

The most successful serial killers are always the boys next door—gentle children of summer, flashing smiles like soft breezes through a park, sharpened knives wrapped in grass-stained Levis. I was akin to these monsters. I was camouflaged and deadly, a viper smiling in the dark.

The Education of the Damned

To be a truly great demon you've got to be attractive—no one sensible gets taken in by a goon. I was born with summer-blond hair, a soft evening smile, and the sweetly dark taste of defiance slashed across my lips—a scrawny, scuffed up teddy bear with a voice that could string words like lights across a carnival midway. Believable, that's what I was: a perfect distraction for the careless mark.

They never saw me coming.

Some of the evil fucks I later ran with were way too ugly to be of any real use. The cops read them like a beacon flashing on a street corner. But not me—the code of the demon, my code, was to fit in, to move from the inside out, to slide into their world, to lodge myself against their love, and then to attack from beneath the skin.

When people refer to demons, they invariably claim we come from the underworld. God, I hate that cliché. It makes us sound like we're all hanging around in a bondage cavern, trying on leather gear and waiting for tricks. And while I do love the smell of leather and I thoroughly enjoy caves, I tortured people for fun, not profit. The concept of a demon coming from underground is pure shit.

If you want to know where demons truly come from, I'll tell you: we're from right here. We exist in a shadow that lies over your

world—a kind of transparency of evil that some demented teacher laid out on an overhead projector. We move around you, through you, in you. We are your fathers, your sisters, your lovers. We are your next-door neighbors. We come and go as we please—although it's a bit harder to leave when we've taken residency in a body. The old Hebrews used to call their angels "Those who stand still," and the name they gave themselves was "Those that walk." If a demon was ever called anything, it was usually prefaced with a very terrified "Oh my God!"



I think, before we go any further, I should take a moment to clear things up. This is a memoir, not a biography. If you want facts, I suggest you call the local authorities—they're loaded with trivial information on my human form. If you're looking for a discography, or yet another failed rocker's tale, then grab your laptop and pop my name into your search bar—I've left a trail of electronic dust from here to Mars. I'm not going to give you those things or comfort you with what you think is the truth. This story isn't for you—the voyeur feeding on the destruction of a man. This is a story for those that find themselves too far from home, a traveler's tale of monsters and bad ends. It's a story for those that think there's something golden at the end of the road—when there isn't.



I stepped onto your world in the Bay Area of San Francisco in 1961, but I didn't stay there long. I was quickly shuttled down to Long Beach—a working-class town chock-full of blue-collared laborers, retired navy men, hustlers, homosexuals, and squares.

My human father was in the military so they'd moved often. He was a junior officer with, at the time, three other children—two boys and a girl. Biologically speaking, I was the sport: a spiritual

AN AMERICAN DEMON

mutation that crawled out of hell into humanity.

I remember the way my father smelled in his khaki clothes: sweat, grease, and the lingering stale mint of a menthol cigarette clinging to his hands. Often his breath carried the strong smell of alcohol and desperation. My father was a worker, one of those cats with that crazy “do anything you can to feed your family” ethic—something, to this day, I still can’t understand. If I was in his shoes, struggling like he did to pay our bills, you want to know what I would’ve done? I would’ve split; I would have headed off to Mexico and left us to fend for ourselves. You know, fuck ’em if they can’t take a joke.

I later found out that my father’s dad had run out on him and his siblings. Maybe that’s what influenced his sense of family duty and honor, but if that’s the case, my father took care of us out of resentment, not out of love. It was more like a “fuck you” to his old man, than a “love you” to us. No wonder he was always stressed out.

My mother—bless her shaming heart—was another product of a failed marriage.

One day I checked the statistics on divorce in the 1930s, and I discovered that people were fifteen times more likely to kill themselves than they were to walk out of a fucked-up marriage. What does that say for my parents? Their moms and dads must have been beating the living fuck out of each other if divorce was a better option than death.

“You want to kill yourself, sweetheart?”

“No thank you, dear. I think I’ll just knock your fucking teeth out with a frying pan, and then I’ll get a divorce.”

My mom didn’t work, or, at least, she didn’t have a paying job. She was a stay-at-home wife; in other words, she was our domestic servant. Her chores were cooking, cleaning, and keeping the children out of the liquor cabinet. My mother was a great candidate for Librium, the first real “Benzo,” although she chose to stay drug-free at the time. I think she actually enjoyed being a little whacked out on stress and confusion; to be a “pro” at emotional abuse, you’ve got to have a background in depression, and she took great

pride in her work. If you're going to deliver lines like "I should have killed you when I had the chance," you've got to believe it.

I started fucking with my parents at an early age. You humans are so easy to manipulate; a little taste of someone else's will and you get all bent out of shape. My father and mother started asking me to do things, or not do things, as the case might be, and I disagreed.

"Clean your room."

"No."

"I *said* clean your room."

"No."

"You're going to get hit."

"No."

Both of my parents favored the belt or the Hot Wheels track—to them, modern folks that they were, new age plastic seemed to be the most effective tool when delivering corporal punishment. I'd roll on the floor trying to make my little hands into a thousand ass-protecting gloves as they attempted to beat the will from me. I didn't mind, really. I kind of liked the way that hard-plastic track left two bloody red welts running parallel down my legs. It was the mark of a good thrashing, a badge of honor, tied-to-the-mast pirate business: "Fifty lashes for insubordination and willful disobedience!"

I loved it.

I used to laugh at their vain attempts to discipline me. Oh, don't get me wrong, I'd play their game—begging for forgiveness, swearing that I'd never hurt the dog again or start another fire in the living room—but the minute they walked away, and the bedroom door would shut, I'd stand in my pride, dust the groveling shame from my body . . . and then, it was forgotten. My parents were flies on the windowsill of my world.

I had a marvelous set of green plastic army men that I loved controlling. I especially liked this game after I'd just been pummeled by my parents. I'd set up waves of attackers, infantrymen stretching off into the distance under my dresser. I'd order them to kill: "Take

AN AMERICAN DEMON

no prisoners, leave no village unburned. If you see an adult, destroy it—and bring me the head.” I wasn’t angry when I played this game. I was cold, emotionless, and unlike them, I was fair.

One thing my breeders never understood was that they were beating a mannequin, a wooden boy clopping along at their heels, pulled deep inside, disconnected from the pain. I was a spectator of the body they thought was me. They couldn’t lay a hand on who I really was. I *wanted* to help them, to yell out during the thrashing, “Go for the soul! Go for the soul!” but I *let* them fail. They wouldn’t have understood anyway—physical pain is a joke compared to the damage you can do to a heart.

I remember the first time I gave my old man a taste of what I really was. It was subtle, not over the top (as far as a demon’s concerned), just a bit of dark psychological terror on a Tuesday afternoon.

My father came home from work. By this time he’d left the service and had taken a job in the private sector. I think it had something to do with shipping, or the packing of crates. I didn’t care, as long as I was getting fed. My parents had recently added another girl to their litter, so whatever my father did to supply my needs was fine—as long as they were getting supplied.

Daddy pulled up in his late model white Lincoln—a man on the go. I was playing in the yard with a cardboard box that I’d lit on fire. I was watching the smoke snake its way delicately into the sky when my father saw me. He jumped from his Lincoln, stomped furiously across the yard, and then he kicked the burning box. It exploded in flames—and our small gray poodle escaped from inside.

My father was horrified—and then he broke.

I just sat there and stared at him—the kind of stare that only the damned can stare, deep black eyes filled with the emptiness of space.

I’ve never, to this day, seen a man look so defeated. All that my father had put into me—every beating, talking to, and punishment—was lying in a blackened pile on that lawn, and the breeze was scattering it uselessly across the grass. He couldn’t say anything.

He just turned his back and walked, head down, solemnly, beaten, into the house.

Oh the joy that flashed through my mind. I wanted to pound my chest, run into the street, and proclaim my win to the gods: “I didn’t lay a hand on you, fucker—I did it with a glance, with a flame. I hurt you worse than you could ever hurt me, and I never even touched you. I own this hell that you call home. I own you.”

I almost felt bad.

I might have been small, but I soared over their lives—a vicious raptor feathered in Snoopy pajamas and wrapped in a blanket.

III

On some afternoons, or early in the day if need be, I was dropped off at my grandparents’ house. I wasn’t quite old enough for school; I was four, maybe five, at the time. I’m not quite sure why I was exiled to the west end of Long Beach seeing as I wasn’t always privy to my parents’ plans, but that’s where they sent me. I preferred where we lived, on the east side, in a semi-nice suburban area by the park.

My grandmother was okay, as humans go, but her second husband, Gramps, was a hard-charging navy man who reeked of Old Spice and scotch. He yelled at me constantly for puttering around in his squared-away bullshit: a garage that looked like Captain Anal had placed each and every tool in direct proximity to the great pyramid, and a garden shack that actually had a shovel wrapped in a fucking raincoat. It was a real drag being there. I had two options: one, to sit on the swing in the backyard and practice wishing people dead—in this case, my gramps—or two, stretch my legs, survey the neighborhood, and enjoy the sunshine. One day, I choose the latter.

Granny was in the kitchen waiting for the evening news. I smiled at her and toddled into the living room. As she slipped on her Playtex dishwashing gloves, I slipped out the front door. I was off. . . .

AN AMERICAN DEMON

My mother's parents lived in a neighborhood that, to their dismay, was a starting-to-go-black piece of the American dream. I thought it was wonderful. Not the neighborhood, mind you, their dismay. There's nothing like a little negative racial encroachment to get the old folks jitterbugging—kind of funny, considering you were all targets to me. I walked past the “colored” park and the liquor store. I waved as I strolled—the street corner boys giving slight head nods and raised eyebrows to the small white prince leading a one-man parade through the jungle. I took my time, occasionally stopping to visit with my subjects. I loved the way they held those half-wrapped presents of Thunderbird wine loosely in their hands. The soft brown edges of the paper bags barely concealed the cheap logo of the bird—it was 17.5 percent hide-and-seek by volume. And then, as so often happens to a child, I got bored, and in that boredom came a thought: “I wonder what's going on at home; I think I'll go check it out.”

We visited my grandparents' place fairly often, and it was a long drive—I'd say maybe eight or ten miles from the 1950s tract home I lived in. I figured I knew the way back. My parents usually fought in the car, or anywhere else, so as a diversion to their bickering, I'd play dead and study the landscape as it went by.

I turned east and headed towards the oil fields on Signal Hill.

The way home sure looked closer in the car, but I didn't care. The journey gave me a chance to study my territory, to stake my claim, if you will. I wanted to walk home, and it never occurred to me that the humans would think I was too young to be unattended.

I walked for hours.

When my grandmother finally caught up to me, I was in the middle of a no man's land of oil derricks and toxic waste. I was on top of a mountain of pride, staring at the kingdoms of the world. She was ghost-white with worry. She held open the car door and I stepped inside; to me, a limousine driven by a peroxide-blond skeleton. I leaned back against the seat. If she'd offered me a cigar and a *Wall Street Journal* I would have respectfully declined and

closed my eyes, but Granny had other plans. I thought we'd just continue home, but she whisked me back to the land of Walter Cronkite and Cutty Sark. Her eyes were rimmed with tears, her hands shaking on the wheel.

It was exciting to see the effect my actions had on others. It gave me a tingling in the lower reaches of my stomach when an adult lost his or her cool. And what a wonderful feeling of accomplishment I got when I made those larger than me twist and sway like pathetic little puppets on a string. But this was only a beginning—a fledgling's first tries at enforcing his will.

Goethe said, "A man sees in the world what he carries in his heart." The same holds true for demons. If you look for evil, you will find it.



It wasn't hard to see the disease in you humans. Your pain was like stars in a dark winter sky, and I flittered like a black moth from hurt to hurt. A divorce here, a loss there—two streets over a child died of cancer, and every night on our black and white TV, the dark whispers of the Vietnam war played backdrop music to our dining pleasure.

One day, a real life military Jeep pulled up in front of our next-door neighbor's house. I was thrilled to see my toy soldiers come to life—giants in their pressed, muted green uniforms—as dignified, strong, and handsome. I watched them walk purposefully inside. Then I heard the scream, a mother's terrified cry, followed by a distressed series of low sobbing moans. Our neighbor's only son had been killed—he was a door gunner in a helicopter, taken out by a single shot from a villager's rifle.



I started to feel a pull from down the street. I hadn't heard of anything bad happening there, but the attraction got stronger and

AN AMERICAN DEMON

stronger. I soon realized that it came from an old couple that lived a few doors up from us—Mr. and Mrs. Krieger.

They were old and gray, small and without sharp form—wrinkled clouds hiding in a light blue house. You rarely saw them outside, unless they were walking to the market; the woman, always pushing a small metal cart, and the man drifting along close behind her.

Some days, I'd sit on my porch and follow them with my eyes as they walked by.

I knocked on their door one afternoon. My small clenched fist demanded entry. I was invited in and they held their lives up for inspection.

They'd been expecting my arrival.

The living room was dark, but not unpleasant—trinkets of their lives sat on dusty shelves and reminded them of times that would not return. I politely gestured to the small kitchen table, and then I sat, my legs a few inches from touching the floor.

Mrs. Krieger offered me a piece of old folk's candy, and as I sucked on the stale peppermint round, Mr. Krieger took off his sweater and sat down. He gave me a sadly tired look, and after meeting his eyes I forced him to follow my gaze to his forearm.

He held his hand over his sleeve and shamefully covered the nakedness of the wound I knew he carried.

Silently, I bade him to roll his shirt back.

Underneath the cloth, in a faded dark ink, were a series of numbers.

"You know what this is?" he asked me.

Although posed as a question, it was more an acknowledgement of what I felt.

"I know it hurts," I told him, "and I know it's what keeps you inside—hiding."

He bowed his head slightly and then he talked about loss.

There were words and places he mentioned that were hard for me to grasp—Kraków, Auschwitz, Birkenau—but it was easy to follow his story. The hurt in his voice was like brail to a blind man.

He and his wife were Jews—Polish Jews that had been relocated and stripped of all they had.

I listened patiently as he talked, but there were times that I had to prod him with a question to keep the stories flowing. I was picking his wound, so to speak, so the rich red blood of his despair would roll out into the kitchen and cover my eager mind with his experience. He spared me no detail—each turn, hit, and terror was slowly exhaled from his lungs in a weary old-world voice. I inhaled everything he had—draining him of the pain.

I'm not sure how long he talked, but he was spent and slumped over the table when he finished. If I hadn't known better, I would have thought him dead, but I could see the hour of his passing in my mind. (It was close, but not yet.)

And then it was time for me to go. If I didn't return home soon, my father would be warming the Hot Wheels track on my ass—tattooing his own brand of identification onto me.

I thanked the Kriegers for the candy and walked away. I never went back. They died shortly thereafter—first him, and then her. For years they had held on to the pain of their existence, the damage done to their minds fading slower than their tattoos ever could.

Sometimes you humans are so easily manipulated. You make a demon's work easy. Picture a domino set of flesh, lives laying so close to each other that they can't help but touch—the dots on their skin, sixes and threes, each number representing a different class or race. Now, if you put your hand on just the right one, warm his ear with mistrust and hate, and then just give a slight,

small

push . . .

The force of your weakness is astounding. One million, two million, six million dead: the flesh falls until the energy of that first shove fails, and then the survivors wonder how the fuck it could have happened.

AN AMERICAN DEMON

A great demon uses his mouth; his words the palette of a rainbow, his tongue an avatar of fear that can only be satisfied with blood.

III

The tale Mr. Krieger told was horrific, as you might say, and I appreciated it for the scope of his pain, but I didn't always need such grand destruction to satisfy me. Sometimes lighter fare could be just as fulfilling to my young mind. Krieger's rich Bordeaux was the perfect compliment to a late afternoon meal, but now that evening was upon me, I felt like something a bit less filling. I knew just the drink, or the drunk, as it were, to quench my thirst.

My father's great uncle was an alcoholic, in the true Dean Martin sense of the word. Marty was good looking, in perfect shape, and at seventy-two could drop down and give you fifty one-handed push-ups. The only time you'd ever see Marty sober, though, was when he first woke.

Uncle M would descend upon us late at night, unexpected and, as always, hammered. He'd sit at our kitchen table and dribble out stories in that meandering drunken way; he loved telling me what a weak little fuck I was.

"If I didn't love your dad so much," he'd burble, "I'd take you outside and kick your fucking ass . . ."

Burble, burble, burble.

I doubt he could have done it, but you never know about drunken-old-man strength; sometimes they can surprise you.

It was easy to study him. His crossed drunken eyes roamed wildly around the room as he talked. He was completely unaware that I was listening, learning; carried on the thick stench of his malted breath were the key words, and I was waiting for them to fall. You see, the trick to understanding drunks is this: a drunk will throw out line after line of completely useless verbiage, and then he'll let something slip, a word, an emotionally charged button that

begs to be pushed, but you have to be paying attention. In my uncle's case, that word was "Anne," the ex-wife that he'd always loved, but who'd left him for another man: his best friend, Terry.

His burble went something like this: "God damn those fucking assholes coming up here stealing our jobs . . . got the fucking kids pulling shit not knowing what the fuck . . . Anne . . . oh God, Anne, how can I live without her?"

"What'd you say, Uncle? Did you say 'Anne'?" I jumped on it—my small finger getting blister-tipped from pounding on that button.

He stared at me in shock, a man silenced by the lisp of an eight-year-old boy.

"Wasn't Anne your wife? Where's she now? Why didn't she come?"

Bingo. He might have been seventy-two and a master of the one-handed push-up, but I had his ass. I had that drunken mother-fucker pushed against his lonely old rope, and he was ready to hang.

"Did she like it when you drank, Uncle? When you were gone all the time?"

I didn't let up. His eyes supplied the dialogue now, and all I had to do was read the words as they appeared.

"What about your friend Terry? Do you ever see him?"

Uncle M grabbed his things and left. He drove off with a cold tallboy tucked between his legs, and the picture of his wife, fucking another man, tattooed on his soul.

Poor Uncle M—he died all alone. He was propped in front of his TV, a bottle of scotch in his hand, and a solid week of decay on his body, before they found him.

Some children learned how to bake, and others learned how to draw. I learned how to sew—how to pull a memory of pain from the subconscious of a mind, and then stitch it permanently in the present.

AN AMERICAN DEMON

I had to be careful not to stretch my wings too wide. Quirky was okay, noticeably evil was not. Even so, at the request of my grade school principal, I got invited to attend therapy—a blind date with the counselor of her choice. You’ve gotta love those school psychologists—probably the most closed-minded pricks you’ll ever run into. For someone that studies the mind and its associated behaviors, you’d think they’d be a little more in tune with the absurd and the abnormal, but they never were.

We’d discuss feelings as we played checkers. I tried to let nothing slip—played dumb when it came to matters involving mom and dad.

“Your mother tells me you’re having trouble making it to the toilet on time.”

“Oh. Did she also tell you she was having an affair?” *Shit. Nice work, Jack. You need to shut your mouth.*

An awkward pause, and then a very concerned face looked up from the checkerboard and directly into my eyes.

“What makes you say that?” the therapist calmly asked.

“I saw it on tv.”

“Seeing things on tv” usually worked for this crowd. It was the perfect escape in a sticky situation. My mother might get a slight warning after the session about what I should or should not be watching on my evening programs, but I should be cool.

“Oh,” she said.

As suspected, the therapist bought it, and we continued with the game.

It was a mistake mentioning that affair. Not like it was going to hurt me or anything, but I just should have stayed cool. That outburst was a direct result of that “shitty” question, and I needed to get a handle on my emotions—the warrior with the coolest head wins the game. Besides, it wasn’t like my mother was a tramp.

My father, as I told you earlier, had gone civilian; however, his work demanded certain travel days from him. It was on these days that my mother was left unattended. It’s funny that when one

mentions the word “affair,” your sick human thoughts travel to steamy, shacked-up-in-hotel trysts. The word itself implies many meanings: public and private, physical and emotional. Fucking someone is a joke, a walk through a sweaty park that gets washed off with a bit of soap and a hot towel. But to give your heart to someone . . . that’s another matter entirely; because whether they ever lay a hand on you or not, you’ve given them ownership of your soul, and it can’t be washed off.

Sometimes I’d pick up the other line when my father called—holding my finger on the hook and letting it lift real slow. I was careful to make sure they never heard the click, an announcement of an eavesdropper. I loved the false sense of privacy they got from the phone—my mother and father speaking freely, thinking the children couldn’t hear. There were calls that said “I miss you” and “I’ll be home soon,” but there were others. These were the calls that I waited for, the ones that were threatening and torn from distrust.

“Have you been talking to him?” my father asked.

“No, of course not” was my mother’s sadly pathetic reply.

She was lying. I’d picked up a call earlier where the booze-soaked voice of a Johnny Cash-loving motherfucker had just told her how much he missed her, and how much he *also* loved her.

This was funny. I loved her little lying game and my father’s mistrust. Kind of like pin the tail on the donkey—my father being the blind pinner and my mother being the object getting poked. You know, it really puts things into perspective when you know what liars your handlers are. The lines “I love you” and “I’d never hurt you,” when delivered to a child, take on a wonderfully sarcastic tone when coming from the same mouth that deceitfully told your father, “You know I’m faithful, baby.”

Now for the shitting, or the non-shitting, if you will.

I didn’t struggle with hitting the toilet on time, because I enjoyed fouling myself, and it was planned. You see, when you’re small, you’re at the mercy of those around you. Shitting my pants

AN AMERICAN DEMON

was a defense mechanism—sort of a broken child’s way of saying leave me alone.

A human cub is quite possibly the weakest of all newborn animals. They have no protection other than that from those who bred them.

“What about social services? What about the police?” you might say.

Yeah, and a child’s hand, two inches wide, is gonna pick up a hard plastic phone, ten inches long, and talk baby gibberish to an overweight alcoholic cop who wants no part of a domestic squabble and an ass-kicked newborn?

Get in the real world.

The minute that baby is taken from the hospital, the parents can do whatever the fuck they want with it, including tossing its little ass down a sewer drain if they see fit. My handlers weren’t quite that cruel, but they did get a little loose in their dealings with me—a little heavy on the discipline, if you will. And maybe, just maybe, they weren’t always too concerned about who was “playing” with the baby. The only way I had to fight back was to shit myself. And believe me, there is practically nothing more disturbing than a human animal that doesn’t have the sense to stay out of its own filth.

I’d run up to Grandma for a hug and she’d wrap her arms around a walking bowel movement in a striped JCPenney tank top. Her olfactory senses might have been on the way out, but the load I was carrying in my britches brought her old sniffer right back to teenage capacity. I was five, six, seven, eight years old, and I’m still running up to granny with a pile of shit in my pants.

And shitting myself did have a few other benefits. Besides the creamy warm feeling one gets from a freshly dropped turd in your undies, and the ultimate in up-close pull-it-in-tight disgust factor, when I shat myself, my parents caught the blame. How’s that for an underhanded blow?

“Have you been beating on this boy?” says the counselor. “No? Then why is he still defecating in his pants? Did you know that that’s one of the signs of physical or sexual abuse?”

If I could have raped my own ass and laid it on 'em, I would have, just to watch 'em squirm.

A doctor once asked my mother why I hadn't gotten medical attention for a rather large wound on my knee. The doctor was concerned that there might be neglect or physical abuse going on in the home.

I'd been cross-dressing on Halloween. My bag was bulging at the sides with candy, but I wanted more—I needed more. Halloween's just once a year and you're a fool if you don't come home with a full load. I was running across a lawn—it was quicker than taking the sidewalk—and I tripped. I went down hard and caught the jagged metal head of a sprinkler across my knee. It tore my neon green nylons, and I came up gushing blood all over my sack of treats—blood filling my stockings and running down to my heels. I was sidelined for the duration.

A few days later, I watched the doctor's face as my mother answered his uncomfortable question.

“I-I-I didn't realize it was that deep,” she pleaded, as the smiling face of my scalped kneecap peered out at her. “It didn't look like it needed stitches.”

Oh fuck, I loved watching her panic knowing that I could confirm or deny said abuse with two large, sad eyes and a tousled hair nod.

I think, this time, I'll deny.

After a good frightening, parents are usually quick with a cookie and a reprieve on the beatings, so I went for the iced-raisin and a nap. Besides, I'd spent years breaking in these two and I was a bit too lazy to start beating on another family unit.

All kidding aside, this abuse thing was an issue I had to be very careful about. I was a being not necessarily meant for this world, and problems of adjustment were naturally going to take place. It just so happened that a young demon's unstable developmental issues mimicked those of a child who'd been molested or physically and emotionally abused. I didn't want to be pulled away from this family, but it was awfully hard to hide.

AN AMERICAN DEMON

The authorities don't go out of their way to find victims of child abuse, but they are casually on the lookout for them. Most semi-responsible health care providers are armed with a laundry list of telltale signs to help them spot the abused. Let me run a few down for you . . .

1. Changes in the child's sleeping patterns —nightmares or bad dreams.

First off, I've never slept "soundly." I didn't need the amount of rest you humans needed, so I'd stay up well into the night planning the next day's adventures; there was always important business to be tended to—animals to be captured, gasoline to be procured, and I could not leave those things to chance. And as for nightmares and bad dreams, I was a demon for fuck's sake. My whole existence was a nightmare, whether I was in bed or not. I attracted, by my very nature, the very worst.

At night I'd wander through the house—sleepwalking, reliving other lives, remembering other kills. Sometimes I'd wake to find myself standing atop my bed, pounding on an old wooden ceiling that'd now become the collapsed roof of a crypt—one whose white marble walls were mortared with the screams of those I'd destroyed.

I was surrounded with the moving portraits of the dead and, when awake, the dreams of night followed me wherever I went. Stranger's faces became the faces of pigs and rats—assemblies of the bizarre bleating out alien orders and issuing decrees of insanity. A demon is constantly on the edge of what a psychiatrist might call madness, and all this has nothing to do with abuse or conscience, just as a tornado has nothing to do with hate. It was my nature to be tortured and my upbringing was irrelevant.

And as if the night terrors were not enough to hide, there was one other, perhaps an even more telling, indication of trouble. As a spiritual being, I had the ability to see the hour and the manner of your death. Try to imagine, if you will, what it's like to stand before

a counselor or a teacher and watch, in future time-lapse photography, the body disintegrate before you: car wrecks, heart attacks, suicides, and sometimes that living corpse in front of me just took a long . . . slow . . . walk . . . out to the abattoir of old age. I saw them all die, and it took all I had to be still, to be quiet, and to face them without a knowing smile on my face.

Come to think of it, I might have enjoyed that conversation.

“Excuse me? Mr. Jones?”

“Yes, Jack.”

“Did you know that you’re going to be split in half by a Land Rover?”

“What are you talking about, son?”

“I’m talking about how you’re going to die. You’re going to be involved in a minor fender-bender, but when you get out of the car to survey the damage, an eighteen-year-old girl is gonna plow into you, and shish kabob your ass with her bumper—probably not a good idea to be texting while driving, huh?”

If I was talking about him winning the lottery—a twenty-four-million-to-one long shot, he’d have no problem with it. It’s perfectly acceptable to dream that dream. But if I talked about his death—a one hundred percent certainty of life—his little panties would have gotten all blown out of shape. Its panic sign number two on the hit parade . . .

2. Suicidal gestures, death obsession,
self-destructive behavior, self-mutilation . . .

Okay, so I liked playing dead. Who didn’t? I saw other children lying on their backs in the park, their tombstone bodies angled towards the sun, watching clouds, seeing pictures of tea-totaling clowns dancing lazily in a forgiving sky. I just chose to play my games inside instead: lying idly on my back, with my eyes closed, a bottle of prescription pills spilled out next to my unclenched hand, envisioning my parents’ shocked reaction as they stumbled over the

AN AMERICAN DEMON

body of a cold, gray child decomposing on their cheap linoleum floor. It wasn't a suicidal gesture when I painted them a picture of despair. I was just testing, giving them a taste of what was sure to come—a helpful omen, if you will.

And self-mutilation, destruction? I *had* to cut myself. It didn't mean I wanted to cash it in, it just meant I needed alterations. This might have been my thousandth time around in human form, but your skin is a motherfucker to get right. When a demon steps into a man it's like trying on a new dress or pants. Sometimes you've got to pull parts in or nip parts off before you get comfortable—it can take years to “settle in,” and sometimes, we never get it right. You can always spot demons by the way they treat their bodies. I ran mine into the ground every chance I got: head first through a plate-glass window, leg caught burning beneath an unattended water heater, finger slashed to the bone with a careless hatchet stroke. I loved the wounds—the blood rolling over the skin and slowly waterfaling its way onto the ground, forming silent, dark rose petals of pain that broke up the colors of the dirt.

I *was*, technically, exhibiting practically every behavior on that laundry list of symptoms. And you could throw in depression, anger, low self-esteem, guilt, and withdrawal—but I could explain every one of them if they only gave me a chance. (And if my explanation wouldn't have earned me a bed in the local asylum.)

I wasn't depressed; I was just frustrated that my small stature didn't allow me to stomp the living fuck out of some of these loud-mouthed adults. I wasn't angry—my pulse rarely went above sixty—even when I was setting fire to the neighbor's garage. Low self-esteem? Never. I kept my eyes to the ground so you wouldn't be frightened by the flame. Guilt? Please. Guilty of what, being a successful monster? Pride, maybe; guilt, never. And withdrawal: I couldn't let you too close, because if you found out what I really was you'd burn me at the stake. It wasn't withdrawal; it was preservation of the species.

Come to think of it, I was pretty lucky growing up in the surroundings I did. I mean, what if I'd stepped into a present day *Leave It to Beaver*?

For you kids, *Leave It to Beaver* was probably the biggest piece of fifties science fiction ever created for television: a father that didn't beat the kids or cheat on his wife—he also didn't drink or walk around saying he'd like to ram his car into the cocksucker that lived down the street. There was also a mother who was pretty, well-dressed, emotionally stable, and always quick with a kind word or a “better luck next time boys”; and two sweetly mischievous sons whose worst crime was knocking down old Mrs. Brown's laundry line.

Christ, I could just imagine “me” being dropped into the midst of that shit. I would have stood out like a Hitler impersonator at a Survivors of Auschwitz picnic. Even kind old Mr. Krieger would have been screaming “demon” and running for rope.

It was a blessing—for want of an eviler word—that I was thrown in with a cast of neurotic, alcoholic child-beaters. Yeah, I was tucking in my tail and hiding my horns, so to speak. I had to, but it could have been much, much worse. It was actually a benefit to be bred in that briar patch—I was a very sharp thorn hidden within a patch of dull ones.

III

So far, I've given you a taste of the family influence in my life—not as if they could influence my nature, but as the color of a rock influences the colors of a chameleon, I picked up what I could. A touch of alcoholism here, a dash of neurosis there. . . . “Hey, why don't we sprinkle a bit of sadism on top, and a drizzle of self-loathing along the edges?”

Oh my, I was a sundae of defect—a confection of the sweetest maladies humankind had to offer, the best that you had, and when

AN AMERICAN DEMON

I was older, these maladies would be the perfect cover for my behavior.

III

I was struggling a bit. Does that sound funny, almost redundant, after what I've just laid down? Well, it's not what you think. It was no struggle getting beaten on, lied to, and dare I say . . . sodomized. I was struggling with what outfit to wear while they were doing it.

The human sexuality thing has always had me a bit perplexed. To a demon, a body is just a body, and I've been in so many hosts that it's hard to remember them all. Oh, there's been the odd stand out that comes to mind, like the time I inhabited a Portuguese transvestite with a wooden eye and a penchant for getting urinated on while she prayed, or that midget nursery school teacher from Perth—he chopped his mother into bite-size chunks and then finger-painted a mural of the Resurrection using her blood as a medium and her face as the face of Christ. These were both very exciting, very memorable experiences, but every time I jumped in a new body I was forced to deal with a hanging appendage or a fascinating slit between my legs.

I'd look around me, trying to figure out which body went with what outfit, but it was never easy. You humans are so hung up on the paint job, and yet you have a hard time following your own designations. I had a cock, so why couldn't I wear nylons and a skirt? I loved the way my legs looked in a pair of fishnets—little diamonds of tanned flesh popping out through the holes—and the skirt: skirts were wonderfully economic when it came to peeing, or playing with my business.

During my younger sister's third birthday party, I was caught hiding in a closet wearing lipstick and a skirt. I was just trying things on, getting familiar with my surroundings, but oh, if my parents didn't throw a fit—especially my ex-navy father who thought men should definitely not be wearing Cover Girl lip cream and miniskirts.

Kinda funny actually, if he knew what was really under that ensemble, he wouldn't have been so worried about the lipstick.

Sometimes I think I fucked up when I stepped into this frame, but I know the reason this body was chosen—big powerful men lend a feeling of comfort and safety to those around them and even if you will, a threat and an element of fear or intimidation. Men are more readily accepted as the prime movers in this society, and if I was going to climb far enough to be a real power for destruction, the body I chose was perfect, but in my heart, wanting to fill the bill of terror that was my nature, I knew that women were the real danger. Shit, I sat courtside two thousand years ago when that bitch Salome asked for John's head. You should have seen her move. I knew demons who weren't that persuasive. Her hips were soft cries for comfort that begged to be touched, and the scent of her that filled that room brought not desire but jealousy upon everyone that beheld her—you were jealous of the men around you, jealous of their eyes roaming over what you knew was yours. You were willing to kill for her. Herod was a fool; he took the wrong head that day. John was harmless. Salome was pure evil.

III

It was the summer of the unloved, and I was drawing psychedelic posters and selling them to my great-grandmother; a nickel a pop—ten cents for the larger ones. I was learning how to profit from a human's weakness for "cute."

My mother was watching me draw, and I thought I might be able to swing a quarter from her purse, so I drew the word love. I surrounded it with flowers and handed it to her.

She studied it for a moment, and then she smugly said, "Why would *you* draw that? *You* don't know *anything* about love."

I was stunned. Who'd she been talking to? I was just about to jam a crayon into her ocular cavity, when I realized she hadn't been talking to anyone, she was just making a commentary on my teach-

AN AMERICAN DEMON

ings to this point. She hadn't fingered me as a demon; she was just taking pride in her work, congratulating herself on a job well done. And she *was* right; I didn't know a thing about love.

A demon has no *natural* ability to understand a concept as ridiculous as "love"—the closest we probably come to it is pride or enjoyment, both of these being conditional mindsets. I, as a child, was being beaten and shamed on a daily basis. And with all the constant fighting and accusations of unfaithfulness flying between my mother and dad, I'd never been shown what it was like to care for someone unconditionally. Maybe my mother *was* showing me love when she held me down in a bathtub—ignoring my screams of pain—and then forced the cold rubber hose of an enema up my ass. That was pretty loving. I mean, I'm pretty sure she greased the nozzle tip before she pushed it in—and then stomped on the bag.

Of course I knew nothing of love; she was just a fool whose statement had fallen closer to the truth than she realized.

I got what I needed from them, and love wasn't it. I needed a cave to develop in. That was supplied. I needed food, I needed clothes, and I needed a place to come from. Other than that, I didn't give a fuck about their love. My education was practically over the first time I tasted blood from the back of my legs—when I reached my hand behind my back and got a hard-on from the open edges of the welts on my ass, and when I heard my father call my mother a whore and accuse her of sleeping with her brother.

On my tenth birthday the nightly flashing screams of terror tore through the broken windows of our house and proclaimed my graduation to the neighbors. I was ready to take my act on the road—into the schools and the playgrounds.

I was ready to share the love.