



NILVX
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WOMB

They had shaved their heads, stroked razors across their arms and legs and genitals. Every translucent hair, every coarse curl, was removed from their bodies. *Naked we came out of the womb, and naked we shall return to the Womb.* The yogi, Jonah, walked by each of them as they crouched on a mat, mimicking the cold posture of a prenatal baby, and drizzled them with amniotic fluid, colorless and saccharine. The flow recalling ritual baptisms, ablutions. It was surprisingly warm on their skin and tinted their thoughts with a solar aura.

The shearing of their heads had been as revealing as circumcision, bringing to light conical crowns, pinched or dented scalps, birthmarks, and ingrown hairs. As if in communion, Jonah, too, was hairless and nude, tipping the bucket, one by one, over each pale and dotted dome. Those who still awaited anointment might have experienced echoing doubt, a distant embarrassment at their condition, but those who were now dripping, who had felt the liquid pool in the crevices of their bodies, remembered his words: *When we are brought down, the world speaks of tunnels of light, or the light at the end of the tunnel, but little do they know that this imagery has an ultimate origin.*

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Those supine on hospital beds, with their heart devoid of beat for too long, come back and tell us of blackness, that central point of white light, and that feeling of warmth, inclusion, belonging, that feeling of home. The former yearns for what the latter have seen but cannot name, cannot fathom. That is, the Womb. We were all of us pushed out by our mothers, and our mothers and their spouses were pushed out in similar fashion, ad infinitum, until we reach the first Womb, which issued forth the soul of mankind. That is our Home, that is our Tunnel of Light, that is where we must reside again.

All of his recitations and revelations, every musing that had been shouted or whispered from Jonah's piscine lips, floated as red specks in the vitreous gel of his follower's thoughts. *Why do near death experiences bless some with a glimpse down the length of that ostensibly true tunnel? Don't for a second think that death can bring us there. On the contrary, those near the end are experiencing a recall, an ancient memory, shocked to the surface, of their original birth. And the haloed and silhouetted figure who splays his arms is not god they are seeing, it's the doctor they are remembering. We are so easily fooled. Which is why the only way to the Womb is through my guidance and your submission.*

The females recognized the sour scent of his penis as it dangled above. Over the course of their training, he had made

them study it usually one at a time in his room, for it was a model organ of their generation, half of the biological equation. The scent itself made them picture its structure, a crenulated shaft rising from a bed of folded and pimpled skin. Every embedded or elevated vein hieroglyphic in nature. The urethral orifice an eye, parched, tearful, then spewing strings of milk. *You must know the inside and outside of this organ, you must summon and consume the seed it contains.* He also explained to them the importance of his becoming familiar with the false home set between their legs, whether the labia were stained a darker or brighter color than the rest of their bodies, whether the folds blossomed or puckered, the size of each clitoris, which he measured with his tongue, trailing down to the bitterness of their cervical mucus. He thought of them as perpetual wounds begging to be cauterized. *These caves, where Adams and Eves dwell in disgrace, pariahs all, must be bouldered shut with force of will and thrust. Do not see them as fertile, know them as barren.* When he had begun to tremble inside them, he would stay true to his own injunction of coitus interruptus, and the slime of potentials would be cast down the well of their throats and burned in a lake of stomach acid.

The males were not as familiar with Jonah's penis, other than a phantom whiff of smegma left on the breath of their wives,

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sisters, or daughters, which would lace the words of their loved ones for days afterward. They remembered how, in a moment of jest, Jonah had said that the men of his congregation were probably already familiar with their own reproductive organs, and all had laughed. Then he had become serious: *Everyone here, strangers, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, parents and children, will become more familiar with each other than you ever were or will be after.* And so measurement and study had not been limited to the females and Jonah, although he did enact the most meticulous and recurrent lucubration.

Once all thirty-three members were properly drenched, Jonah took his place upon the blanketed pedestal, cross-legged, his penis in a state of half-blood, the skin blue and purple in the shadowy light. His ectomorphic build made him seem a Buddhist statue. He positioned his feet into a double lotus, the soles upward. After he inhaled, he pushed his palms outward, as if repelling an ocean, but then turned them in a welcoming gesture, exhaling. With pursed lips, he began a hum which, by degrees, ascended to an inaudible pitch. Zenith. His congregation followed suit, except that their synchronous hum descended into a silence. Nadir. Master and apprentice, each occupying opposite ends of the spectrum. *You will be trained to replicate the*

sounds that our fetal ears perceive while afloat in the Womb. The Womb is everything and all, except where we are right now. If we can fine-tune the conditions, then reintegration will inevitably come to fruition. When that happens, it will be out of my hands and yours. You will be at the mercy of the owner of the first and final Home.

Jonah placed his palms over his marbled chest, the right hand atop the left, flanked by his shriveled nipples. *Our hearts are not our hearts. They are the pits of sour olives, fermented from clumps of matter and gaseous residues. They mean nothing. What truly gives life are the sounds. The color of sounds, the taste of sounds, the sight. Close your ears if you want to hear. The beat. Yes, the beat is the echo of something meaningful. If we can excise it from our own hearts then we are one step closer to Realization, to Return.*

And then they switched silences. Jonah from high to low, his congregation from low to high, and when they passed each other on the spectrum, something unlocked, releasing an incorporeal queef. Jonah's hands moved to rest on his knees, his fingers shaping the shuni mudra. The congregants, abandoned heretofore, wailed with infantile colic, anticipating osmosis. As the sugared zephyr encapsulated them, they all felt the arrector pili muscles in their skin contract to form goosebumps. *Many,*

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if not all of you, will be compelled to cry like dumpstered babies, and you'll feel the pain of it in your abdomens. But fear not, this is the predictable buildup of a life spent on earth, it is the symptom of your exile. Rid yourselves of the poisonous sounds, let it all out, so that you will have room for the Hums, the Vibrations, the Lullabies. By all means, speak in tongues, mold your perpetual sorrows into cathartic soliloquies. Think, think, think of where you yearn to go, where we all must go. The earth is infertile. But the universe is our Uterus. Our bodies will burrow into and issue forth from the Sun, the Moon, all the astrological eggs. Spliced DNA commingling. Our brains as blastocysts. When you are Returned, your umbilical cord will be renewed, twice as thick and infinitely long. In gestation you will eat as sustenance the ether around you. A reality that is entirely fecund. Think upon this...

Jonah opened his eyes. His nictitating membrane remained closed to protect him from any uterine radiation that still lingered. The room was empty of bodies, and he looked over the coral-colored walls, the damp mats, then spotted something that increased his pulse. He could feel the throbbing as a kind of stigmata, in the wrists, his temples, his soles, the right side of his ribcage. On the far left mat was a pair of feet, each ending halfway up a shin, cleanly cut. He recognized the long toes, with

nails painted a pale red, and the inward pinky. This woman had possessed doubts, not measuring and studying her daughter as zealously as she ought to, and he had done his best to extinguish those doubts, to replace them with a strengthened faith, but, no matter how many times he instructed her tongue with his words of encouragement, she had retained some shadow of unbelief, dark and oppressive, which prematurely closed the Womb on her legs. Now she would bleed out in a void, with not even a point of light for deceptive companionship.

The Darkness, too, must eat, replenish its reserves.

Yet, after years, Jonah couldn't help but feel this was proof he had gotten careless. The last time something like this occurred was when he had forced his mother into attempting the meditative stance and corresponding rituals. Back then, he had to use his own urine as a substitute for amniotic fluid, the latter being too rare and expensive in the absence of monetary donations. When the Tube had unsealed, his mother screamed, and he heard a shuffling and quick, wet footsteps. After that omnipresent sound of suction, he had opened his eyes and saw her naked head rolling toward his feet, severed at the base of the neck. Her dried pupils aligned with his. Somehow he had found her death, the justice of it, appropriate.

