

EXTRACT #26: PAUL BECKER

*I have been spying on you for a long time. I mean, every night. I have sat next door with my ear pressed to that wall and listened to the two of you talk, telling this story, this narrative or script or whatever it is. I know this is unforgivable. It is an outrageous invasion of privacy. I thought it was time I knocked on your door and confessed.*

And what do you expect us to do about it? Should we alert the authorities? We have heard you listening, so what? Have you got nothing to say about the work itself?

*Well, I do wonder where it will all end?*

It is something of a conundrum I suppose, says the mother, but then we are not sure either, are we? Not sure if it will be tied up in a neat ribbon, or if it needs to end at all. The daughter says: I suppose it ends when my mother and I stop talking or when one or both of us grows so tired of it that we can no longer continue.

*I have taken extensive notes.*

What use is that to us? You may as well sit with us and join in from now on.

*I would rather remain sequestered. I would rather continue as a spy.*

Do as you see fit and take whatever notes you please. We welcome any suggestions, ways to smooth the road so we can figure how each situation properly plays out.

*Is there really to be no end then, she asks, no purpose to this?*

Purpose? Why, isn't this enough? It seems to have interested you at least? Isn't it enough that these scenarios exist if only for the moment, if only in this room, the instant they are conceived? After all, when you see a great film or read a great book the most important, most generative aspects are the images you witness and then manage to immediately forget. I mean, where do think these moments go? In their magnificence, you attend them in silence, then they are absorbed into the mixed cosmos of your brain, into the space between synapses and neurotransmitters, the lost regions beyond the stars. This is the space that we are interested in, this non-space, the story told and then irrevocably lost, the painting found in an old bric-a-brac shop then left on the train.

*Then what are you communicating? What are you giving to the world?*

The world? says the daughter. What's the world?

*I mean, says the spy, what will exist and in what form when you are gone.*

The old woman laughs. There really is no transmigration of souls, she says. I can say that out loud. Death does not work like that. At least not as you imagine. I don't believe you go to heaven and sit in the warm, on white cushions, amongst old friends, like an imbecile, everyone suddenly, miraculously young again. But I can let you know what I think really happens. The body departs (yes, that much we know). Then, well in a sense yes, I believe you do transmogrify, but not into a tankard or a lapdog or some sort of nebulous angel but into fiction. It is different for everyone. For example, one's soul could fly to the frozen North and awaken on the deck of a galleon, a schooner; travelling alone, long

abandoned by her crew, cutting a line through thin ice that closes in on her wake, viewed from above through sepia clouds, snow swirling in. You die and you emerge as an undercurrent of feeling, as an image: part of the fog that flits around a lamppost, the rain or the wind howling in, a description so evocative that it captures your soul in its first flight and embeds it there in that story forever.

Earlier that evening this third woman — the spy — had dreamt of leaving the place, of leaving there at last, of smiling to herself as she walked down the same avenue where, at the end, the same taxi would be waiting, the one that had brought her; the same driver. She would slump down on the back seat and the driver would say: There, I told you so! They always arrive tired out and they always leave half dead! And she would manage to speak to the driver this time; she would tell him he was wrong. She was not tired at all, just thinking.