She looked down.

Later: a client meeting discussing the strategy brief for the eEye launch. Skull-crushing boredom interspersed with hyperventilating fear.

“As we all know,” I said, “security is big business, and this product has huge profit potential. Since 9/11 and even further, with the popular acceptance of global warming as a trend, people have two options. Those who can afford it invest in both directions at once to hedge their bets. The first behavior is a ‘conservation’ or so-called ‘green’ direction where they attempt to ‘make a difference.’ As miniscule as that difference may be, our research shows that people find it psychologically satisfying because it makes them feel like it’s *other people* who are part of the problem. In addition, they feel they are contributing to future safety needs by trying to reduce the dislocation that will be caused by environmental catastrophe. It’s important to note that—except for a few Luddites here and there—this is self-interested and often halfhearted behavior in the average consumer.

“The second track is to protect themselves from those who may be angry and in fact economically at risk due to the new poverty caused by environmental degradation and economic collapse. While green technologies are doing well in the market, these security products are doing even better. Personal safety comes first. There’s nothing but upside here. Further consumer research

shows eEye is best targeted at the six-figure-and-up demographic—individuals whose psychographic profiles wed them to the faith that money can buy safety. Of course, we don't say that. What we do is, we play upon their fear of the unknown and position eEye as the solution. We're recommending the following brand positioning: eEye is knowledge and knowledge provides security—or, more concisely, eEye equals knowledge equals security."

So why is it ... the more I know, the less safe I feel? I reached into my pocket for a tissue and touched the gummy pill. Had forgotten it was there.

"We're going to need to review concepts for our sales meeting at four tomorrow."

"But you just approved the brief. There's not enough time. At least ... let us come back to you with a mood board," I found myself dredging out of the job bin.

"No, we're going to need to show them a full ad campaign. Can you deliver or not?"

"No problem, Christopher. We'll have the creative for you."

So many meetings, I couldn't get any damn work done. Shut myself in my office with a paper plate and a knife from the kitchen. I retrieved the black lozenge, set it on the plate. It looked like a gum drop or the inside of a black Chuckles, with an oily consistency and an odd phosphorescent sheen. Perhaps this was where all the bitter black Chuckles go when they die. Or perhaps it was glue soiled by the hands of Mr. Homeless Guy, Esquire.

I clicked open an email just delivered from the GM.

You've been doing great work on eEye ...—*blah-blah-blah*—... account worth 500 but with growth potential ...—*blah-blah*—... let you know Ed has decided to move on to other opportunities—*fired*—and I'd like you to take over his account for now. You'll have to continue managing eEye but this is a great opportunity for you. I'll be out of pocket tomorrow but Ficks can begin your download.

Please. Strap some electrodes to my temples and sear my brains.

I raised the plate to my nose and sniffed. Nothing. I stuck the plate in a drawer with the knife and proceeded with the fiction of the day.

“I want a fucking life!” The cry echoed from somewhere in the warehouse outside my door. The creatives were getting restless. It was 12:21. Third night in a row I’d been at work past 10:00.

“So lose the account and your job, fucker!” I shouted back and stuck my head out the door. No one. Just a cleaning guy sweeping the floor. He didn’t even look up or acknowledge my presence ... perhaps because we don’t speak the same language. I retreated to my office. Back to my laptop—email from the art director. How much of my life has been eaten up by this machine? What is that, masturbation into a vacuum?

ill be back at 8am if youv got comments

I opened the PDF and reviewed the creative. One good idea, two mediocre. Oh, you spineless jellyfish sons of bitches.

Gotta grab this bull by its balls. Bounced a koosh off the wall for an hour and pulled a couple smarter headlines out of my ass. Fired them off to the art director with some comments, and it was done. The presentation was at 4:00 so we’d be fine.

Warm and stuffy. 1:35 a.m. A dead zone. Discontinuous, discontinued from life outside the walls. I’d rather sleep here than take my work out. Inside and outside reverse so easily, separated by nothing. The outside falls in, the center will not hold. What shambling chimera slumps out of the office?

I turned off the light and sat in my ergo chair with the glow from my laptop spilling across the desk. Lifted the plate from my drawer and placed it in front of me. The object on the plate seemed to have darkened since I last looked. Gotten blacker. I put it back in my drawer. Searched for “free hardcore” and clicked a random link that led to a garish porn site featuring teaser images of

topless women. I closed it, triggering a horde of pop-up windows to swarm across my desktop. Who would be quicker—me or the interstitial masters of the universe? Eventually they got the better of me, so I rebooted. For a brief moment, my office was completely black. I pulled the drawer open and touched the gummy shit, pinched it in half between two fingers. It was jelly-like.

Popped it in my mouth. Tasted like chicken. No, hah. Tasted like bone and asbestos. Like death. I swallowed and gagged, but it went down. My tongue went prickly and started to burn as if I had eaten too much pineapple. I gasped as it oozed a trail down my throat, taking its time. Mistake. That was a mistake. Oh yeah, shit. Why'd I do that? Shit. I closed my eyes. The computer monitor reversed itself, a black square in silver frame. I got up and grabbed my jacket from the door hanger then put it back.

I touched the wall of my office. It was cold. Industrial. Metal rivets. Grey. The floor black and oily. This was fashion. This was marketing.

Ganesh was there on the shelf next to my desk. *If I'm really going on a trip, I might as well pack my totem.* Joke. Stashed him in my pocket anyway.

Some time passed. Sweat ran down my forehead. I felt alternately hot and cold. I gripped the armrest. Desire is not pleasure. It's fever. I picked up a folder of project timelines and emptied it across my desk. Aimlessly flinging and crumpling presentations, turning things over without looking at them, dumping shit on the floor, pulling open drawers and emptying their contents. There went my paperclips. Binder clips. Spare change. Taxi receipts. Business cards. *Seven Habits of Highly Effective Cuntholes.*

I was hunting. For what? For courage? Need to tell a new story of myself. The born-again do it. They let someone else write the plot for what they become. Boring. If I had courage, I would write my own fiction. Become someone interesting.

I was having a hard time wrapping my head around ... why I was doing what I was doing. And what exactly *was* I doing? Outlines softened. Surfaces went

foggy. What was I supposed to be doing? I was caged in solid smoke, sharp smoke. I saw it settling in, filling the space. A skintight dream with hard corners, corroded metal defined space. I shaped the proportions when I could to avoid the spikes. The heartbeat of work. Pain and pleasure cannot be argued with. They demonstrate me. Touching is just electrons repelling. Nothing can touch. Ever.

I passed my arm before my eyes and watched it skip past me like slowed frames in an old movie. Life was stop-motion.

Realization: We render time by stitching together moments—flipping pages in the book of consciousness presents a continuous stream. Our senses too slow to realize the separation of moments, like a strand of pearls through eternity.

Time is terrifying, time is unspeakable. Clock-time lies down between moments ... but distance warps with velocity, time bends with velocity. Frames of reference. Are not absolute. Are selfish. A private reality. Clocks have a life of their own. Framed by references.

Speed separates: the faster I go, the faster everything moves away. At light speed, time accelerates to infinity; a catapult to end-time, light is the end. Within a singularity, density is infinite, gravity is infinite, light cannot escape. Light has zero mass. Time ends at both ends.

Time, you bastard, what are you? An allergy? A sickness. My body aches. I need to become completely still—my insides, I need to stop them, enter the singularity. But what are you? A reflection into matter of speed? Velocity's unconscious. Time is velocity's dance partner. Movement changes our angle through time. Time and space are trapped together, live together. Space trades places with time. Light is the crease where space and time, matter and energy fold.

Time is imaginary space. How do I get from one moment to the next? Space doesn't have direction, why should time? It's a medium. Within which vibrations occur. It just is, not movement, no strand, just now.

Time is—Realization: I could see nothing.

I could see nothing.
The room had vanished.
No forms.
No color or ground.
Absolute zero.

I was thinking, *This is a vision, a vision of nothing. Nothing is recognizable ... not my vision—I'm borrowing someone else's vision. Whose? Who are you who sees this? A spirit guide? The spirit lives in me and is driving me. But ... spirits can be liars or truth-tellers ... quixotic tricksters. What is this?*

My stomach was a black pit spiraling into a negative space, an aching hole where my cock should be receding like the tide into meaninglessness.

Vacant vapid.

The surface of my life felt fragile, like a tympanum, taut and ready to snap. What if there's nothing inside to come out? Nothing, only air, no me in there, no life, nothing to become.

Suddenly, in the clarity of a drug-dark high, I became aware of the emptiness of all things. Every single thing around me, surrounding me. All belongings, buildings, people, people are empty shells, behavior mapped onto mannequins precluding any possibility of truth by gorging at the trough of emptiness—what fills up the emptiness I can taste my fear the fear. I wanted to smash everything every single thing and everyone. Smash the walls the objects the people the air myself crack open the shell release the loneliness. But nothing is so dense and powerful a delusion. The irresistible pull of a black hole the ultimate greedy bastard my inevitable demise drawing closer so I fill myself with more death to get closer to it. Love is burdened with all the feces of emptiness, a vacuum. As empty

as
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And then I began to dissolve

Drift i n g
glid i n g

between
the

lines

Everything was wrong. I had done something not quite right, but I wasn't sure what. Bad things were going to happen to me. I had to try to follow along, play along, if I could just figure out the rules. But I had messed up somewhere. I didn't know the rules.

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I could sense them like crust at the corners of my eyes. I felt outlines, vague outlines of other people in the room with me, but I didn't dare look right at them, I couldn't move my head in that direction ... were my eyes closed? I didn't want to open them because I was ashamed. I could see one of them out of the corner of my eye, one of them was female. Smooth like a doll. Her head was a brown deer head. Doll plastic. Salvia. I knew her name.

A cold glowing eye floated in front of me glaring with basilisk gaze—I threw up my hands to protect myself and the eye vanished in a jagged bolt of lightning.

Heard a sound.

Click.

Slid apart to a place. That deer. A time to get up and move sideways around the room because I was supposed to, disapproved of I could see that.

I was clutching the armrest—must've sat down again. Perspiration trickling at my temples. Oh, this was not good, no, I knew, my desktop exploded like a stick of dynamite *Ispasmedontopofmydesk* it was exploding wouldntstopexploding I stretched the bomb exploding I grabbed it and held it up.

I could see its fat mouths poised to embed themselves into my body

Hello?

[“...”]

Hell oh Hell oh

[“...”]

I tried to yank the thing away from my ear, but it wouldn't let go. Sparks crackled out of the mouthpiece cascading fountains burning my hands, face. I realized I was shrieking. I shut my mouth the sparks vanished black fluid absorbed my consciousness, caught in spongy ether.

I heard the sound of time out of my eye *click-click-click-click-click* trying to catch the present moment I could hear the flower of the metronome from the corner of my eye but I could not see it distinctly. It repelled my touch. Reality pivoted on a single point, I was spinning up and out like a tornado.

I saw through the back and top of my skull. Two television screens face to face talking to each other. There. The metal desk. And my hands went through it to the molecules then the empty spaces full of waves and waves I was swimming. I was in the bathroom wanted to get out because it was so hard. But I couldn't walk.

Whiplash of wind howling through me. The withering glare of the ice mantis emptied my body of all substance. I sensed the fraud. All true calculations

had been hidden from me. The mantis moved across my line of sight leaving a trail of cruel certainty in its wake, outline after outline of itself disapproving of me from the corner of the room.

Motionless, they spoke with the utmost disdain and venom, You live here? We could not have come up with a better punishment for you than this. Your pleasures are shallow and false and nothing exists behind you but emptiness in your so-called civilization so you strain to fuck things, you know deep down you can feel it in your meat that all this pretended human creation will shatter, plunge jagged seeds into your flesh and grow a torture garden.

Silence struck me like a blunt instrument. The stall door slit ajar. The sink—blotched with little lakes of water, a geography of disgust. At a urinal. The small dirty yellow tiles with streaks of rose over and over and over again the same dirty yelling tiles over and over and over again to infinity squares rotating reality clicking around in an infinite wheel I must follow it or I will be lost and life is the ring of the rungs of reality where I step off a world within a world within a world within a world and I needed to wake up because each world was worse than the next stay where I am right now I have to go back—the clicking rotating universe each one a fractionally different version of me I had to concentrate try not to panic stay in the right one or I could become one of the other ones instead I needed to stay in the right slot or I might not come back eyes closed eye saw rows of disapproving people one of them in the middle in the back a deer head of lucent brown they were all related to me and next I was swimming surrounded by liquid pressed against it I plunged through milky clouds diving through fathoms of ghosts. I could not breathe and I did not need to. Slices of clear-clear water.

I saw this then this was the way it is, it always was. This I saw. This was the way it is, it always was. This place was divine. I was always here. I would always be here. And I will return to it. I will always return to it. It is behind everything haunting me. That other place had been a trance. A trance that seemed to last twenty-eight years. This I see now. This is the way it is, it always was. I imagined that world. This is what's real. I imagined that world. This is what happens when I dream of being real.

My skin peeled off to get away from me
 I touched my ears and they rang like toxic metal my teeth were grinding
 A place of phantom surfaces
 A knife sheep god eater and the twitching toads
 The people were beautiful and spoke a language incomprehensible machine chatter
 Gleaming iridescent white suits and strapless dresses blinding cocaine teeth
 Their laughter sizzled in my head and the scraping of rusty wire
 She (of rainbow hair) passed the needle
 He (with silver eye) passed the needle
 a drop of nectar glistening at the top a lambent drop trembling in light
 is me
 the slightest disturbance a slight gust evolves and swirls me into heaps
 endless and unnecessary
 as I turned to speak—vanished in a poof of dust
 Matter is the energy of perception with the sentiment of a pile of maggots
 My self soled in sagging burlap
 a chemical dancing on the tip of the iceberg
 the creative radiance grimaced

Words break world breaks eat ourselves O the sea the hole the Center the whole (no)thing(ness) around and round under and up and u

Things were not good not good I was shitting bricks ripping hairs out my asshole felt like my intestines were going to blow fuck fuck fuck ah shitfucksssss

I felt myself being ripped apart inside my asshole chunks of my ass thrown across the bathroom splattering the walls my legs falling in opposite directions my body surrendering to the tile my face bounding off a surface warm milk in my mouth my tongue felt the topology tooth tooth tooth? jagged edge my face was a jagged tooth my eyes they were closed they would not open I was tugging at them with all my willpower nothing the abyss no orientation no perspective abruptly swung open: my face was in the urinal I pushed back many bodies entangled with me we were all kneeling at the urinal I wriggled and all the bodies writhed around me a knot of little snakes nadouessioux nausea overwhelmed us and we vomited into the urinals before

A beginning:

In.	Out.		In.	Out.		In.	Out.	
	In.	Out.		In.	Out.		In.	Out.
In.	Out.		In.	Out.		In.	Out.	
	In.	Out.		In.	Out.		In.	Out.
In.	Out.		In.	Out.		In.	Out.	
	In.	Out.		In.	Out.		In.	Out.
In.	Out.		In.	Out.		In.	Out.	
	In.	Out.		In.	Out.		In.	Out.
In.	Out.		In.	Out.		In.	Out.	
	In.	Out.		In.	Out.		In.	Out.

Ensnared back at my pad. Wrapped in a blanket. Shivering dog-sick. Puke all over my shirt. Lips numb. Drifting in and out. So many threads of nothingness knitting through my head. Flipped on the poisonous afternoon TV. The television exudes a warm glow of friendship on lonely nights. An insect god waiting patiently for me to rot and decay. Quivered a lot. Smoked a bowl to try to calm down. Shook like Parkinson's. Checked the locks on my door three times just in case. Unlocked one by accident the last time. Had to check three more times. Phone rang. Hot and aching. Lay on the sofa, ceiling fan going around slowly, so slowly. The original *King Kong* was on TV. Closed my burning eyes, sickness of commercials infecting my ears. I think I heard one of my babies on there selling home security. Home security. A house of cards. My job, the economy ... there's always nukes. A home is paper-thin.

I was thinking: *Why'd I do it, why? Every time saying, if this trip ends badly, I can handle it, but I forget every time forget I can't control my brain, parts of it shut down like in a dream that dream where I was talking to him—not thinking he's dead, just talking to him, not saying this isn't possible, this is a dream, don't think it—what was the last one? ... indistinct characters ... can't seem to look them in the face—a warehouse? The office. Right, typing at a computer ... dead fucking father ... run over like a deer in the road—I can hardly picture your creased face, that stupid outfit you put on for the “traditional” dance competition, leather headband stuffed with turkey feathers, feather anklets, beaded wristbands, looking like a sad-ass mascot doing a competition for fuck's sake about tradition ... had to marry a white woman didn't you and move us into a log house so you could still feel full-blood that's why you never could look me in the eye, saw me as iyeska the day I blew up, it all blew up the scholarship the hell I'd go back to the shithole rez no more speak to half-breed cuz I was going to be better than you and you knew it.*

Closed my eyes. Pounding hangover. Couldn't sleep. So fucking tired, but my brain was wrapped in barbed wire. All I could do was groan and feel like I was going to die. Even my tears were afraid to leave me.

I blinked, looked up. The ceiling light was contorted into an angel of death.

Suvé. Suvé. Swedish and quintessential. That summer after college in Europe ... my big black backpack ... the creaky old youth hostel in the Alps—way up at the peak of the peaks. Nothing around but cliffs and snow and space. Meeting over dinner ... talked ceaselessly until it was late, everyone asleep but us. Insects of all kinds zwinged around the ceiling lights, and the chill air sluiced through cracks in the rickety walls. What did we talk about? Pine Ridge, I told her about Pine Ridge and how it was the poorest place in the U.S. and about Wounded Knee and fry bread. I wanted her to see me as special. The one time I told anyone about being Oglala. She just listened, didn't act like it made a difference one way or another. Her tattoo—a peace sign inked in tie-dye on the back of her neck. I love the symbolism of it, she said, whether it's genuine or not. She wanted to believe it had meaning. Sitting across from each other at a rough-hewn picnic bench ... she held out her finger and a monster dragonfly landed on it. The insect preened its eyes for what felt like forever. When it finally flew away she asked, What do you feel when you're in love? and I remember thinking I don't know, I don't know how to answer that, so I just answered without thinking, I want it to be over so I can fall in love again. She had to make a call so we wrapped ourselves in wool blankets and stumbled out into the moonless dark to find the sole payphone in town that stood a hundred feet away down a dirt trail toward the cable car that went up to the top of the Jungfrau. We found our way to it by using our feet to tap for stones lined along the border of the trail and squeezed into the phone booth. She pulled the door shut, and the ceiling light went on. One cube of light amidst miles of pitch-blackness. She was close enough that I could feel the warmth of her breath as she spoke. I leaned my back against the glass wall as she slid a card into the machine and punched a number. For fifteen minutes, I contemplated her long glowing hair flipped back from her forehead like wings and listened to a song I couldn't understand then or ever.

I stroked my slippery hard-on and pictured all the women I wanted to fuck, one after the next falling onto my dick, falling into each other, through each other, becoming one large, arbitrary, beautiful woman who I realized was nothing, and she vanished, and I was fucking myself, and my dick was abraded. I lost it, I lost everything, and I melted into a hole, folded into myself.

My face in the mirror. I looked tired. Thin and brittle. I rubbed my eyes several times. Opened my mouth, front tooth chipped to a point, throbbing. Should get that capped immediately.

I turned on the water and let it run, steamed up the mirror.

The need to buy something uncurled in me like an erection. I would feel better if I just gave in to it.