

And then Nothing, Body-sponge, Teabag

By Andrea Mason.

Wake up. Realise the truth. *You are a fly caught in a spider's web. They are all in on it.* Drop your keys onto the table. Walk into the middle of the studio. Look at your new piece. *You left it unfinished. Now, the bottom left corner, a dead-looking young man splayed, naked, on the raft, held on by an older man's strong arm, is complete. Did you ask one of your assistants to come in? Was it at the party, and you didn't notice? Two nights ago Lucia burst in at 5am, rich couple in tow and Jos é, her current art collector squeeze. She is determined to broker a deal on this piece, offering you up as her art prodigy, her wild child, even though you have a gallery, and that is Konrad's job. Jos é scampered around the studio like an excited puppy, finally dropping down onto the raft you made out of Bubble Wrap and vinyl tape. You're either crazy or a genius, he said, and jumped up to slap you on your back. You played along. But you're tired now. The party, you feel, is over. You and Th érÃ¨se are over. Maybe you and Konrad are over. You are over.* Stand smoking. Eye the piece. *Five metres high. Seven metres wide. Your magnum opus. You've been working on it for months, since Basel, where Konrad whipped the rug out from underneath you, and gave over more than half of the stand to a new younger artist. Suck on the cigarette. Konrad loves me, but if he's going to go pussy on me. Suck the cigarette hollow. Extinguish it with your heel. Pull the camera bag over your head. Pick up an empty champagne bucket. Pull the knife out of your jacket pocket, a stubby object not unlike an oyster knife. Put the bucket on the floor near to the piece. Detach a length of chain from above the head of the dead young man. In your version the old man can't hold on anymore, and lets the young man go. Open a link above the man's huge arm. Drop this second length of chain into the bucket. Continue working around the upper outline of the two men. Twenty minutes later the piece looks as if some chain-eating beast has taken a bite out of it.* ¶ Barefoot now. Wear a flower-print kimono. Pick up the coffee pot. Step out into the yard where you've created a rubbish garden. Empty the coffee grounds. *You want a drink. You're trying to give up. You've been working through coke-fueled marathons. Now it's finished you'll ditch the coke and the alcohol and stick to weed. Th érÃ¨se has been filming you when you argue. If she shows the footage to Konrad it really will be game over.* In the dark, tread on a shard of glass. 'Ouch.' Limp back inside. Put the coffee pot down. Sit on a stool and lift up your foot. Use tweezers to pull out the glass. Bend your head towards your foot. Notice the chest hair poking through a rip in the collar seam. Remember your dad at the age you are now: his thickened torso and solid forearms covered by a golden fuzz and the shock in his eyes when you beat him at an arm wrestle, as if you'd knocked out a light for him. *You're the man now. At art school you made paintings of stocky men with thick forearms locked in battle across a table, bullish faces contorted. It isn't over yet; you're just getting started.* Clamp onto the shard. Ease the tiny fragment out. Dab the wound with toilet paper. Return to the kitchen area, where you left a joint burning in the ashtray. *It has burnt down. You don't mind pain. When you were a kid you had your teeth filled without anaesthetic. The dentist leant her breasts against your arm, whilst you held your mouth open wide, resisting an urge to bite down. At the age of three you chopped off the top of your left hand fourth finger and were sorry to leave hospital after months of attention.* Fill the bottom of the coffee maker with water. Pack coffee into the filter. Screw the top back on. Place the pot onto a ring. Turn it on. Rifle through the debris on your desk, looking for your lighter. *It has a purple, upside down drawing on it of David's cock, made as a souvenir for the last show you and Alix did together. Before she gave up on you, or at least on making art with you. Something had to give, she said.* Call Th érÃ¨se. Press the square digits on the landline phone. *Kimono falls open.* Prop the phone under your ear and hold out the lighter. *A fan of pubic hair mushrooms out from the base of David's cock. Look down at the pubic hair mushrooming from your cock. Look at the mole just above the pubic hair line near your right hip bone. It looks darker. What was it Jeff Koons said in his film with Cicciolina. We're totally Roccoco, baby. Well I'm baroque, baby, all the way. The phone call goes to answerphone. Konrad then. 3am. Leave a long rambling message. Drag on the joint a final time. Hold your breath. Blow out. Put the joint out. Hang up. The coffee pot splutters. Take an oven-cloth.*

Lift the pot off the burner. *It hisses as it singes the wooden work surface adding to the black rings already burnt into it.* Pour coffee into an espresso cup. Stir in three lumps of sugar. ¶ Sit on a stool with your right leg bent, your foot on the stool. Pull across the large heavy Gericault book open at *The Raft of Medusa*. Stare at it. Look across at the chain curtain. Look again at the picture. *All those waxy torsos, tossed together.* Look down at your own waxy cock and balls which flop over the edge of the stool, like a clock from a Dali painting. Look again at the chain piece, all that soft flesh pixellated into 1cm square links of cold aluminium chain. Stare at tiny particles of dust which dance in the hot air rising from the hot coffee. *Like you, a dancing monkey in the spotlight, suspended by hot air.* Move around the studio. Gather things up. *Tea lights.* Go into the garden. Pick flowers: orange marigolds, red nasturtiums. Walk on the broken glass which covers a large section of the garden. *Sam. The sun is hot. A pile of vegetable peelings is pungent.* Carry the blooms inside. Rattle through the layer of blue chain which covers the doorway. Continue to collect up random items: plastic toys, dildo sculptures, mini-DV cassettes. Pick up a pair of pink fairy wings, from where they are draped over a stool. Tie them on. Untie them. Make carrying straps for the raft, which is light but awkward to carry. Tie a red silk scarf around your waist. Put your Rizla papers, dope stash, tobacco and lighter in the large kimono square pocket. Sling your camera bag over your right shoulder, the raft over both shoulders. Pick up the holdall. Push your feet into a pair of hotel slippers, which sit in front of the bedroom door. Swig back the last dregs of coffee. Put on the mirror shades tucked into the blue chain covering the front door. Struggle to exit as the chain gets wrapped around your neck. Manoeuvre sideways through the door. Exit the main front gate. At the main road stick out your thumb. *A pick-up truck pulls up.* Flash a smile. *'La Seine?'* ¶ *The driver, a well-built man with sideburns, wearing work overalls shrugs. 'Pourquoi pas?'* He keeps the engine running. Throw your stuff into the open back. Jump in. Slam the door. Roll a joint, balancing the Rizla on your left thigh. Take a drag and offer it to the driver. *He shakes his head. 'C'est chaud.' 'Oui.'* Wind open the window. *'T'a perdu ton pantalon?'* The driver, faces forward, impassive. *'Oui.'* Lean back. *The radio plays Born To Run. Twenty minutes later you are deposited close to the river. The driver beeps his horn as he moves off.* At the river's edge, set light to the tea lights. Launch them one by one onto the river. *Some stay alight.* Skim the cassettes in, and the dildo sculptures, and the toys. *They bob on the surface of the water.* Undress. Tie the red scarf around your head, the knot to one side. With the flowers and sunglasses in your hand edge the raft ahead of you. Enter the water. *The cuts on your feet sting.* Take a few goes to climb on. Push against the tide. Sit cross-legged. Pick the petals off the flowers. Throw them into the water behind you. Untie the scarf. Wave it as you attempt to stand up. Cry *'Ahoy. I'm the Æbermensch.'*

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