

I would like to say thank you to everyone who has inspired me and supported me in my literary ambitions: Nathalie, Sophie, Chloé, Joyce (thanks for everything sweetheart, see you in LA soon), Claire, Amélie, Linda, Blair, Jennyfer (thanks for the money, for the parties and for the C... :) Sebastian, Niels, Trent Reznor (keep your head up, man!) Eternal gratitude to Drago (you saved my fucking life, brother, and I'll never forget that, bro!) And a thought for my brothers in arms: John Nodveidt from Dissection and Signifer from Ecclesia Tenebrarum from Russia (see you in hell, brothers!!) Thanks also to Valentin Scavr (your books and your advice changed my life, brother!) A fond thought for Maxime (rest in peace, my friend!) and Kyrianna (may Lilith welcome you into her bosom), and Bruno Conrad (we really screwed them over... the cops!!)

“Listen to me, you people of sighs! The sorrows of suffering and regret are left to the dead and dying, those who do not yet know me. Those are dead, those like them; they feel nothing. We are not for the poor and the sad: the lords of the earth are our parents. Will a God live in a dog? No! But the highest are ours. They will rejoice, our chosen ones: those who grieve are not ours. Beauty and strength, loud laughter and delightful languor, strength and fire are ours. We have nothing to do with outcasts and the incapable: let them die in their misery. For they feel nothing. Compassion is the vice of kings: trample on the miserable and the weak: that is the law of the strong: it is our law and the joy of the world. Do not think, O king, of this lie: That You Must Die: in truth you shall not die, but live. Let this now be understood: If the body of the King dissolves, it shall remain forever in pure ecstasy. Night! Hadit! Ra-Hoor-Khuit! The Sun, the Force & the Sight, the Light; these are for the servants of the Star & the Serpent.”

The Book of the Law. Aleister Crowley.

For me, Watain is the perfect religion. It is the perfect way to connect with 'My Gods', it is the perfect magical weapon to do what I must do in life. People are always interested in Watain's take on religion, but I can tell them that Watain is my answer to Christianity. And if people want to understand

better, they should come to the concerts, read the lyrics, and then we'll share what we think about our religion.” Erik Danielsson from the band Watain

. “Better to reign in hell than be a slave in heaven.”
John Milton.

The night was freezing, and there I was again in the middle of this familiar forest at 10 p.m., lit only by the soft light of the moon. How many times had I been in this same place, near this circle of stones, over the past year? I don't know anymore. I don't know much anymore, I'm only sure of one thing, tonight I'm going to leave, leave this world I despise so much, now that she's gone. I had to drink and drink again, to numb myself so I wouldn't feel the bite of the scalpel that cut deep into my wrists. I sat down, closed my eyes, and listened to the faint sounds that populate this nocturnal, vegetal world: branches breaking in the distance, leaves rustling, the strange cries of an animal far away, the murmurs of tiny insects. All of this delighted me and filled my imagination with strange and evil things. After five minutes, the cold slowly invaded my body, and I began to feel as if I were floating. I let myself fall to the ground. How good it felt to feel the cool, damp leaves under my hands, the earth already drinking my blood, like a final pagan sacrifice, me offered as a holocaust to the gods below. This thought made me smile, and images and memories began to flood back like a torrent. I felt good, I had never felt so at peace. I was floating and looking up at the tall treetops around me. Time seemed to stand still, nothing was moving, there were no sounds, the gentle breeze that had been caressing my clothes just an hour ago was gone. I didn't understand what was happening. The world around me looked like a piece

of photographic film, a negative... “Living a moment of eternity”—these words echoed in my head. My eyes closed despite myself, and I let myself sink into a spiral of darkness. Slowly, however, sounds reached me again: rumblings, gigantic footsteps, trees being violently pushed aside. I could sense something lurking around me, something gigantic, but I couldn't open my eyes. I don't want to see, I focus solely on those faces and those moments from the past, I remember... I wait for her to finish, there's nothing else I can do. It's cool in this church, I feel comfortable here. I light a cigarette, the metallic sound of the lighter echoes in the entrance. You're not supposed to smoke in a church, but I don't care, I'm not religious, and anyway, I don't give a damn. She's still on her knees, I can see her, her hands clasped, leaning on the kneeler in front of the statue of the Virgin Mary. Her body sways slowly, imperceptibly. I can't take my eyes off her jet-black hair, that pool of ink flowing down her back. And then her buttocks, magnificent and round, how I'd love to touch them, caress them, smell the sweet scent they give off. I don't dare make a sound, I don't want to surprise her, but I have to. The moment is right. To unite our souls and bodies, to offer our moans of pleasure, our intimate juices as libations to the pathetic, jealous god who presides here. I approach her slowly. I hear her whispering a prayer, no doubt. Standing over her, I slowly place my hands on her shoulders. She tenses up but doesn't

turn around. She must have recognized the scent of the perfume I'm wearing, the one she gave me. Perhaps she caught me following her? I don't know. It spoils my pleasure a little. I would have liked her to look at me, frightened, to try to flee and struggle, to be indignant, but none of that happens. She remains there, submissive and abandoned, in her stupid prayer. I kneel behind her, wrap my arms around her, and rest my head against her back. I can hear her breathing, the distant echo of her heart, and for a brief moment I am immersed in an ocean of wool and perfume. With my eyes closed, I wait. She stops whispering. I can sense her indecision and fear. My hands slowly move up to her chest, I caress her breasts, she tilts her head back, I hear her exhale, "It's okay, Lord!" I smile. "There, there," she says, guiding my left hand to her crotch, while I direct my free right hand inside her jeans, toward her large buttocks. I slip two fingers into her soft, wet intimacy, teasing her clitoris. I feel her stiffen, her breathing quicken. I bite her right earlobe eagerly, she lets out a little moan of pleasure, and when my fingers slip into her pussy, she tilts her head back and whispers, "Keep going, keep going, don't stop." My left middle finger moves inside her, faster and faster. I feel her clitoris swell, I touch it, I brush against that little button of flesh. She then turns violently and grabs me, I feel her mouth, her thick lips tasting of vanilla and candy, all over my face, her tongue finding its way into my mouth, while her

hands dive into my pants. She roughly kneads my balls. I'm on the verge of ejaculating in my pants, I'm sweating, I can't breathe for a few seconds, and I tell myself I should have taken the rest of the coke. She stops kissing me abruptly and stares at me intensely for a few seconds. Her cheeks are red, a thin trickle of saliva runs from the corners of her lips: "Not here," she whispers. She backs away, she's going to leave me there on my knees on the cold floor of this church, with this painful erection. She gets up slowly, pulls down her sweater, and looks at me. Me on my knees, in front of her. She smiles, amused by the situation, seeing me prostrate and disappointed, my face sweaty, with that bulge comically distorting my pants. She fixes her hair without taking her eyes off me, finally breaking the silence and saying, "See you at your place tonight, okay?" she asks. A hint of a smile lights up her face. I've won this round, after all. "I'll call you later this afternoon," I say without much enthusiasm. She leaves me standing there and quickly heads for the exit, leaving behind her sweet perfume. I get up, still dizzy and alone in God's grim, cold house. I close my eyes, bring my hands to my face, and smell her, intoxicating myself for a few moments with the strong, musky scent of her pussy. "It's okay," I think. I never thought I'd be able to approach her. I was a different person before, before her, before all the women I disappointed and destroyed. I can't help but smile. So many years wasted, so much energy

squandered, so many risks taken, for brief embraces in the sterile cold of a funeral home. I was one of those people who made a living from the deaths of others. Now the years have passed, but I still have that something, that strange feeling, those imperceptible whiffs of incense and embalming fluid that float around me like ghosts, or when I take her and she straddles me. I love her life, her smell, all those olfactory wonders that remind me every night that it is a body full of blood and warmth that I hold against me. I am afraid, and this fear paralyzes me. This silent, invisible whispered promise gives rise to morbid visions in my mind, awakening in me sinister and delicious desires. I close my eyes tightly, and an army of dead women, putrid and cold as the marble of the tombs, open their thighs to me. Young boys, livid, shamelessly expose their icy, tight anuses to me, their penises erect, rising from the ground, spreading their cold, velvety seed on the gravestones. Yes, I am afraid. I open my eyes. My head is spinning, and I let myself fall onto a bench. I look at the street, the few passers-by around me, the shops. My gaze falls with horror on the front of a funeral home. I get up quickly and start running. People move out of my way,

sweat pours down my face. My eyes sting. I know I have 100 meters to go before I'm home, safe. I scream and scream. I undress and try to calm down. I lie down on the bed and force myself to forget all these visions. I close my eyes, but the images come

back. Always the same familiar scenes, the same ghosts to fight, I am never truly alone... Juliette N. 1980-2001, died at the age of 21, suicide by hanging. Her parents found her hanging from the chandelier in their large dining room. Her father sank into alcoholism with no hope of recovery, and her mother, consumed by grief, died two years later. I see her every day, and her image is so vivid that I can almost feel her presence and smell her perfume... She died because of me, because I behaved like the worst kind of bastard... I wake up with a headache and touch my face; my eyes seem abnormally swollen. I get up, splash some water on my face, and try to remember what happened yesterday, but nothing! These moments of absence scare me more and more. I pretend that everything is fine. This job is the only way for me to fit in, to have a boring, dull, but normal life. Today, I've almost made it. The wild years, the madness, and the love are far behind me. It's my choice. It took me all these years to realize all the harm I did to others and to myself. I was wrong, I truly believe that. The truth becomes a little clearer every day. I am no longer one of those degenerate monsters. All I want is rest, the comfort of a laughable life, freed forever from my obsession with women. A quick glance at the clock tells me it's already 4:00 p.m. I get up quickly, open the door of the apartment that leads directly to the hallway, turn on the light, and wait. I know that in an hour, the usual parade of tenants will begin,

giving me no respite until 7 p.m., when I will be subjected to the usual complaints, reproaches, confidences, and all the repugnant hypocrisy I've had to deal with since I buried myself in this janitor's lodge, which every day seems like my future, a tomb. I open a drawer where all the complaints and claims from the tenants are filed. I've only been on the job for two months and already I have dozens of blackened sheets in my hands. I no longer care about pleasing them, I don't pay any attention to them anymore, I just try to do my job properly. For now, that seems to be enough. The other day, an old lady asked me why I was alone, why I hadn't found a nice woman to love. I looked at her, smiled, and said, "For me to love a woman, she'd have to be dead and cold!" She suddenly turned pale and started backing away toward the office door. I looked at her and smiled, then added, "I'm joking, Mrs. Ferchaud!" She seemed reassured, smiled back at me, and exclaimed, "You have a funny sense of humor!" I watched her limp away, feeling sad and disgusted at the sight of this old wreck dragging herself towards the front door of her building. The little pity I felt for her disappeared in a few seconds when I remembered that she had been responsible for the eviction of a young couple of undocumented Africans who were staying with friends. "Old bitch," I thought. I lit a cigarette and waited for them to pass by and spout their usual nonsense. One guy will ask me for news of his blonde neighbor with big tits

whom he hasn't seen for a few days, another will make stupid comments about various domestic political issues, and yet another will try for the hundredth time to convert me to his morbid religion from the desert. The days go by and are all the same. Strangely, I feel like I've been reliving the same week over and over again for the past two months. The same companies, the same cleaning ladies to manage, the same tasks to perform, nothing really changes. 7:10 p.m., the end of the afternoon has been very quiet, no packages to deliver, nothing to sign, no visitors. I was lucky, I was able to finish H. Selby Jr.'s "The Demon" in peace. I turn off the light in the lodge. I press the button that silences the doorbell, lock the door, and I'm not available until the next day. I walk through the door of the apartment. The smell of stale tobacco is intense, floating in the air and stinging my eyes. I never air the place out. I've always had a phobia of open windows, I don't know why. I open a bottle of vodka, drink straight from the bottle, and take a big swig. Sitting on the living room sofa, I listen to the sounds of the building around me, doors slamming, dogs barking, neighbors whispering near the mailboxes in the entrance. All this commotion both annoys and reassures me. I am aware that this bustling, inquisitive life around me protects me from myself, numbing the morbid urges that sometimes assail me. I take off my clothes as I go into the bathroom and stare for a few moments at this ugly

body, which has nothing left to please or arouse a woman. so many years have passed... It's been almost two weeks since I started dating her, we see each other regularly, and I still can't understand what attracts her to me. Why me? And I'm afraid again that history will repeat itself and that the black hole inside me will swallow her up. She remains an enigma to me, "Cécile," I think. I let myself drift off into a sweet daydream, leaning against the shower wall. The water runs, scalding hot, I sit down and stay like that with my head in my hands for a good ten minutes, unable to stop myself from crying. I try to focus on what's going on in the world, I throw away the newspaper. I just can't do it. I don't care if the Middle East is exploding, if polar bears have nothing to eat, if everything is burning, I don't care about anything. I wait, and the anxiety slowly spreads like poison throughout my entire being. My eyes keep returning to that damn clock in the living room. I try to think of something else, but the hours pass and I know deep down that Cécile won't come, that she won't come anymore. I listen intently for the slightest sound of a door slamming or footsteps, but she doesn't come. I've spent the last two weeks in a state of stupor. This permanent daydream has left a deep mark on me, but it has also been a great help, preventing me from sinking into a bottomless abyss of despair where no light ever shines. Cécile, I thought she was the one, the one I could have given everything for, burned everything for. I was wrong,

it was just a matter of habit... I met her in one of the alleys of the Père Lachaise cemetery. It was raining heavily and it was cold, and that Saturday I was wandering around the cemetery, more out of a sense of pilgrimage than anything else. Memories resurfaced, faces and slender, adolescent bodies came back to life in my mind. Embraces, my hands on black stockings, torn lace and kisses, where the taste of wine and blood mingled. Drunken afternoons, dark tunes coming from a broken radio, lines of coke snorted on the cold marble of the graves, often tracing an invisible path to a hotel room on Chemin Vert. I was lost in my thoughts, sheltered in an abandoned vault. I hadn't heard her come in; it was her perfume that made my head spin. It was the first time I had seen her, and I knew at that moment that I had to have her, that I wanted to know her. It was her gaze, her intense blue eyes, her jet-black hair, her porcelain-white skin, all these details that made me lose my mind and want her with a force I hadn't felt in years. I still didn't know her name when we gave ourselves over to a frenzied and brutal fuck in that modest cellar. I took her violently against a wall, scratching and dirtying her leather coat, covering her with passionate kisses, her sharp nails digging into my back, drawing deep, bloody furrows that made me instantly shoot burning jets of semen onto the dusty floor when I pulled out of her. We didn't say a word, there was only the soft sound of the rain falling between us. That same evening

she was in my bed, and after yet another wild fuck, she fell asleep whispering her name to me: "Cecile..." The days passed, thanks to her, less dreary, life was less painful to bear. When she wasn't by my side, I could almost feel her lurking around me, see her, be enveloped by her scent, she was already part of me, the unreal impression of her perfume saturating the dampness of the pillows with her imprint. I had to stop summoning her ghost, that erotic specter, that delicious succubus. She threatened to destroy me, to ruin the precarious balance I had finally found in life. Succubus, dear succubus... I had been up for hours since the first rays of sun, I went out, I wandered like a zombie through the cellars of the residence, back and forth, I searched every nook and cranny, I felt this urgent need for primal violence, the consuming desire for blood. I prayed mentally as I wandered through these dimly lit tunnels, for someone to come along, any junkie, a junkie in need, anyone, and for the fight to begin. I had my hunting knife on me and a pellet gun. But I didn't meet anyone. I was disappointed and angry too. I managed to calm down a little by shooting a stray cat. I let it come close to me, treacherously stroking it, then shot it three times in the head. I stuffed everything into a trash bag and threw it into a dumpster. Its head exploded like a watermelon, and one of its green eyes stuck to my pants. I picked up its carcass and, using a broom and dustpan, stuffed everything into a

trash bag and threw it in the garbage. The floor was littered with tiny pellets, but I didn't touch anything. Oh well... Since the incident at dawn, I've been waiting, jotting down notes about what needs to be done today, the various tasks, the appointments scheduled with our service providers. Through the window of the lodge, I watch the usual parade of tenants leaving for work. "There aren't many workers, really, it's more like a parade of social parasites of all kinds," I think to myself.

I take out the four garbage bags, light a cigarette, and wait for the cute girl who lives on the fifth floor to pass by the door. She always leaves at the same time, to go to class or to work, I don't know. I know almost nothing about her, except one thing: I like her a lot. The air is fresh this morning. It's December and my hands are frozen. I toss my cigarette into the gutter and see her coming toward me. "Dear blonde angel," I say to myself for a few seconds that seem endless. time seems to have stopped. My mind is sailing above a maelstrom filled with darkness. I have to violently suppress the diabolical urge to talk to her, to distract her so I can tie her up and rape her savagely. I can clearly imagine her screams, I can almost feel her sweat on my mouth, beading and slowly running down her back. I imagine the infernal gallop of her heartbeat, I greedily taste the delicate scarlet flower that widens between her legs as my penis brutally tears her flesh No!! The scream echoes in my head and I slowly move away from the

front gate, sweaty and panicked “Hello,” she says with a big smile. “Hello,” I mumble. I try to produce something resembling a smile on my face, but it's a lost cause. She steps out onto the sidewalk, and all I can see is her back and the golden mass of hair falling down her back. She walks quickly, as always, and a few kids turn to look at her as she passes. She leaves no one indifferent, I think to myself. “I've done it again,” I think. “You understand,” she says, ‘since my husband died, I've been going around in circles. The loneliness weighs on me and suffocates me.’ She whispers. ‘I'm going crazy.’ She says in a gloomy tone. I listen attentively and can't help feeling a certain pity for her, poor old woman, I think to myself. She keeps her eyes down on her handbag, a tear rolling down her cheek. We sit in the booth in silence. I look at her face and try to imagine, without too much difficulty, the beautiful, flamboyant redhead she once was. How many lovers did she have? How many passionate embraces? How many homes and lives were destroyed by this poor creature, now old and wrinkled like a prune? I put my hand over my mouth to hide a cruel smile. I can't do anything for her, for anyone. I feed off their misery and pain, greedily drinking in their vices. Her surprisingly clear, young blue eyes rest on me as she tries to assess my humanity, hoping perhaps to find confirmation of my incredible honesty in my face. My character is perfect, I think. She slowly gets up and recites the same platitudes and thanks as usual.

In her eyes, I am a saint, a young man who is well-rounded in every way, lacking only a lovely and honest girlfriend. I burst out laughing, a laugh so well-rehearsed and mechanical that people don't even notice it anymore. I keep up the illusion under all circumstances. I walk her to the heavy door of the lodge and hold it open for her as she scurries outside. With a wave of my hand, always the same, I say goodbye politely and close the door. I sit in the corner of the office for a few moments, breathing slowly and deeply to chase away the rage and frustration that suddenly overwhelm me. This role of the nice guy is eating away at me, and this incredible seduction, which began almost two years ago, is exhausting me month after month. Jeremy contacts me during my lunch break, reminding me that he'll soon be ready and that everything will be in place. There's an unhealthy fever in his voice that delights me. Behind him, I can hear the excellent song "Inno a Satana" by the black metal band Emperor playing in the background. I remember his shitty studio, perched on the sixth floor with no elevator. It was filled with dozens of cages devoured by rust and the urine of about thirty black rats. He keeps talking about the parties he wants to go to, the people he wants to meet, the girls he absolutely has to fuck, the enemies he has to punish. I'm only half listening, my mind once again completely focused on her, on Manon. Whatever I do, her image haunts my dark inner world. "Are you listening?" he asks. "Not

really,” I whisper. I can't wait for him to shut up and hang up. Sensing that my interest in his chatter is waning, he apologizes for disturbing me and hangs up, making me promise to come over to his place in a few days. I promise.

Testimony, dialogue with a young police lieutenant about a violent assault:

Are you the guard here?

Yes, how long have you been here? A year and a half, but it feels like I've been here for 10 years already.

I see.

And what exactly did you see?

...

Okay, let's get back to the matter at hand. Did you witness the assault?

No, I was at my boss's place when it happened.

We were drinking, actually.

Can I ask you a question?

The guy who was almost beaten to death, is he the fat pedophile with the shaved head?

Yes, that's him!

But what do you mean, pedophile?
Everyone here knows him!
He's already been to jail for playing with kids, so to speak.
Don't you guys talk to each other?
Have you checked your files?
Listen to me, sir, I'm the one asking the questions here, understand?
Yeah...
So you didn't see anything.
Did the victim have a tense relationship with young people or people in the neighborhood?
Are you kidding me? I burst out laughing.
Of course it was tense. I'll add that.
He sodomized two five-year-old boys, the last one needed seven stitches in his anus! I shout.
Calm down, sir!

I'm tired of your questions. I add.

The delicate fire burning in my throat helps dispel the horror, momentarily keeping the ghosts that haunt me at bay. I long for a little rest, a rest I will never get, I know that now. Every night I become a poor thing, a piece of trash with a feverish mind. I destroyed that love, I tore it to pieces, that's what I did. I think of her again, and of so many others. I wanted these stories to end well, but instead I only managed to cause chaos every time and engulf them

in the black hole that serves as my heart... Some, many even, truly loved me, and my only gift to them was to deceive them with lies and vices. I look at my hands, and the only thought that comes to mind is that these fingers, my fingers, have caressed so many young, willing bodies, passionately squeezed graceful, perfect throats, and for what? Today I am alone, once again. I no longer tremble, I have never trembled in front of anyone since that fateful day when Juliette took her own life. I just remember that on that day, the ringing of the phone tore me away from the arms of a young blonde whose name I have forgotten, and that on the other end of the line, her mother told me of her daughter's death. I had the surreal feeling that something was slipping away, as if I had lost something inside me, a piece of the chaotic puzzle that is my soul... Caroline is watching me closely, our eyes meet, she knows that tonight she will end up in my bed. The music around us is too loud, more crap from the rap soul subculture, music for the brainless sheep of this era, for those who can't do anything with their hands, who rave about three pathetic chords and a few samples stolen from so many others. She gives me a discreet sign, nodding her head to indicate that it's time for us to leave. We get up together. I'm relieved that this miserable evening is over. I don't want to be here, I haven't wanted to come to other people's houses for a long time. Sophie, the hostess, asks us to stay a little longer, saying it's too late to leave and that it's

been far too long since we've seen each other. I clear my throat and add, without much conviction, that I'll come back soon! She believes me. She looks at Caroline and whispers a few words in her ear. Caroline bursts out laughing, her face crimson. She heads for her coat, which is hanging on a chair. I follow her with my eyes, reveling in the magnificent sight of her buttocks, sublimely highlighted by her tight black jeans. I think of my cock in her warm, welcoming mouth, of her breasts, and I'm already hard. I wonder if the others have noticed. I look at each of the people sitting around the table, drinking, laughing, and talking. "My friends," I think. I don't really know these people; no one ever knows anyone, that's true. Sophie, Marc, Lionel, Najib, Philippe, and Celine. They don't know who I am, and ultimately they don't care whether I'm dead or alive. They never called me back after Juliette died... Caroline's voice pulls me out of my thoughts just in time for me to notice that they are all staring at me strangely in silence. Someone has turned off the music. Feeling uncomfortable, I turn to Caroline and say, "Shall we go?" I say goodbye to everyone, promising to come back, even though no one has really asked me to since Sophie. I walk to the front door and wait for Caroline on the landing. I hear laughter again. As if my absence had suddenly lightened the atmosphere, it doesn't sadden me that much. I can only think of one thing: Caroline's naked, sweat-drenched body. Tonight, she's mine.

The cold, crisp night air gently slaps us in the face. It invigorates me instantly. We walk quietly through the strangely deserted streets of Courbevoie. She presses herself against me, arm in arm, and we walk silently down the avenue that leads to the bridge. She looks ahead, smiling, while I am drawn to the black, icy water. As we walk in silence, I revel in her quiet company, her delicate perfume tickling my nostrils. The night and the city lights still amaze me, and during the short walk to my car, I am almost happy to have her with me. At my place, we sit on the floor in front of the TV, which is our only source of light, watching a documentary about biker gangs in the US. I try to concentrate on what Caroline is saying, but it's not easy. I did two lines of coke in my bathroom, and I'm captivated by the spectacle of these biker gangs, which remind

me of chaotic trips in the desert around LA five years ago. I watch her lips move, but I can't understand what she's really saying. I only catch a few words: "moving in together," normal family life, love and children! A trifecta that I deeply despise... children? I repeat aloud, stunned. She looks at me tenderly, touches my cheek and smiles before whispering: "Yes, it would be nice to think about it one day!" She lowers her eyes and waits for an answer. I don't know what to say to her. My head hurts, a splitting migraine is gaining ground, and this idiot is talking to me about children! I think. I get up and collapse onto the worn-out sofa in the living

room. She joins me, sits down, and rests her head on my right shoulder, watching me with a smile. I close my eyes and whisper, "I don't know!" She twirls her long black hair around her fingers, and I can sense her sadness and discomfort. Boredom begins to set in, adding to my terrible headache. I agreed to put up with these idiots, these so-called "friends," for three hours just to see her. I hid all my dirty stuff, the drugs and the extreme porn DVDs, I cleaned, I aired out the place, I washed every inch of my miserable apartment for her! I agreed to put on a mask of respectability for a few hours because I only want one thing: to fuck her. I naively thought that was what she wanted too, without feelings or strings attached! "Just put it on your ear," I tell myself. I get up and head to the kitchen. I need alcohol. "Would you like something to drink?" I ask. 'A glass of wine,' she says in a sad voice. Never go out with a friend, what an idiot I am, I should have listened to myself! I pour myself a triple shot of vodka and pour her a glass of Bordeaux. I quickly think of the best way to get her out of there. I look at the clock in the kitchen, which reads 1 a.m. Shit! I mutter. It's far too late to ask her to leave, and I don't want anything to happen to her outside. I decide that despite everything, there may still be a chance, albeit a slim one, that she'll shut up and take her clothes off. I return to the living room with her glass of wine. She's gone, and the bedroom door is open. I put her glass on the coffee table and go into the bedroom,

which is pitch black. I call her softly, but she doesn't answer. After a while, my eyes adjust to the darkness and I can make out the shape of her body lying on the bed. She seems to be fast asleep, so I close the door quietly. Almost relieved that this miserable evening is over, I turn off the TV and sit down on the sofa. I sit there for a long time in the dark, listening intently to the sounds outside. The metallic sound of the gate to the residence closing, kids talking loudly, the sound of a bottle breaking. After half an hour, silence descends and all I can hear in the distance is the murmur of cars, which calms me in a strange way. The alarm on my phone makes me open my eyes. I turn my head to see what time it is: 5:50 a.m. I get up slowly, undecided, navigating in complete fog for a minute or two. Then suddenly I remember that Caroline must be there, lying on my bed, asleep. On tiptoe, I risk a glance into the bedroom. Nothing. She's gone, left without saying goodbye. Probably less than ten minutes ago, to catch the first subway train. I'm furious with myself for not talking to her, for not choosing my words better, for not being more talkative. I go into the bedroom, sit down on the bed, my head in my hands, already overcome by immense fatigue. I worked in a state of stupor that is difficult to explain. I haven't spoken to anyone since this morning, I haven't smiled at anyone. And most of the tenants who greeted me this morning got nothing more than a vague grunt and a nod in response. I deserted the

lodge for most of the morning, craving solitude and fresh air. I transferred all calls to my cell phone, just in case... There were no calls, I wasn't disturbed. Sitting on a bench in a small square, my eyes lost in the distance, I spent an hour dwelling on all my romantic failures, betrayals, misunderstandings, and hatred, without finding any explanations, answers, or any way out. "Only hatred, danger, and violence make you feel alive." No! I said out loud. "Accept it!" That little voice in my head, I'd been hearing it for years, fighting against it and trying to stifle it, but I wouldn't give in. Was it my conscience? Conscience, the subtle vehicle of providence, or of the devil... Stéphane. He asked me to meet him at his place in two hours. I have no desire to leave my house or see other people. They all depress me. I don't need that, not right now. I weigh up my options: a night alone at home watching TV with the last of my coke, or getting high at one of my oldest friends' houses? I opt for the second option. Pretty Hate Machine by Nine Inch Nails is blaring in the car. The only luxury I've allowed myself in two years is a pair of monster speakers. The vibration of the music makes the rear windows shake. I smile and decide to turn the volume down a little. Stopped at a red light, a group of four girls walk by, smiling and pointing at me. "Some slut for rappers," I think. I drive up Boulevard de la Chapelle to Place Pigalle. It's already dark, and despite the freezing cold, there are tourist buses everywhere. I park on Rue

Fontaine. I turn off the engine. I sit there for a while, smoking a cigarette and listening to music. I think about Manon again, trying to imagine what she's doing. Maybe she's reading or watching TV? Sleeping? "How I'd love to see her sleeping," I say to myself. Her bare shoulders peeking out from under the duvet, her thick golden hair spread out on the bed, her angelic face frozen in an expression of bliss—all these details make me want to defile her. I shake my head, exasperated by these silly, everyday daydreams. I get out of the car quickly, slam the door shut, and look around me. The bars are full of students and foreigners. I'm cold and would like a drink, and tonight I plan to get wasted! Fifth floor, no elevator. The building is well maintained, a professional habit, I suppose. And then I say out loud, "What the hell do I care?" I get to her door and can't believe I made it up all those stairs! Two packs of cigarettes a day, stringy hair, and a deathly complexion—that's what I've got to show for the last five years. A few minutes of peace smoking the shit that's killing me, and this is all I get.