

## Andy Warhol and the Art of the Bullet

### You return

from shopping. Isn't there something you forgot, baby aspirin or turpentine? Raspberries, razor blades, Hula-Hoops? Oven-fried-Corn-Flake-chicken? Or maybe a tulip? You clutch two T-shirts and a bottle of hand lotion, its plastic the color of wet plaster bones. Color of correction fluid. Its plastic so grease-beady, so spooned. Its plastic smooth in your paper tissue fingers, like ambition, only ambition is made of rice paper, imported from Japan on a listing freighter, rice paper dipped in oil paint, twisted into marbled shapes, thrown to tumble, to dry sideways in the center of the room. Your art covers the floor like piles of autumn leaves. You sit cross-legged and wonder about the saleslady, Sarah. Did she like you? Did she notice your A-bomb hair? You enter the bathroom, pop open the mirror and swing the lotion into the medicine cabinet, its yawning maw, and along its silvery jaws Colgate and cold cream and compresses and baby aspirin, jar after jar. All unopened.

Desiring to repeat things.

Desiring to swim below the mirror.

Desiring love in a curvature of blotted ink, a perfect slinky curl, eyelash angle, lips, but until: settling for red.

*I'd faint to paint you.*

Excuse me? Sarah says.

Desiring to unwrap the T-shirts. Not unwrapping the T-shirts. Stacking the T-shirts on the top shelf alongside T-shirts. All unopened.

Desiring biscuit dough. You see yourself as biscuit dough in the pressurized roll: strike it on the counter edge and you may explode, unravel, expose. Have a gulp of air. Think of a certain type of chalk. Outweigh the emptiness with things: lotion, T-shirts, a can of tomato soup. Or just flinch. *Spaz out.* Light the fuse on your A-bomb hair. Or cough, lightly, like fallout dust. Return the dough to the cool shelves. White shelves of Pillsbury and pillow-shaped pasta and pills. All unopened.

The mirror whispers in the next room; it waits for you. It sees a man of angles, edges, of thumbtack, eight-track, and spatula bone. It has a question: Why do you lean so skinny? Why is your voice so milky thin, so half-beaten egg? Why do you blink your lashes against the light? Is it because you're afraid to open things?

"No, no," you stutter.

"I just know if I use something, it's gone."

## Upstairs

that day you worked, as usual, a six-step process: You

- 1 found this grainy video (your old SX-70 camera; smeared a layer of Vaseline and cigarette ash on the lens) of Marilyn Monroe digging the cotton from an asthma inhaler and eating it with a loopy smile.
- 2 froze the video and took a photo of the TV screen with a Polaroid and then dropped the developed image into a pan of milk.
- 3 heated the milk on a hotplate.
- 4 tweezed the photo from the saucer.
- 5 used three Q-tips and a burnishing tool to manipulate the emulsion inside the Polaroid.
- 6 admired the unexpected surprise of the TV lines (monitor phosphors caught on film), but the final image was less than pleasing. Less than art, certainly. So you ate a slice of tangerine, smoked two low-tar cigarettes, and went shopping for lotion.

## The first two

shots, the first two shots—she misses you! This door slamming, sparkles of humming light, flashbulbs, or Benzedrine, pulsing glow-cut lemon breeze, with two bees zipping by—yellow, yellow, yellow—and you don't see her and then you see her and she has this little pistol, this shiny toy pistol, from Schwarz—this is your brain now, the flux—only it's not a toy and *Who is she?* and that's your problem, your situation: to know everyone and so not really know anyone; and she gets you! Lifts you into music, up, up, into ricochet of lung, spleen, stomach, liver, esophagus, lung—all of this one bullet. But how? By art. Magic and art and silver bones blending with the wind.

*Hey, hey come here,* you plead, a gargle in your throat; clutching someone's lapel and tugging them close. This, this lady, this is large. She

shot me. She shot me? *This is so large, so much talent, a thing done well. Wow. This taste in my mouth. I wonder if I'm dying.*

Yes, she shot you. With bullets she spray-painted silver.

*Silver bullets?*

Yes. You see...she thought you were a vampire. Or a werewolf. Something not of this world.

### The anesthesia

tasted like eggs, raw eggs lining your mouth, and you always thought of eggs as coffins for tiny chickens.

They removed your wig while in surgery.

The press said you were dead for a while, but the press always says that, particularly with the famous, so you read all the papers, watched the TV, and felt unoriginal, a cliché.

Everyone who phoned with condolences eventually got to their genuine concern: What's it like to get shot? *Oh I don't know. I... Go ask Mario. Ask my manager, Fred. She shot him too. Hey, go shoot yourself if you really want to know. That would be terrific. All I can say is the god of jammed guns is a good god.*

The first day your toothbrush was a stick with a foam cube. Perfect execution of design.

What you found in a hospital room—the angles, the cleanliness, the teal and white and blue, the astringent air, the awesome solidness of the space—was a feeling of separation, a divorce, almost afloat, a chasm forming, two sides: *in here, and out there*. Terrifying.

Only the very old nurse could find your veins, and she worked nights. So when they needed your blood they would miss the target, collapse it, prod and probe. You heard one nurse say you had the capillaries of a child. One nurse opined you had no blood. One nurse hit an artery and blood sprayed the wall, a vibrant arch of lip gloss. You said, *You're a regular Jackson Pollock*, and she did not respond.

For some reason, the toilet water was a deep, iridescent blue.

Gasoline, turpentine, razor blades, and epoxy were not allowed. An open flame would ignite your oxygen. After much pleading, they did release a copy of the video tape of your surgery, but what could you do with it, how could you create—in there? Sometimes you sat all night counting in your head the canvases you weren't painting, their subjects, their prices, the empty spaces on someone's wall.

### Gee, I don't

*do that—lawyers and judges and that whole world. There's so much, so much heavy polished wood in that world, and loud voices. I think loud voices are really unnecessary. I saw it all on television. Television is amazing. This one erupted from the ceiling on a shiny black neck. It was in my room and I never let them turn it off. They say she shot all these people, you know. Shot all these people and only got three years; and I, I say, So? I think the word justice is a cloud in someone's dream. I don't believe in justice. I think people would prefer a large slice of pizza to justice. Do you believe? I once believed. I once believed and that's how I worked with my art: making sense of it all, framing. But I don't do that anymore. Nothing makes sense anymore. I know this artist who was walking through Central Park on a windy day and a tree branch fell on her head. She's in a wheelchair now. She's in this, this institution. When she wants to talk she has to point a little light at a computer and a metal voice talks for her, only mostly it doesn't work so then she can't talk at all. Wow. She has a television in her room, though I've only visited once. I like to watch the television, to see the shoes, to see what type of shoes people are wearing. I've always drawn shoes. Sometimes I'll spend all day listening to sirens up and down the street and I'll draw shoes. Styles haven't changed much. But then here comes the news channel. Look there. Look. At what? RFK, MLK, all gone, and then they say a human being, for the first time, has seen the dark side of the moon. I had to let it all go. These people, they don't believe in art. They believe in virgin births. In Silly Putty, soup in a can, McDonald's. The most beautiful thing in Tokyo is McDonald's. The most beautiful thing in Stockholm is McDonald's. Peking and Moscow don't have anything beautiful yet, but they will—for everyone. Psychic phone lines they believe. Napalm, which I think you can make at home if you have a laundry room, and...well, a car. There's this TV show, it's terrific. Gilligan's Island. And I saw on the news how this show really annoyed the Coast Guard off California. These people, these people who watch this show would phone, all hours. They wanted to know why the Coast Guard didn't go and rescue the castaways.*

*It was only a three-hour cruise. They don't believe in art, these people. I saw a bird plucked out of the sky yesterday. I did. I think you add to this world, or you subtract from this world. That's my theory. So, so... I didn't testify. You know, I really couldn't.*

### **For weeks**

you lay in bed on all these drugs—Valium, Darvon, Doxepin, all these futuristic Vs and Xs, spaceship names so you know you're flying—and then it came to you like inspiration: her face. She was a young girl, hyper. Her hair was this bruised blue. At The Factory one morning she had this play. It was called *Up Your Ass*. You never filmed it—the writing wasn't much, except for that title. You gave her some work as an extra. You watch the film now; she's always smiling.

### **My, my...**

*final thoughts? I think I wear this corset to keep my guts in. It rubs my skin on the left side so I pinch my right side to make it even. The pain, I mean. I like it to be balanced like that. Symmetrical. I think the important things are never pretty, no matter what I try. I think silver bullets. I think the delicate powder that coats bubble gum is the same as a moth's wing. Or fallout. I think of making 4,000 paintings in one day. It's a goal of mine. I think this corset, everyday. Every single day now. I think Brillo Box, Flowers, Cow Wallpaper, and Silver Clouds. I think I love my Trinitron color TV. I think I love beauty, which I mean as sin. I think about when I finally woke and the first thing they tell me is why the gun jammed: those spray-painted silver bullets. My mind just flipped on that, just flashed like a strobe. Yes. I said I thought that was beautiful. I said, Well, there's art for you.*