

THE DETECTIVE AND HIS DOUBLE

No one could say quite what his motives were, but One Fine Day the private detective sat down to write a novel... Obviously an act this unnatural could not pass without consequence.

Episode 1

Inman Square, Cambridge MA

Randall was sat in the back enclave of 1369 Coffee House, his frame crumpled in sympathy with his suit. The staff were all round the corner dealing with customers so he snuck a quick glug of whisky. Grimacing, he glared at the garish cheap bottle: it seemed to like him just about as much as he liked it. In front of him was a pad of paper. Yellow foolscap. If you had to guess, you'd probably say he'd put it there himself. On the top page, three words were written – a couple of lines of space between each of them.

Breath

Blood

Antwerp

But they were scratched on in biro – not Caps with a marker, as you might expect with such sparse pronouncements. You got the impression that nothing else had been written in the book, but you couldn't be sure – since only that top page was visible, *obviously*.

Uncanny, but there was some seriously deep house being played – not the usual mix of Pixies and same ten hits from the fifties that passed for edgy out here in the provinces of the East Coast. Not that it meant anything to Randall; you'd think he'd been smoking through his ears all this time, the amount he could distinguish musical tastes. Anyway, on top of a disco bass line sounded like it had been filtered through the bowels of Shiva, came that Kerri Chandler vocal line, looping with an intent to keep incanting until the words had lost all meaning: “Deep house provokes thought...let's take it back to the real; let's take it back to the raw...” What was this mix – too contemptuous of the audience to be Chandler himself – ? It looked like the staff were asking themselves the same question since they were clicking through iPhones, seeking out the ends of cables, trying to work out how to change it. But the source couldn't be traced so they gave up – some new management initiative maybe.

Well God knows what thoughts had been provoked in Randall but he started attacking the paper in front of him like a man possessed. You wanted to toss the pad a weapon of its own just to make it a fair fight. While he was lost in the savagery, the 1369 resident weirdo walked in. Soiled beret balancing on the south-west corner of his strangely wide head; gut peeping out of an ill-advised plaid shirt; permanent film of sweat aglitter. After slapping a randomly purchased secondhand paperback (Melanie Klein) down on a nearby table, he danced to the counter knowingly, sporting the kind of lopsided grin made you consider giving up smiling for good, just to avoid any association with *that*. He started making some intrusive comments to the girl working behind there. But before he could hit what by his standards passed for a stride, he spotted Randall.

He crept over with an attempt at conspiratorial eyes and stood over the table until Randall looked up. The 1369 resident weirdo aimed for an uncomfortable silence; but when he saw the detective preparing to return to his writing totally uncurious, he started talking:

“Well aren’t you the private dick who spent two months tailing me last summer?”

“I’m the private dick spent two months wishing he was a contract killer tailing you last summer.”

“I didn’t have you down as the note taking type. Well I’m flattered that a certain well-to-do family whose name we needn’t mention at least saw fit to hire a professional. Still with all that unpleasantness cleared up, we can stand man to man as players in the same game.”

Just then he caught a couple of lines of what Randall had written and froze. His film of sweat thickened and coalesced into droplets. He staggered out of the shop dripping and forgetting the book he was never going to read anyway. Randall resumed writing, more calmly than before, and stayed until the café closed.

Episode 2

Spring. Outside. It's Boston so there's chattering birds, blossom, and perfumed air – no scent of jizz intruding on this vignette since we're dealing with highly stylized impressions here, *remember?* Typing sounds float out of Randall's open window. Well not float exactly: the keystroke echoes more kind of topple over the ledge and plummet downwards but catch themselves just before they smack the ground, as they shake off the plodding specifics of the detective's tiresome prose and become a weightless abstraction rising up – simply an aural metaphor for writing in the springtime – fit now to permeate the air and (gaining more confidence as they go) wrap themselves round the rustling leaves, slip into the sparrows' lungs, coming back out a song. Randall's mind is pure since he is oblivious of his transgression, and this purity shapes all that's *audible* in his keyboard's clattering. However, there is also an undertone or perhaps a harmonic – not a sound on any conventional understanding, it's too subtle for any of that – a jarring undertone that speaks of the unnaturalness of the act. The birds hear only the innocent intent and so strain their voices ostentatiously in its honour – this would be in danger of spoiling the unselfconscious beauty of the scene were it not done with such joyous bombast. The trees, however, are older and more attuned, with an ear for the perverted. So instinctively the leaves strain against the wind, tensing forward and periodically being slapped back against themselves, an orgy of whips on arses. Those outside slowly become restless, and without knowing why develop excuses to leave. Old academics find themselves in gaudy bars knocking back - “what on earth could have gotten into me” – Evan Williams of all things; the languid and uncomplicated youths rush into bedrooms and fuck a little more violently than they had any desire to, uneasy in each other's company until cleansed by the serene that descends after Randall closes his window; the ageing hipster just holes up in his kitchen and drinks coffee until he's unspeakably lonely. Only the self-professed freaks – the amateur trapeze artist, the 1369 resident weirdo, the half-naked police captain, the self-styled beatnik (raves about Bukowski, but has never touched Ginsberg or Burroughs), all the bloodless Kantians, provincial artists, repressed coders – these knock-off weirdos stay on the streets, claiming to embrace the discomfort as Realness but only enduring it so they can say they have. Volvox sits in her study contemplating deep house and senses the wrongness. She alone has the fortitude to locate

it wholly outside of herself. Intuiting that there is nothing else to be done she lies in the bay-window and sleeps, untroubled.

Episode 3

On the subway: Greenline running towards Allston – which branch exactly you don't need to know. Randall sits typing in a workmanlike fashion. The train judders on, slow and ugly. That unrefined type of inefficient transport even lacking some sort of redeeming anachronism. He is unbothered by the progress, not so much Zen patience as lacking in imagination. Opposite sits the amateur trapeze artist. She's dressed up like a gothic ragdoll – though in a decidedly amateurish fashion. Her mouth is starting to curl in distaste, and the mock stitches around it – they're not quite scratched on in biro but that's what you're tempted to think looking at her – the stitches wrinkle up like woodlice. Why she is so revulsed is not clear – we have no reason to think she's aware of Randall's crimes. He looks up and meets her eye; her sneer wavers, and when she notices this happening she overcompensates, her whole face puckered up like an arsehole.

“Don't even think about touching that mothballed dick of yours, pervert,” staring at the detective with proud nervous eyes.

Now Randall is all Tathagatic repose, a man in his element: “Let me tell you darling, I'm as big a sleaze you'll find this side of Revere; but these days without a quart of whiskey in me my dick's 'bout as dangerous as an indoor firework.”

A pause – Randall resumes typing. Concrete, and haggard BU students flash past the windows. You could call it scenery; I wouldn't. Memories of a train journey across Belgium slip through the detective's mind. The countryside is where a train should be – suddenly the thing glides rather than lumbers. The old European air welcomes it, allows it to cleave through without resistance. Inside the carriage men wear full suits and read the newspaper. One remarks that the land in America is still too young to allow meaningful travel. Randall pictures himself weeping as this is said to him – though in fact he did nothing of the sort. At the edge of the forest, hunchbacks stare in through the windows, completely motionless. These recollections go no further because the amateur trapeze artist has grown restless.

“You know I’ve got an 8 inch plastic penis strapped to my leg right now pervert. How do you like that? Don’t think just because I’m a freak I’m going to let you near it – I’ll scratch your balls and draw blood.”

“Well at least if it’s plastic you won’t have to worry about moths. Would be difficult getting circumcised though – need a sculptor not a surgeon.”

”I don’t care about your stupid jokes. I’ve got a whole gang of circus performers who work with me - we’re family. And they’d all laugh at you, even more than I am.”

They stop talking, for good this time: Randall silent and serene; the amateur trapeze artist contorting ostentatiously, making little squeaks to convey a deranged persona, and glancing up to check if the detective’s seen what she’s doing. No one’s noticed the independent scholar watching over the whole episode from the corner of the carriage. Muttering to himself “Aristotle said it was the telos of man to acquire a plastic penis...”

Episode 4

*Wiretap Recorded: 3.20.2010. Division*_____

“So I’d been at the Hawthorne for a drink...Oh it’s in Boston, Back Bay... Yeah, right, everyone asks me that. I moved to Boston because I think it fits my image and I can relax there. It’s a place you can spend money without being too cool – without people inflicting more and more *ideas* upon you the more you spend. Obviously New York is fucking hell, and L.A. has gotten so self-conscious of its own trashiness, that it’s now tacky in this reflexive *avant garde* kind of a way – and I want just plain *trash*. And in Boston the people are too old, stupid, or downright provincial to offer you anything but. So yeah as I was saying I was at the Hawthorne, drinking a Mission to Burma – not their drink but a good drink, a *Boston* drink. Grand Marnier base. I could talk to you for hours about Grand Marnier, this is a liquor for people who know what they’re doing and absolutely no gimmick to it so it’ll never take off with the hipsters – so at the Hawthorne and then on to Neptune Oyster for dinner – *I* can make a reservation there.

“But when I get to Neptune and I’m just looking through the menu – I’m looking it at it for the thrill of repeating the words to myself, especially the prices, I know everything that’s on there – and I notice these two guys who were also there back at the Hawthorne. I’m thinking something’s not right about them. They’re all done up like frat boys, Lakers caps, tight t-shirts, meathead hench – only they move their muscles a little too easily, like they know what to do with them, like they’ve got them for a reason; they haven’t just squeezed them out at the gym to waddle around in like a swollen peacock. Anyway, before I have any more time to think about what’s up with them, they’re strolling over to my table. ‘You Bret Easton Ellis?’ the one says. Weird fucking accent: half unreconstructed Southie like you don’t hear much of these days; half genuine fresh off the boat Irish. Intrigues me instantly. Anyway, I tell them that I am and they say that they’re here on behalf of someone, needs my service. At this point I’m feeling disappointed since this is looking like the same old story I get everywhere, and I tell them I’m very sorry but I don’t write vanity biographies – not for anyone. And they say that

it's not that, that they need someone to follow a man and that I'm uniquely qualified for the job. Well at this point they've got my interest I can tell you. I leave with them without even eating – I chuck a good couple hundred dollars on the table though, to make sure I'll be getting a reservation next week.

“They take me to some building in Roxbury projects, but the apartment inside looks like it's fucking Christ Church college or something – oak panelled, all the drinks in cut-glass decanters, portraits of Northumbrian counts, you name it. And there're these two old men in armchairs that I'm brought to sit down beside – no desk between us, as though this is friendly, not an interview. Both expensively dressed but practical wear not suits – pristine North Face gilets – which tells me these guys are the real deal. It's the younger one – I'd say 65 – does most of the talking. ‘I trust you've noticed that something has gone awry in this city’ – this is *English*, English, and so self assured, he doesn't at any point pause for me to nod in agreement – ‘you feel tense, but you can't say why. All you know is that there's been a violation of the natural order. Well we, and our partners, are more attuned than most and we've conducted an investigation. We've discovered the root of the matter: a private detective named Randall. The PI is writing a novel.’ I start to express my confusion when the other guy – 80 at least – raises his palm to cut me off. His voice was startlingly high but clean and unwavering, and reciting from memory:

As long, verily, as a person is speaking, he is not able to breathe. Then he is sacrificing breath in speech. As long, verily, as a person is breathing, he is not able to speak. Then he is sacrificing speech in breath. These two are unending, immortal oblations; whether waking or sleeping, one is sacrificing continuously, uninterruptedly. Now, whatever other oblations there are, they are limited, for they consist of works. Knowing this very thing, verily, indeed, the ancients did not sacrifice the Agnihotra sacrifice.

When he was finished the younger man chipped in ‘Moreover, the ancients despised writing; they would resist doing it whenever possible. And if they absolutely had to write, they would hold their breath for the duration of the exercise. Randall, however, breathes

freely and deeply while he's typing for hours at a time. And as a detective – a man so profoundly entangled in action, in the *works* of everyone in this city – the implications are terrifying. So you see, you need to investigate him, and bring this to an end.' 'But why me?' I ask. 'I mean why not just have him killed if it's so bad.' 'You are aware how dangerous it to wake a sleepwalker, the violent effects it can have? Well it seems right now like whatever delusions the detective is experiencing, the whole of Boston is caught up in them.' I couldn't believe that he seriously thought that we'd all become figments of the detective's dream world and I told him so. 'Quite.' He replied. 'But I do think that it's near enough to the truth that we should heed the warning. Accordingly, we want someone to approach him *gently*. And who better than a novelist – a man who's experienced the perversion first hand – to do this.' And that was that, I was escorted back out, no talk of payment, no talk of how to contact them again. Just dumped back at Neptune with an address and a photograph sweating in my palm."

Episode 5

Bret Easton Ellis was staking out Randall's apartment – a virtually *suburban* street in Winter Hill. He had on a \$2000 Burberry trench coat, a \$5000 '50s style Dior suit – though a bit slimmer cut than was authentic, since he had to make some concessions to modern aesthetics – fedora, and pocket-handkerchief whose prices he did not recall. He checked the time on his Asprey watch – well, er, first attempt he realised he'd just been admiring how the gold hour-hand twinkled and had to take a second look to actually see the time. Then he settled down to thinking about what kind of a man being on a stake out made him – *ahem* no sorry I mean, he settled down to focus on Randall's movements with a steely, single minded determination.

He was sitting uncomfortably. This wasn't something they told you about being forty – that you'd still not be able to find a comfortable way of arranging your body. He'd always assumed that once he'd left adolescence completely (you know, around thirty-two), he'd transcend these kinds of distractions. That was the way the serious men he'd observed as a child presented themselves: free of such petty troubles. But no, his adult mind was still at the whim of these inconsequential valences – he could be typing some of his most inspired material and still not be totally absorbed in the moment because his pants were riding up. He felt cheated out of decades of his life – since the number of worthwhile thoughts per year he was capable of producing was a fraction of what he'd anticipated as a kid.

For a while he chain-smoked, but he stopped without even realising he had and just breathed. As he relaxed, his breath slowed and deepened; and, lubricated by his exhalations, time started to slip through him more easily. Its passing lost the usual connotations and started to merge completely with the progression of the music on the radio – a seamless endless mix of disco instrumentals. The peripheries of his field of vision gently contracted and expanded, just slightly, in time with the beat. The panorama in front of him slowly pursued its path through the night. Bathroom and hallway lights calmly pulsated on and off to the neighbourhood's secret rhythm of midnight pisses. Front gardens sat quietly content in the knowledge that they wouldn't be disturbed until

morning; the blades of grass, motionless, tensed every cell until they were brittle as a flake of chalk – a secret nightly yoga ritual – ready to return to normal at the first light. A cat padded silently across the scene, so horrifyingly omniscient at this unfamiliar hour. The noise of cars on the adjacent main road, though not any quieter than would be expected, felt surreal and very distant. Ellis was in a deep enough reverie that there was no longer any awareness of himself observing these things. There just *were* these objects making their way through the hours. Randall's light stayed on, and it seemed that the tapping of the keys on his laptop and the hum of the idling engine mutually propelled each other forward.

Bret Easton Ellis dreamed he was working in Newcastle. Like most Americans, he had virtually no knowledge of the north of England so he imagined the city as a Queens detached from the rest of New York and set down in the middle of some generic New England countryside. He drifted past boarded up corner stores and faceless mothers. Strangely, though he'd never heard of the statue, the Angel of the North had intruded on the vision – overlooking the town from on top of an old quarry. He saw a group of teenagers stabbing a cat and without thought started chasing them. They went through an alley of leafless trees, and as they ran at an ever more lethargic pace a fog descended. Finally the fog cleared and Ellis found himself in a huge indoor swimming pool (he didn't call it 'the baths' because he was ignorant of the real Newcastle, remember) – empty with only the red emergency lighting on. The light on the water was meant to be jarring and malevolent, but he didn't have the imagination to actually visualise this, even in his sleep. The teenagers, now all girls in club gear, were floating facedown in the water. He turned around to see Randall strolling in. "I couldn't save them, I tried but I just couldn't get hold of them" Ellis said, silently weeping. Randall laughed "Of course not. You're dead. You exist only for me. You can touch nothing."

Outside, the 1369 resident weirdo came dancing silently down the street, still smiling. He paused at the car, and very deliberately tapped the roof three times with his knuckles, nodding vigorously to himself as he did, then slid off into the dawn. Bret Easton Ellis woke uneasily, the mystery of the night had dissipated, and his surroundings now looked bare and thin – stripped of all symbolism. Randall's car had gone from in front of the

house. Ellis had let him get away. So feeling groggy and slightly ashamed he headed for home.

Episode 6

Police HQ. The Chief's shouting snaps Randall out of his reverie, and he realises he's being hauled ass first into the office for a ripping. "Relatives, journalists, the worldwide electronic music community, the Christian Fucking Scientists all calling me up to tell me I'm the biggest piece of shit since the dinosaurs were around to empty their asses. And you know what? *I don't blame them*, the freakshow shit's been going down. But wait, every man's got his own account of things. No point in me bringing you all the way here and then not listening to what you've got to say for yourself. Sheer prudence you know, not to waste my breath shouting when you might have some explanation for all of this. [It's the tired old calm down before *really letting them have it* routine; you can tell the chief's impatient to get back to shouting as soon possible – shouting long and loud enough he'll be able to sleep tonight] Now I'm a reasonable man -- I don't like private dicks, but I think we can all agree that that's entirely reasonable -- ['This *is* tired - pretty much verbatim off of the Wire'] – but what reasonable explanation is there of what to you did, taking the body of that dead singer, wheeling it down in front of the old town hall, *injecting it with someone's blood...*"

"It was my blood"

"*It was your blood.* Oh well in that case head right out, Randall, I'm sorry to have misunderstood you so badly...OK I'm being facetious, and can you blame me you must understand just how much stress I'm under right now. But I've got it out my system, I'm ready all jokes aside for you to give it to me straight, because what you did must have been some sort of insane forensic shit that's going to solve every crime this city's had the past twenty years, I mean what else could justify a stunt like that."

"This wasn't connected with any crime"

"Please, don't say that; my pancreas is about to pop"

"It was research for my novel. My writing mentor says I have to act out my key ideas – that this is the only way to add depth to my writing."

-- *Sophie Podolski, Tyneside starlet. Gran daughter of her namesake, the poet. Strung up from the Angel of the North. And obviously the statue was just a prop. Theatrics. But still with the crowd transfixed on it, cameras flashing... no it's ridiculous... but still you swear you could detect a stirring in its rusty loins. By some quirk of her record contract – US health insurance – the girl's body had to be taken to Boston for the autopsy.*

“What the fuck you fucking freak, you're more of a pervert than the angel of the fucking north, and that thing's got lichen growing on its balls. Get out of here you're through. Fuck it I'm through, when this gets back to the commissioner. My daughter's going to community college, scratch that probably stripper school thanks to you. I'll be pimping out my own collapsed asshole just to put food on the family table.”

“I know I fucked you captain and it's nothing personal, but I just have to follow my urges as a writer, that's the only way...”

The Chief's shouting becomes indecipherable. Randall exits; at peace.

Episode 7

As the detective continued to write, things started to really degenerate in the Boston metropolitan area. It wasn't that the crime got any worse – or better – it just stopped making sense. There'd be best friends murdering each other with no motive, not even an explanation, though they readily confessed; perverts jacking off in school assemblies but not even enjoying it, barely able to get hard “what can I say, only mountain landscapes *really* turn me on these days, but I've got to do my bit, you know, keeping up appearances”; cops and criminals equally inept in their cat and mouse so that who got caught and who got away just depended on which blunders cancelled out which; the defence attorney standing up to give his closing statement with a visible erection, the judge changing her tampon behind her stand and slinging the old one at the clerk and hitting him slap on the ear, the jury (no messing about here) just plain fucking each other right there in the stands, and the defendant begging someone to give him the chair right there and then. Worse, no one could quite register what was so weird about these developments – despite its staring them in the face, naked, on the end of their fork – instead there was a worrying collective blindness and everyone just felt a tightness in their chest, and a murkiness in their thoughts. Volvox, still, was untroubled – as really she belonged to New York.

Episode 8

Junot Diaz was in his office looking forward to a luxurious afternoon to himself after his office hours were unexpectedly freed up. All the students had cancelled their appointments last minute (funny that) reporting symptoms of “undifferentiated sickness” in rather abrupt emails. He slipped off his shoes and started to loosen up his brain so as to make progress on his new novel. Given that this time was a gift, he wasn’t going to slog his way through it. This was a chance to explore and sharpen his associations, see what happened – no real goals in mind. He’d start running the key concepts and motifs through his consciousness, firing up the neural pathways between them, seeing what connections emerged. This wasn’t a time for great chunks of writing – brief notes only, no full sentences. It was through this process that he got the instincts for how a book wanted to be written.

But – *no, are you fucking kidding me?* – there was a knocking at the door. Had one of his students not been invited to the orgy, or whatever, they all got sick at? (Though this was *MIT*, much as he tried not to buy into the stereotypes, so it was probably some group-meet wank session over an eight-foot high sculpture of a rubix cube.) At the door though, was a rather dishevelled middle-aged man who he hoped to God was no student of his [it was Randall as well you know]. He smiled the honest smile he always offered to his Public – it was the very same one he gave to his closest friends – and started explaining that it was against protocol for him to see fans while in his role as an MIT professor, though he’d happily sign something quickly since he was already all the way up here (and no he didn’t silently congratulate himself on his own magnanimity.) But Randall cut him off: “I’m no fanboy ace, and unless you’re about to go daft and write me a cheque I’ve got no interest in your signature.” Confusion and apprehension on the part of Diaz followed – as you would expect – but when he found out the intruder was a private detective, his eyes greedily lit up. The opportunity to talk with such a specimen man-to-man offered almost pornographic intrigue to any writer – and Diaz was no exception. Randall was being invited in, offered a seat, a drink “you guys love your whiskey, ha ha ha”, Diaz was babbling about the university administration and asking what he could do for Randall.

“So you’re writing something – memoirs of some of your most exciting cases?” But Randall shook his head deliberately and Diaz felt his stomach turn a somersault and then take a bow. Right then he was *sure* that something wasn’t right about this guy and he was seriously regretting letting him through the door – how had he known to come at this time anyway? Randall explained that he was writing a novel and no it wasn’t a fictionalization of some of his experiences. “It’s about Antwerp, and *there is no crime*.” Junot Diaz had started sweating and couldn’t look the detective in the eye. Unperturbed, Randall offered him some typed pages to inspect. Diaz rolled his eyes across them without anything sticking. But wait, there was a description of a girl strangled: “I thought you said there was no crime, what about the girl?” “That’s what isn’t a crime. I’ve just got find a way to explain it, only I don’t have the words to do it – that’s why I need you.” And OK, Diaz was *really* freaked out now and had to find a way to end this – whatever it was – immediately. Luckily his body provided a solution of its own volition as he found himself throwing up in his bin. When he was able to look up finally, the detective had gone. However, it was a good week before he was able to even think about writing again.

Episode 9

Philosophy is in progress. The academy. David Lewis is present – or rather he’s attending but not *present*, because well who is... [“David Lewis stopped asking questions twenty years ago, even when people are discussing his work directly. Just once, after fifteen years of silence, he raised his hand to correct the date of publication attributed to a Davidson paper.”] Bret Easton Ellis has snuck in, philosopher disguise: huge fake beard, inch thick glasses, a pipe, and, er, a toga – well how was he to know they’d stopped wearing them after Aristotle? Anyway, everyone either hasn’t noticed or is too socially awkward to comment so it doesn’t seem to be a problem. Ellis looks around. Bored clammy faces, but incapable of imagining somewhere they’d rather be. The talk is on David Lewis’ theory of detectives. Discussion is hung up on whether it says the right things about cyborg PIs. The speaker in fits and stutters says this isn’t a counterexample and little else – Prof Lewis himself is unconcerned. The details of the discussion? Who cares...in fifty years time all this analytic stuff will be forgotten and everyone will only remember Zizek anyway. Between Ellis and Lewis sits the independent scholar, spooning cold chickpeas into his mouth. The crackle of saliva. “But Aristotle said that fucking was beautiful” he murmurs. The speaker shifts in her seat, uncomfortable. David Lewis maintains an unwavering quarter-smile. Ellis walks out – he’s had enough. “Aristotle was taller than Bret Easton Ellis” the independent scholar says to himself.

Episode 10

It was an oddly quiet class, given the time of day and what was usual for the yoga school – uncanny if you think about it. The dark eyed yoga teacher didn't seem to mind though. Actually, that was another strange thing: this was the first and only time anyone ever saw her. If you asked other staff about it (even the ones who'd been doing the desk at the time) they'd say they forgot and firmly laugh off any attempts to demonstrate it *couldn't* be anyone on their normal roster. But there were so many of these oddities around there would be no point dwelling on this, so anyway, as this teacher had everyone on their backs and was doing the normal pep talk... “Find your breath; take it in deep, breathe into your arms, your legs your internal organs; feel the sacrifice of speech you are making with your breath and honour yourself for it; feel the speech being driven out of your arms, your legs, your heart, your liver, your skin as you breathe through these places. Know that what you are sacrificing is *work*, and prepare to engage in movement without work, movement as pure production, a body without organs...” Anyway as she was saying all that, Randall shuffled in.

He was in a full suit and hadn't bothered to get himself a mat. He tossed his jacket and shirt against the side-wall (he had a vest on underneath) but kept on his suit trousers and shoes. He knelt down with a grimace and adopted a rather stiff child's pose. And he stayed there the entire practice – except to take what he thought was a sly swig of whiskey every now and then.

Things got underway, and the dark eyed yoga teacher was doing the poses with the class. She gave of the impression she was holding back – just playing – even when that was impossible. Like, she was doing the splits with both legs flat on the ground and still you got the sense she could sink deeper – *much deeper*. And you couldn't even explain what you meant by this, but it was how you felt. Still something was working, since the class was mesmerised. They were going through the poses with liquid bodies, hitting that sweet spot where your sense of self – the boundary between skin and air – starts to soften. Where your breath isn't *your* breath anymore – it's just your passive reception of the universe's gentles pulsation. The ether pushing a part of itself inside of you on the inhale

and on the exxxhale... pulling it out again. “Keep breathing *through* your organs,” the instructor was saying [she was really dragging out the words she emphasised so that’s how the italics are to be read – don’t slack on this, now]. “Remember that breath is the one bit of pure production you have. The organs are all work, desire, action – their so-called *movements* always derivate upon their ends. Breath flows for the sake of it, taking in far more of space into the body than could ever be any body’s *business* to engage with. Let your breath dissolve your spleen, your stomach and your arteries. Let no organs *reside* inside you, but take in a new set with each inhalation, arranged in a new way each time – your lungs in your skull, your bladder in your rib-cage – and release them on the exhalation. New organs with each motion – only then will you really *move*.”

The atmosphere in the room was changing. No, I mean literally: the *atmosphere*. Every bit of air that had been through the instructor’s lungs had a faint taste of blood and bile. But in a reassuring way. Like well cooked offal. Her skin was translucent and you could see the breath fizzing through it – along the collarbones and down the backs of the legs. Even her hair was rippling with each inhalation. The air she’d fortified came to fill the whole room and the effect was positively intoxicating. Everyone had been inching closer and closer together; and now they climbed on top of each other, getting into a stack of deep deep pigeons. The amateur trapeze artist – who’d only come along to show off her contortionist capabilities – was at the top of the pile, ecstatic. The dark eyed yoga instructed walked over, like Shiva, and placed what seemed to be four arms on the back of the acrobat, who screamed but didn’t resist. Everyone folded up, sank even more into themselves and into each other; and it was like they were becoming less *manifest* with each breath.

And then the session was over and everyone disentangled. Reality wasn’t returning just yet and so they sat in the garden of the, at this hour closed, café downstairs. Silent, uninhibited about making long eye contact with strangers, but mistakenly directing glazed and sloppy stares at each other’s cheeks. Randall was the last to get up – only he hadn’t moved into the pile in the centre of the room. The instructor came over to ask him how it had gone “Everything feel good? Any injuries?” And Randall replying: “I’ll

dissolve my stomach with my breath just as soon as you teach me to eat out my asshole.”

But when he got home he stayed up writing until past dawn.

Episode 11

A toilet once mentioned, must be shat in – Anton Chekhov

Some time after his meeting in Roxbury, Bret Easton Ellis had a lead. He'd been leaving a bar in Brookline when he was given a flyer. He was usually pretty adept at avoiding these guys but this one hadn't given any indication what she was up to – no eye-contact as he approached, stood looking the other way, all in black and with a quiet ease you don't expect from a Boston hipster. Then she just slapped the folded card right into his hand and slipped off, cat-like, without a word. It was for some house night – Heartthrob – but tucked inside the crease was a hastily torn out page of *The Big Sleep*.

This party was now a strictly occasional thing, occurring at seemingly arbitrary intervals. It used to be monthly – and, according to those who were around then, it was the rawest night there's ever been in Boston. But a few years back the promoters disappeared (into rural Maine apparently), only reappearing for these shows now and then without warning or explanation.

Usually Heartthrob was at Middlesex, but for some reason it was being held at Machine this time round. So it was that Ellis found himself, a couple of days later, clambering his way down into the club's basement. The whole staircase was covered in black insulation foam, sometimes solid sheets you had to tear your way through, and which seemed to seal up again behind you – and these stairs were going on far too long, how deep underground was this place? There was no line at the door, and there must have been eight or ten people just inside who looked like they worked there, but they didn't want id or money, didn't say anything at all in fact, just watched silently as he sidled through the middle of them. Despite the emptiness outside, there were two hundred or so people in the club, a noticeable fetish vibe to their outfits – not too ostentatious, but you could tell it was for real. There'd been an Artuad production in the space earlier that day and it looked like no one had bothered to clear it up. All about the dance-floor were strewn theatre props: a shipping container, panes of mirror and glass splashed with fake blood... and in the middle a giant pedestal supporting a handful of toilets and urinal. The music

was industrial and sparse, there was no groove to it, all forward motion, somewhere between techno and house (which of course does not mean tech-house, good god) – maybe some stuff by Levon Vincent and his crew, though each track seemed to go on *forever*, edited just to add repetition. It was Volox, the DJ, gliding her hands over the decks, manipulating them reiki-style as though in a trance.

Ellis started moving through the crowd, attempting to find some clues. He noticed something slip from the hand of a person in front of him. Diving down into the swarm of black boots and heels, he peeled it off the floor. It was a corner of yellow paper, with writing smeared by the wet of the floor, so that only the word ‘Gormley’ was legible. Though he had no idea why this might be relevant, Ellis felt compelled to run and grab the shoulder of the guy who’d dropped it. PVC full body suit, dead eyes and lank peroxide hair faced him...*play it cool don't let on like you know anything...* “So, er, this place seems so sordid you might even find a novelist in the crowd” – *what the fuck kind of an opener was that?* But the kid wasn’t thrown by the question, and launched into a response utterly serious: “A house track is like a novel written at the maximum level of abstraction. You’re just given a series of structural tropes with none of pointless details the reading public consume pornographically. It’s simply: a theme, a complication, a reprisal, a suspension, a resolution, calm. That’s all there is... except there’s the repetition, so you really *get it*. This is the way you really understand a *progression*, no distractions, no moving to something new before it’s sunk in.” *Well maybe I can get something out of this kid* “Umm, it seems like you’re saying you have to approach a novel (or a track) like a detective...” but the kid had already disappeared into the throng.

As he started looking for further information, a member of staff slunk over to offer him a drink. He waved her away but she shook her head and pressed the glass into his hand. As he started to protest she placed the palm of her hand on his throat – and he thought he saw a big guy in bouncer garb looking his way, so he backed down. This was confusing, and it got worse when he look around the place. All over people were drinking odd things – pretty hipster kids grimly knocking back dirty martinis, snake bites, crème de menthe. And *food* too – as in shepherd’s pie, ratatouille, a whole roast chicken – trying to eat

these things while maintaining some kind of a shuffle to the music. Needless to say, everyone was covered in crumbs and smears of grease, and there were unidentifiable chunks of meat squashed under boot and heel. Luckily some industrial strength smoke machine was clogging up the air so you could hardly see how disgusting it all was.

The strung out drag queen had just got behind the decks and picked up a mic. Her make-up was smeared, the lipstick drawn wide around her natural lips, and as her mouth opened it seemed like you caught a glimpse of braces. But her voice was a revelation: as she spoke doubled over, cowering from the crowd, it emerged sonorous and terrifying – utterly filling the room, as though each particle of air were a speaker from which it came, so that the whole space was homogenously awash with the noise. “The dancefloor is a place of cruelty, the dancefloor is a place of poverty, the crowd must suffer. The dancefloor is everywhere, there must be no distinction between the club and life as a whole, all activities must be performed here and must meld with house music. For house music is the bubonic plague, house music is cruelty, house music is an uncontrollable desire to empty your bowels and it will devour all, and you must surrender yourself to it, let yourself suffer until you are washed deep into the bowel of house. You may be weak, you may be strong, you may be Jew, or gentile – still the cruelty of house will break you. And this abandonment, this breakdown of identity...this is raw...” And it went on, repeating and riffing endlessly. But the strung-out drag queen suddenly stood up tall, and climbed on top of the monitor. By this time she was shouting; you could see the saliva flying out her mouth and sticking and popping in sheets between her gums. And then she threw down the mic, still shouting, and the voice continued just as loud. She’d been miming: it was all a recording.

At some point Ellis had been handed a leg of lamb, and peas and gravy on a napkin, which he was trying to scoop up with his free hand. He realised, *hello there*, that he quite seriously needed to piss, and so headed to the corridor off the back corner of the main room. Except after it rounded a corner the passage just ended with a bare wall – painted all black like the rest of the place. No one else seemed to have tried their luck going round here, but underneath a sticker for DJ Deleuze, there was a message scrawled in white:

He shits (painfully), he fucks (ineptly), he eats (without relish), he drinks (bitterly). This PI is a clunky son-of-a-bitch of a machine; all rusty subparts, joints

calcified, parts out-dated, worn away by years of neglect and malpractice. The mouth machine dry and peeling, barely capable of gripping a cigarette. The wisecrack machine misfiring, no gallows humour produced anymore just unalloyed misogyny and self-pity – he can't even deliver 'just one more thing' with an even voice. The gruff seduction machine not even working on crack whose false alibis these days...

What was this – it couldn't be unconnected? But if it was about Randall it was a funny way of being about him. And a further scan made clear that there really was no toilet in this place except...but that was just a prop it couldn't even be working. So Ellis, muscled his way to the door past a troupe of Balinese dancers attempting to drag him into their midst: he'd find a quiet alley somewhere outside the club. Some machine in the ceiling was unleashing rain and a biting wind – it really was time to go. However, when he got to the door, the guys he'd walked past on his way in blocked his way. He tried to explain that he wanted to leave, and then, his voice quivering, that he was on the verge of pissing himself – but they just shook their heads absently and stood firm, without so much as looking at him. As he turned back, the toilet on the pedestal loomed over him with a malicious inevitability. He felt a loosening in his bowels too – there must have been something put in the food they'd given him. Frantically, he scrambled up and flung himself on the bowl. He was being purged quite brutally, and as he looked down, sweating and wheezing, drenched and wind battered, he saw that the crowd had congregated around him, jeering and whooping. The music increased in volume, and the sounds started to disintergrate as he grew light-headed. Just before he passed out, they seemed to coalesce into a single hum, a single elongated syllable: *Ohm*.

Episode 12

Fung Wah, Boston to New York in the late afternoon. Randall was on his way to a meeting with his writing mentor. Though most of her clients lived in Massachusetts, she'd never been known to leave Park Slopes. The detective was in a window seat near the front. He still felt a residual disgust at having taken part in the silent impotent jostling to get on the bus early. There was palpable hostility and pettiness hanging in the aisle.

The sun was beginning to set, dousing the scattered clouds in the blood of the then young spring. The highway was bending gently into the heart of the sacrifice. Randall dedicated his silence to this ritual. Though as he focused his attention outside the placid folds of his face arched up into a sneer. The trees and grass were blandly scattered along the sides of the road, charmlessly – but stupid enough to be content in their mediocrity. It was like as soon as you left Boston you were in an eternal fucking Connecticut.

Randall remembered Belgium, and Sophie Podolski. She hired him for her tour – back when she was a wholesome X-Factor winner, not this *faux art personage*. Though even at that point everyone should have known something was off about her, the way she claimed to be the Gran-daughter of her namesake. The poet. Anyway *he* felt like something was off. He had instincts as well as a career back then – leading high-end security details. Part of the job was to personally look in on her at regular intervals, assure her everything was running smoothly. He'd noticed that she had a photograph of the angel of the north that she took everywhere – pinned it above the desk in every dressing room she used. But one day as he checked in on her hotel room, he caught her violently masturbating while staring at the picture. That was it. He was instantly dismissed. No references. And word seemingly got around since he couldn't get work anywhere after that. Thankfully his cousin was in the Boston police force and hooked him up with some of the work even they felt they had to turn down. Boston: that artless grey watering hole in the desert of Connecticut.

Gradually his memories grew hazier until they dissolved into dreams entirely. He dreamt he was in the museum of anthropology in Antwerp. In the room of Balinese death masks he finds Sophie Podolski. One of the masks floats up out of its stand and through the

glass barrier. There is a cry: either the mask or Podolski. The mask flies forward and clamps itself around Randall's crotch; he comes to know that it's an extension of the girl's body. As he starts towards her, she shouts that he's violated her and a scar appears on her inner thigh. Museum security arrive and Randall calmly shoots each of them in turn. The bullets move through the air slow enough to be seen and the guards' cries are garbled, as though the whole scene is unfolding underwater.

Randal was woken as the bus pulled into Burger King for the driver's break – 20 fucking minutes outside New York, as ever. The lights came on and he stumbled off the bus, as though going out onto the yard of an asylum.

Episode 13

Bret Easton Ellis had finally found the door to Backbar, after a good ten minutes of walking up and down the same couple of streets like a dick. Oh yeah, so fucking edgy just having an unmarked door in the side of a building. Why didn't they hire someone to stand outside and beat up homosexuals, just to complete the prohibition vibe?

He was on a date with the dark eyed yoga instructor. She'd mentioned an interest in detectives and Sophie Podolski on her OK Cupid profile, so it seemed like something he should investigate. She was at the bar smoking, and half eying the barman. Languid legs. The kind you could spend half an afternoon dragging your eyes from top to bottom of. After Ellis sat down, she took a long considered inhale and exhale before turning to face him. He nervously started stuttering that maybe they were going to get thrown out. As a response she called the bartender over and lazily blew smoke into his face, which he endured blankly. Another pause and then she said to Ellis "I'll have a Little Giuseppe"; "Oh you know what you're doing – I love Cynar. You know it's made from artichoke." "It's bitter and the colour of congealed blood, that's all I need to know" Was that accent from Eastern Europe? Anyway, um something related, can't let this conversation die already. "Well I think I'll have a Mission of Burma; you know I could talk to you all night about Grand Marnier..." "This is not a conversation I have."

With some apprehension, Ellis embarked on his OK Cupid small talk. To his shame, he found out she was interested in Podolski the poet, not her more well known namesake. He also expressed some surprise that, as a yoga teacher, she was smoking at all – never mind inside the bar. "It's precisely because I practice yoga that I'm able to. I have such control over the workings of my body that the smoke does me no harm. I can close off the cells in my lungs from the smoke, so I suffer no ill effects at all. I could swallow an ounce of arsenic and be completely unaffected." With that she pulled out a little pipe and took a deep hit, smacking her lips as she exhaled – that smell, yes it was crack, this was happening – and continued the conversation, still terrifyingly sober.

“So you’re a famous writer then.” Ellis nodded uncertainly. The dark eyed yoga instructor pushed her heel firmly into the inside of his leg. “I trust you’re aware that no girl you’d ever want to fuck more than once would read even a page of that shit.” Ellis found himself unpleasantly aroused. A pathetic partial erection and an anxious throbbing deep inside his asshole.

He desperately wanted the whole affair to end, so he turned the conversation to detectives to at least try and get something useful out of it and then exit. “Oh you want to know about Randall” (huh, he hadn’t mentioned the guy’s name) “Well yeah I fucked him. I like to fuck detectives – they’re the kind of creep that fits with my needs. You see I look like a victim but I’m hard to the bone and there’s not a single drop of blood inside of me. So I don’t want a real criminal, but someone who adopts the perspective of that other for dirty thrills – a pervert. Only then can I experience the fetid realness of human copulation.”

The conversation continued for a while longer but Ellis must have drunk more than he’d thought, because he couldn’t remember anything about what was said. He was sure, though, that she’d refused to say anything more about Randall, despite his clumsy insinuations. There were flashes of clarity. As they parted, her giving him a slow luxurious kiss on the cheek, then pushing him away with a laugh as he let out an involuntary little sigh. Staggering towards a taxi. Putting peanut butter on God knows what back at the condo. Then morning. As he got into the shower he noticed bite marks on his stomach, ass and inner thighs.

Episode 14

It's now a balmy May morning and Bret Easton Ellis' apartment appears to be getting fucked up. Well not strictly speaking *his* apartment. One he's rented for the purposes of this party – though since it's part of the back story that he's living here on a permanent basis, he's got to come off as just a little concerned about the havoc taking place. He shudders once again at the thought that all the people here think that he's someone who would live in Cambridge – he has a second shudder at the thought of living in Cambridge. But he needed all these academics here and, in what he suspects is simply a symptom of a wider ineptness, they are incapable of crossing the river to have a party in his \$3 million Back Bay condo.

The plan was simple enough – throw a party in honour of that slimy over-rated Junot Diaz cunt, and invite everyone implicated in the goings on of Randall. People would get loose and hopefully let slip something crucial, and perhaps even the PI himself would turn up. He'd counted on this crowd to be naïve enough to fall for a spiked punch, and had thrown an eight-ball of molly into the tub of rum, just to get everyone's guard down. It had all started innocently enough with the academy types showing up early behaving well – though holy fuck were these guys a drag to be around. They all would prefer to stand in awkward silence rather than just talking shit like a normal person.

And Junot Diaz showed up right on fucking cue bringing a fog of graduate students busy trying to lick his ugly ass shoes. Ellis gritted his teeth, rubbed some coke on his gums and went over to congratulate him on that fucking genius grant. Diaz all laughing modesty: “Come on, honestly I don't why you bother. We all know the MacArthur's a farce – there's only one *real* genius at this party.” Too fucking right, only Ellis didn't have any ghetto ethnic fuck-me-I-can-hardly-bring-myself-to-say-this-*diaspora* bullshit to get the New Yorker critics jizzing.

Just then Volvox started up the music – some early Chicago house, the good stuff, I know I don't have to mention any names for you to know what I'm talking about. It had taken a lot of work for Ellis to get her to do a reception, he had to promise in writing

there would be no vol-au-vents. His whole celebrity status hadn't gone as far as he'd hoped – “oh yeah, I saw the movie version of the Rules of Attraction when I was 14 or something...” Mainly he had to agree to cover deposit, first and last on a Brooklyn apartment of her choosing. But at least the music had started, though she didn't look like she was going to start helping his investigation anytime soon so it was time he looked elsewhere for information.

He had noticed the independent scholar had been avoiding the punch so he sprinkled a gram of low-grade coke in his chickpeas when he wasn't looking (he always kept a bit of cheap shit on him for these kinds of situations). After spooning down a few mouthfuls, the old man started talking feverishly to Ellis about Aristotle's raunchy side. Apparently the philosopher was the most ferocious lover that side of Caligula. He believed that a child's strength was directly proportionate to the strength of the hip thrust from which the spunk that spawned it sprang, and so sex for him was nasty, brutish and short --- “You eating all the chickpeas get your strength up so you can have a good bash yourself buddy?” --- But this incensed the old man and his voice rose to uncomfortable volumes, his saliva cracking like gunshots. He said that Aristotle was a protoscientist and of course he got some things wrong and that was not a sign of his intellectual failings given how new his ideas were. In fact if anything it was a further sign of his greatness that he was willing to say things with empirical consequences rather than resorting to the mystical nonsense that certain of his contemporaries whose names we will not lower the tone by mentioning spouted. And the point was... anyway, the point was that of course Aristotle's theory was wrong, disproved by evolution and it was not at all his legacy to hold onto the aspects of his views that modern science had superseded. Bret Easton Ellis did not try to restrain his sigh and eye roll. But seeing how free talking the man had become he said something innocuous about detectives, though before he could finish the guy was vomiting into his own lap... and it couldn't have been anything because hadn't even finished the word 'detective' before it happened, but still he caught a flash of cold sober eyes between the retches.

As he got up to leave he noticed that something strange was going on by the punchbowl. It seemed like some guests had got wise to it being spiked, and had decided to embellish it some. The dark eyed yoga instructor, was upending a good couple of dozen bottles of

cough syrup into the mix, and David Lewis – the sly old bastard – had pulled out a full bag of what looked to be peyote cactus and was crumbling it in. Just then the amateur trapeze artist arrived (God had he even invited her?) with an entire amateur fucking circus troupe and they started attacking the punch like it was milk from the Virgin Mary’s tit. Well if this was happening then he better be along for the ride... and he got himself a healthy pint of the stuff.

He was now staggering from group to group, tactical interrogation was out of the question but he might at least hear something useful. His senses were all out of whack, his vision was lagging behind, smearing as he turned his head, sounds had lost their normal locations and were instead coming from inside his mind, which (worryingly) made it hard to distinguish what were his thoughts and what was being said to him. The police chief had torn off his shirt and trousers to reveal lace underwear – a baton shoved down the panties – and had jumped up on the DJ table dancing with intent, until Volvox, without breaking her flow, sent him flying with an elbow to the kneecap.

Some people he didn’t know had come dressed as Sophie Podolski and the Angel of the North, and were re-enacting the murder in middle of the living room, some sort of party trick he supposed: the angel had snuck up behind her and twisted what looked to be an office tie around her neck and she was in the process of making some rather over done choking noises (“I mean just think about it, strangling restricts flow in and out of your windpipe as a matter of definition...”). Except some other guy in a Statue of Liberty costume (*who were these people*) hadn’t worked out it was an act and was aggressively trying to break it up. And now the Statue of Liberty and the Angel of the North were going toe to toe. They were serious about it, except they weren’t fighting properly, not covering themselves, but clumsily slugging each other clean in the face, like in Rocky. How were they both still standing? And there really should be some blood by now, but instead the Angel of the North was starting to get dents in the side of its head, and chips of stone were coming off the Statue of Liberty’s knuckles. Then they staggered into David Lewis spilling his drink, he lashed out and before you knew it there was a total free for all – amateur acrobats clambering on top of the amateur strongmen then dive-bombing into the crowd, the midget sneaking through people’s legs and pulling down their trousers, Junot Diaz delivering sucker-punches from edge, the self-styled beat in the

middle of it all seemingly oblivious to the blows he was getting had ripped off his awful plaid shirt and was howling from a mouth in his navel (no one listened). At the bottom of the scrum, the Angel of the North had pinned the Statue of Liberty to the ground and was viciously dry humping it – as vigorous as Aristotle in his prime. Ellis thought he might as well get a few punches in himself, but fell flat on his face as he tried to move.

More disturbing than the violence was that there were these people he hadn't seen until now with some outfits like nothing he'd ever seen – what was going on, this wasn't even meant to be a fancy dress party? But they'd gone to town, covered in some slimy ectoplasm – were they going as newborn aliens, covered in some fucked up placenta type thing? – and they were throwing lumps of the stuff, at everyone else. They were reaching deep into their stomach to grab handfuls of it, this ectoplasm this undifferentiated tissue, and you could see a bulge in their back as the hand went in the front. (Hey what was that 'undifferentiated tissue'? That's not a phrase he'd used before, what was it doing in his head? *Oh don't mind me, I'm just your regular neighbourhood obscure under-used concept turning up uninvited at the party wanting the same uncomplicated good time as the next man. You know, I get mentioned so little these days, and the opportunities are so limited – how often is it anyone's talking about undifferentiated flesh? – so when I'm relevant I have to just kind of be begging your pardon and put myself in there. If I also had to wait for the cases where you've heard of me and it's the kind of expression you find to your liking then I'd just never get said at all. For a long time I was able to accept my neglect, but then Bill Burroughs struck upon me and I was cropping up left, right and centre, but before I knew it forgotten again which was just too cruel...*)

Some of the slime hit Bret Easton Ellis in the chest and spread to encompass him like a womb. There was blackness but still sound. Volvox had taken her set deep into house's intestines and there was this voice ringing out low and sticky – syrupy even – so that it resonated right in your colon, endlessly repeating, slower each time *deep house is a private detective who has not offered the necessary oblations...*

He came to biting the carpet, feeling drool on his cheek and bile in his throat – with it came a comforting sense of childhood and a distant echo of his mother's voice. As his

senses sharpened and separated, he gathered that he was lying in the front room – apparently right where he'd fell – and the party was still going on. He started to push himself up but – *easy there, not quite straight yet* – the floor started to sink and ripple in response to the pressure. He went slow, probably farcically slow to the sober observer, and it allowed him to sit upright. Objects were detached and cotton wool padded in their movements but they appeared to be obeying the laws of physics, so there must only have been the lean left in his system. Everything was starkly lit: it was morning, in fact (wait a minute) it was the very same morning we started out with...which must mean we're back to the present tense.

So yes, as I believe has already been mentioned, it's a balmy May morning, and Bret Easton Ellis' apartment is getting fucked up. It had all started off so innocently, but... but well now here we are. Everyone is drinking champagne, God knows where that came from, and somewhere in the time Ellis was out cold the mood's switched from crazy raucous to a mercenary destructiveness. A couple of kids are emptying bottle upon bottle of red wine onto the carpet and sofas – it's taking them a while because they insist on keeping their champagne glass in the one hand at all times so that they have to remove the screw caps with their teeth. There's an organized operation aiming to tag 'twat' on every square foot of wall, piece of furniture and whatever else in the apartment using a set of markers some genius must have brought along. "Remember on top of the doors, and inside the hinges" the old guy who appears to be the ringleader keeps slurring. There are some sitting around just trying to drink the champagne nonchalantly, but they're slumped horizontal, falling out of their chairs, elbows and wrists skewed all over the place and they get sucked into staring at the liquid for minutes at a time before taking a sip. One by one they give up and smash their glasses against the wall.

Ellis tries four or five times to make a noise of protest but nothing comes out. He can't face this anymore, so he hobbles outside into the hot sick air of the aging spring, trying to get a cab to the back bay. Weird, though, despite everyone completely losing it, no one gave anything away, and Randall never showed, so did they not know anything? But the way they'd ignored him had seemed so calculated: was everyone in on it? (*it?*) Was this the orient fucking express?

Episode 15

When summer hit Boston it was oppressive: hot and grey – like England put in the microwave. Great masses of clouds covered the sky, slipping past each other like inscrutable bureaucrats. The sun beat greedily behind them, thickening them, giving them potency. But they let no light through, only emitted heavy, malevolent heat. The rain fell in giant viscous droplets, and everyone who got caught in it was left feeling slightly degraded.

In Union square there was a perpetual sleazy drizzle for a month straight. It contaminated the mood of the place. The provincial hipsters were disillusioned. Conversations in Bloc 11 and Sherman became ever more jaded: no more excitedly discovering electro eight years late, just rants about Southie trash and Roxbury thugs ruining the neighbourhood. The food stopped being locally sourced devised recipes, switching to battery farmed, tinned and disdainfully thrown on the plate. In the yoga studios, teachers making classes collapse, vomit, from exhaustion, screaming for more – “fuck your breathing, give me thirty push ups pussies”. The stretch of tarmac at the main intersection expanding, shrinking the trees and buildings scattered around it till it spread out like a desert.

Strange things happened with the animals too. Dogs refused to go into the play park and slumped melancholic on the top of radiators all day. The cats stopped washing themselves. Skunks appearing inside houses, not releasing their scent, just sitting motionless on sofas, *zazen*, refusing to move off the doorstep when they were carried outside. By this point Randall’s novel had become a complete abstraction – divorced from the man and anything he might ever have written – encompassing and privatizing Boston in its entirety.

Episode 16

It was Saturday – two weeks back – when those guys came again. I was in my Back Bay condo for the night... yeah I've starting spending more time in there recently. Well you know if you're gunna own a \$5 mill property you might as well use it. And...and this Randall thing is kind of filling my head up, so when I'm out and constantly being confronted with sensations it feels like an intrusion. I don't need these things squeezing their way into my mind. Plus I've really been getting into prescription meds recently: codeine, Xanax...Valium of course, these muscle relaxants I can't remember the name of. I think doing all this is to be really tapped into the fate of my generation – plugged into the mainline. This kind of subversive deadening of the consciousness is so much more *apt* that coke or molly or whatever.

Anyway that night, er, I mean Saturday. *Then*. I had all my books laid out on my Alex Cooper Persian rug. I've been rereading all my old stuff – and it hit me that I have the material for one great book. The book that will mean no one can deny I'm the greatest novelist of my time. No matter what fucking ethnic illuminati fucking strings Junot Diaz pulls. Bitch. I know you can't say that stuff these days but someone who's that much of a phony just is a *bitch*: it's too real for me to hold myself back. But my one book, I just need to get things in the right order. Tear out the old pages and rearrange them so they make sense. Then I'll have my novel.

It was slow progress, and with all those opiates, believe me a lot of time was spent with me just rubbing my face all over the rug. And just as I was getting some ideas those sons of bitches kicked the door down. Fucking posers just proving a point. They didn't try knocking – I'd have answered and I'm not exactly going to put up a fight. Splinters everywhere. It was the same guys. But this time no small talk. Just a sack over the head and a bumpy ride to Roxbury.

That apartment. Those old men again. Except this time they were done up like southern gents in the most half-assed way you can imagine. Cowboy hat. Sheriff star pinned to their gilets and otherwise *exactly the same* as before. But they had a ruse about as

convincing as their accent. Fuck knows what their hustle was. “Well howdy y’all sir...um partner. We are associates of those gents you met last time and they would have could been here but they were busy something frightful...I mean darn shitty. Anyway listen here, you’ve got to darn tooting call it off...” He kind of went on but I couldn’t focus. I was too fucked up to even be freaked out. Then the older one started... what? Oh yeah it was the younger one speaking before. It’s hard communicating these things. I’ve got so many things, so many theories going round in my head at the minute that telling this stuff to someone who doesn’t *get it* is tough. But you will. *Haven’t you felt the rain this summer?* Like spunk. Just get wise before it’s too late. Oh yeah but the old guy. He was even more unhinged than the last time. No attempt at a southern accent from him:

The Zen master Baso always said, “Sun-faced Buddha and moon-faced Buddha.” And when he was ill, someone asked him, “How are you?” And he answered, “Sun-faced Buddha and moon-faced Buddha.”

And then the younger one again (he’d given up on the act by this point). “Yes. Right. Well you’ve certainly instigated some developments. But there’s an invisible natural bureaucracy at work here so you can’t possibly appreciate what the current state of play is. Take my word for it, though, that you can’t succeed. Just forget this whole thing and get back to your little stories.”

I protested that it didn’t make any sense... “When we wanted you to hunt Randall it was sun-faced Buddha and moon-faced Buddha, and now it’s the sun-faced Buddha and moon-faced Buddha where you, as it were, leave the fuck alone. That’s it.” That *was* it: I was thrown out rough enough to make my entrance feel like a red fucking carpet, and I’m pretty sure it’s the last I’ve seen of them. But of course I’m not stopping – couldn’t even if I wanted to. My whole angle on the world’s changed. And this pursuit of Randall is the hinge I’m rotating on.

The End

As the rot of summer set in, things began to unravel for Bret Easton Ellis. All of Randall's conspirators had closed shop – no more playing detective following them around. More and more dates were standing him up, emails were ignored, restaurants were barring him, even the MIT philosophy department had security turning him away and since when did anyone there even know *how* to call security. Though he would catch the perfume of the dark haired yoga instructor every now and then...

And then his bank accounts were shut down; a hobo beat the shit of him right on Newbury St; he woke up raving drunk in a castle in northern mass and he couldn't even remember starting to drink. Receipts, jewellery and bits of flora and fauna, in all his pockets (including the top pocket of his shirt), that he would absent-mindedly rotate and occasionally chew on.

He saw flashes of Randall everywhere: a door swinging shut his exit, the jarring angle of a bench leg the work of his perverse yoga practice; the rumbling of a laundrette his bowels; the dappled light on the grass his weak stuttering orgasm. Ellis was struck with a vision of certainty that these things *were* Randall and always had been. He knelt down and wept for a full day. The detective's monstrous novel had unwoven the narrative of life itself.

By the time clarity returned Ellis was in LA, checking out some Sternwood guy – though a feeling he wasn't sure was his own told him that really he should be in Antwerp.