ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book has taken me on a 50-year journey encompassing my entire career as a writer. Putting it together was like paging through an album of the memories, thoughts, fears, dreams, desires, joys, resentments, disappointments, and triumphs that define me as an artist and make up what most would call my “identity.” In consequence, a true list of acknowledgments should include nearly everyone who played a significant role in my life.

Rather than attempting such a daunting task, I’ll instead warmly thank those who advised me during the compilation and editing of these stories: Cathleen Peters Saito, Dale Corvino, Drew Zeiba, Travis Jeppesen, and Scott Neary. I’ve always been awed by the talent of the person who created the art for the cover of this book: Scott Ewalt, a great artist whom I also have the privilege of calling a friend. I appreciate the efforts of Jerry Wheeler, who copyedited this manuscript in record time. Warm appreciation many years later to Eddie Mercado for collaborating with me on a story that appears in this book. And finally, a huge expression of thanks to the publisher and editor of ITNA, Christopher Stoddard, without whom this book would never have existed.
## CONTENTS

Preface ............................................................................................................. 1

### Call It Love

The Ring ............................................................................................................ 7
Dust, Angel ........................................................................................................ 13
Blades ................................................................................................................ 23
Fraulein ........................................................................................................... 33
James ............................................................................................................... 41
Persistent Patsy ............................................................................................ 49
The Buttoned Lip ......................................................................................... 91
A Libertine .................................................................................................... 95
The Worst Place in New York ................................................................. 101
Myra ............................................................................................................. 109
The Puerto Rican ...................................................................................... 131
The Romanian Boy .................................................................................. 135

### Pseduo Noir

The Old Switcheroo ....................................................................................... 143
Recommendations for the Mass Production of Teenagers .................. 195
Recovered Memory .................................................................................... 247
I Murdered My Sim .................................................................................. 267

### Time-Worn Tales

Pinocchio ....................................................................................................... 275
Stations of the Cross .................................................................................. 285
She ................................................................................................................. 293
The Sea ......................................................................................................... 297
# The Sacred Art of Breeding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Visit from Mom</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Romance</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# When Crack Was King

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Happy Automaton</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King of the High Con</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide Ecstasy</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New York Rage</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretending to Say No</td>
<td>387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casio Like the Keyboard</td>
<td>403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apollo’s Curse</td>
<td>409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterfeit John</td>
<td>415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Other Maria</td>
<td>425</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# The Reformers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They Had Stories Then</td>
<td>433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Oh Why, My Brother?</td>
<td>439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take My Advice</td>
<td>447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time-Warped Vision</td>
<td>449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosting Made Easy</td>
<td>451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Hero</td>
<td>455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Anarchiste de droite</td>
<td>463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Closet Catholic</td>
<td>465</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Weird Trips

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Grandstander</td>
<td>479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return to San Francisco</td>
<td>527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost in Bucharest</td>
<td>543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convalescence</td>
<td>547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mouth of the River</td>
<td>563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep Springs: Blood and Brains in the California Desert</td>
<td>581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodnight, Manhattan</td>
<td>587</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WE LIVE IN EXCEPTIONAL TIMES. If I may be permitted an easy simile, it’s as if a giant, not overly sharp blade is cleaving the old relationships between ethnicities, genders, and sexual pairings in the hopes of rearranging the unbalanced power dynamics inherent in them. Yes, I’m referring to a sensibility that those made uncomfortable by these radical changes are calling “cancel culture.” I myself welcome and accept such long-awaited adjustments in equality; but, as most blades are double-edged, one aspect of the new mentality has not at all won my support, and that is the rewriting of history to match contemporary value judgments.

This collection of 59 texts—21 of which have never been published before—includes every finished short literary piece I created between 1970 and the present. Unsurprisingly, many of them reflect the values and, especially, the language of their time, back when pronouns reflected a male bias, descriptions of minorities were created by the minds and perceptions of majorities, and the current incarnations of feminism and gay liberation were less developed. It would be an injustice—especially in terms of the education of those born after these historical periods—to pretend such mentalities were nonexistent despite the fact that the erasing of offensive—call them triggering—yet realistic details and language from accounts written or taking place in the past is becoming
more and more common. To put it simply, I have not edited or changed any language in these older texts to reflect current norms.

The only other issue this complete collection may occasion has to do with the kind of texts that can be called “short stories.” This issue can be traced all the way back to the invention of the novel—or, more properly, fiction—in anglophone literary culture in the second half of the seventeenth century.

Most studies accounting for the birth of the novel in English cite Paul Bunyan’s *Pilgrims Progress* (1678) as providing a template for what would become the contemporary novel. This spiritual autobiography, or detailed account of an individual’s fall and redemption, influenced the majority of fictional narratives that followed. So powerful was the mandate of the spiritual autobiography that it eventually infiltrated nearly every narrative, or story, that exists in America—from contemporary short stories and novels to many forms of journalism and even the steps blueprinted by today’s recovery movement—a purely Protestant mentality that depends almost entirely upon the same narrative of fall and redemption.

I find it curious that critics currently trying to reform our language or make it more politically correct have proven no match for this deep-seated characteristic of narrative—the mandate of structuring one’s story as a spiritual biography. Even the most radical, “woke” reformers have not questioned the redemptive narrative itself, only the details of its moral imperatives and habits of language. More disappointing is the fact that America’s reliance on the spiritual narrative when it comes to telling stories has placed draconian strictures on the division between what can be thought of as fiction and what can be thought of as “facts.” Even creative nonfiction has become subject to such an interrogation, despite the obvious need such narratives demonstrate for many of the techniques and mechanisms of fiction.
There do, however, exist other literary cultures in which the redemptive narrative does not necessarily hold sway. The one with which I am most familiar is the French literary tradition; and because the French definition of stories, or “textes,” is unhampered by the demands of the redemptive narrative, their definition of what constitutes a “story” is much roomier. In many cases, French prose neglects to define a text as either fiction or nonfiction, aware as most French writers are of the high degree of imagination needed to tell any story that touches on the truth, whether fact-based or wholly fantastic.

I now come to my motive for initiating this discussion. Many of my texts were either influenced by French literature or—in a few cases—were originally written directly in French by me and then translated by me into English for this collection. In the process, I have included a few brief texts that might actually be categorized as essays and whose purpose is to extend and deepen the vision that materializes in my stories. Those who doubt the appropriateness of such inclusion might only glance at the short texts in Baudelaire’s *Paris Spleen*, which may seem like essays, but for Baudelaire and his scholars ended up being termed “prose poems.” To collapse this issue into its crux, I will say that the stories in this collection are about reality as I see it, and the few short essays that help connect them are just an extension of my lifelong search to come as close to that reality as I possibly can—by any means necessary. I hope you enjoy them.

Bruce Benderson
New York City
2022
Call it Love
OF ALL THE GANGSTERS and hustlers, the crack-smokers and dealers, I only made one friend during my entire fifteen years in old Times Square. It was a sixteen-year-old boy, a frail little hustler from a middle-class family who had fled a sadistic father and alcoholic mother in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, one of the most exclusive enclaves in the Midwest. Aside from the johns, he was the only white besides me in the bar we frequented; and his appearance was so extraordinary, mostly because of his ultra-blond hair, his enormous amber-colored eyes that looked yellow in the sunlight, his arms like matchsticks, and his pale and translucent skin that others, intimidated and overcome by his beauty, tried to ignore him. He was so slender and so smooth-cheeked that he looked like a young girl before her breasts have developed; and in summer, his tank tops revealed his shoulder blades, which seemed sculpted from meringue. He was, without a doubt, immensely popular with the johns in this place, but he possessed a combination of coolness and placidity that insisted on respect—or a sense of embarrassment and unease—on their part.

I myself felt not the slightest sexual desire for him. It would be more accurate to call what I felt an irresistible reverence for his beauty, which filled me with tenderness. It is true that I wanted to caress his thick
masses of fluorescent curls or touch his whipped-cream skin from which emerged his prominent skeleton, but I did not dare and, in a sense, did not want to. After a period of nine months, he’d become my best friend there, the only one to whom I could lend money with the certainty that he’d pay it back and the only person to whom I confided the details of my life, career, and desires. In contrast, the other hustlers were almost like adversaries, whom I desired and whom I paid for pleasure, but in whom I couldn’t trust.

In the entire bar, there was only one other person with whom I’d developed a casual friendship. She fascinated me largely because of her image. It was a very small Vietnamese woman, a transsexual who operated a transgender brothel in Atlantic City. Once a month, she came to New York to see her boyfriend, a Puerto Rican hustler, and I would see them in the bar.

My first encounter with the Vietnamese had left me fascinated by her rings, her black Issey Miyake fashions, her jet-beaded capes, her lustrous black hair cut Louise Brooks style, and especially her eyes, which shone like onyx jewels and which were framed by eyebrows tweezed into immense, thin half-circles.

Like the blond boy, she was a better conversationalist than most of the people in this bar. After some time, I’d find myself talking with her and the little blond while the Vietnamese’s boyfriend left to find drugs. The blond boy and the Vietnamese were in the habit of talking to each other to some extent, but I had the impression I was the principal link between the two.

Perhaps the most striking thing about these experiences was, again, the Vietnamese’s eyes when she’d glance at me from time to time while I was speaking with the blond boy. Just the hint of an ironic smile would compress the corners of her lips, and her eyes said that she was aware of the wealth of friendship I felt for the blond. But she never mentioned
this observation, and my friendship with her always remained on the
same level.

I love rings. For several years, I had been collecting them. I don’t
know why, but when I wear a ring that I like a lot, I feel as if I’m under
the beneficent power of a protective star. It calms me and gives me the
impression of possessing power. I have a friend who insists on putting
the rings I buy—always secondhand, never new—in a solution of water
and kosher salt. According to my friend, this rids these jewels of the
“bad vibrations” imparted to them by their previous owners. But I don’t
believe in these notions, and I always discover good energies in my rings.

One day I was alone in the bar with the blond, and he admired a
gold ring with a sapphire I was wearing. When he told me, I took off the
ring and offered it to him. I suppose it was a flamboyant gesture—the
sacrifice of one of my favorite rings—but as I’ve already explained, this
boy had something that inspired respect, and perhaps even more than
that.

The boy accepted in his dignified and nearly silent way, and the in-
vigorating effect that comes from the accomplishment of a truly
generous act spread through me. Two days later, when I saw him in the
bar, he was wearing the ring.

That winter, I left New York for three months for some literary pro-
jects. Old Times Square had a quality that you couldn’t bring to mind
when you weren’t there. I could never completely recall its ambiance. I
suppose that was the reason I didn’t think about the place much during
my trip. But from time to time, I would find myself thinking of the boy
and wondering how he was doing.

One of the first things I did upon my return to New York was to
visit my bar. I was a bit disappointed that the boy wasn’t there that
evening. The Vietnamese was, but I sensed a coldness coming from her, and her ironic smile was a little more pronounced. I wasn’t at all surprised. In that world everything changed so quickly, your usefulness for someone could evaporate in an instant. There were too many factors interfering with friendship. Who knew? Maybe she was dealing with HIV now, or handling a legal problem. However, I made the mistake of speaking to her even so. And during the conversation, I mentioned my friendship with the blond boy and said I was disappointed that he wasn’t there that evening. And to exhibit my high esteem for him, I explained how I had given him a very expensive ring.

As the months passed, and the boy’s absence became normal, I began thinking of him less and less. I admit I nearly forgot about him completely. It wasn’t until just before the month of May that I saw his little back in its yellow tank top not far from the entrance to Port Authority. The traffic was making too much noise for him to hear me, but I ran after him and touched his shoulder. The face I saw when he turned his head was covered with a torrent of shredded skin, scarred into thin ribbons of dead flesh. And one of his amber eyes was no longer an eye but a pink and gray hole. We conversed politely while I made an effort not to look him in the face, and then he left. But, overcome by pity and an unexplainable sense of disgrace, I shouted after him, “Give me your telephone number!” He came back and scribbled it on a piece of torn paper.

I ran to the bar for a double scotch, and when the bartender, a worn-out, hardened guy, noticed my face, he asked in an offhand way what was going on. “Have you seen the face of that little blond boy who was always here last year?” I said, forgetting the folded-up scrap of paper and leaving it on the counter.

“Oh yeah,” said the bartender. “His career as a hustler is over, I’d say.” He offered a gruesome smile.
“But what happened to him?” I asked. “Who did that?” The bartender lit my cigarette and pointed to the back of the bar with his chin. When I turned to look, I saw the Vietnamese.

“But why?” I asked in shock.

“Don’t know,” said the bartender curtly, “something about a ring. You do know, don’t you, that pathetic little blond was her great love?”

I nodded weakly.

“He even gave a pricey ring to that Oriental slut, and she wore it all the time, showing off her jewels in this scummy bar. But like a lot of people, she forgot he was only a prostitute. When she discovered that the ring hadn’t been bought for her but that it came from one of the kid’s admirers, she threw acid in his face.”

My cigarette went tumbling from my lips. With a filthy, wet rag, the bartender wiped up the crumpled scrap of paper and my cigarette and tossed them in the ashtray. Then, brusquely, he threw all of it into an enormous trash can.
Dust, Angel

REAL POWER: I’m talking about you and me. Us wearing tuxedos and me showing up in a white one. You got to dress up this way for this restaurant, it’s the most high-class one you can think of. You’re a big coke dealer and so am I. Though I show up smiling, it’s just that I don’t want to get my white tuxedo dirty, but somebody is giving you lip, so I have to take his fucking face and make mincemeat out of it.

Nobody talks to you that way, not to you. You understand what I mean when I tell you we were all padrinos. It was a bugged-out dream, I can’t remember all of it.

The first one I ever had about you.

You never think I’m ever thinking about anything, do you? But you don’t know how much I’m always thinking, thoughts spinning around like a revolving door spitting things out.

Making people do things to me they wouldn’t do really, dressing them up and peeling them down, putting weapons in their hands, making them too nice or ready to murder me, saying you lied to me yesterday.

Did you?

My mind so full of so much shit like bees buzzing round and round the same branch.
Have you ever seen that? A whole colony of bees settling on a branch.
Lucky you didn’t walk into it, ‘cause I wouldn’t want to see you get hurt.
And there would be too many bees all at once to punch each of them out.
Can you see me spinning round and round, knocking those bees off one at a time like a wheel that goes whirr? My mind churning out cartoons into the black air.
One of them’s my dog Kuchi, used to yap around my mother’s ankles, yapping and yapping at our old man because he’s beating her up.
One of them’s my little brother with his pants falling off his butt.
The other’s a fish that used to be in a tank in somebody’s house. If you stick your lips right up against the glass, this fish would come and stick his lips against the glass, too, right up to you.
The glass would feel cold.
Wonder where the fish is now.
Probably dead.

You keep thinking about things, and you don’t know why. The thoughts swim around looking for a place to get out, but they can’t find it, maybe you made them up.
Like this one: I’m so little, I’m in a shoebox: that was my little bed. The shoebox is on the floor and Kuchi’s coming over to see what’s in it, then he begins to lick me and at first it feels good.

Did you ever get licked all over?
Now it’s kind of weird ‘cause Kuchi has taken a little bite of me.
Now he’s going to eat my leg off, somebody’s got to stop him.
When a dog tries to eat a baby it doesn’t really hurt. The teeth sink right through the soft skin, you know, sometimes a cat will eat her baby but when they found that they took me away from my mother.

Then when I was four they gave me back.

Hand me that pillow. Now let me tell you what I was thinking about that dream.

The coolest Mafia man. The best scarface walking into a restaurant that’s so shiny you need sunglasses to look at the silverware. He’s on his way to meet the godfather because he’s his ace and number one boy walking right in just as they bring out the steak on the silver plate, or is it a snake? Maybe it’s a snake on a silver platter coiled up like rope. You’re wearing a black tuxedo and I’m wearing the white one, remember. Can I have some coke, I say.

You pull out your silver blade and open up the diamond-studded box and fix me a line, everybody in the restaurant is watching but nobody dares to say anything, nobody except one person who is thinking of saying something. It’s a guy that’s so jealous he just can’t stand to see us set up like this and I feel—

Did you ever look in the mirror and what you saw in the glass, suddenly for a moment you pretended it was someone else and he makes a face at you and you have to keep from smashing your fist into the mirror—

Well, I felt like that when I looked at this dude that’s jealous of us. It’s as if I saw him in the mirror and I really didn’t like what I saw.

It’s the worst feeling you can imagine.

I’m glad I remembered to bring my piece.

That’s what this bulge in my tuxedo pants pocket is, by the way.

I had asked you to carry it but you said, if I had a big bulge in my pants pocket everybody would look because they’re not used to seeing
it, but you, kid, they’re used to seeing a big bulge there anyway, so you put it in your pocket.

And you keep looking at that bulge in my pocket and feeling safe—’cause you know what’s in there and it’s going to keep anybody from giving us any trouble.

Hairy scary moby dick, that’s what’s in there.

So we take some more coke, you open the diamond box—was it diamond or gold?—and give it to me until the wheels spin in my head and a dog is yapping there. I wish he’d shut up, he’s making the walls spin, we hated what was going on, which is why he used to run around her ankles yapping.

And now the guy in the mirror, he’s standing in front of you, sir, and my hand’s on my piece, I’ve got to protect you.

But what I can’t understand, what I can’t even look at, is you’re reaching out and laying your hand on him, nice: the way you do to me. So that he looks more and more like me till I can’t stand it anymore, and now I’m the one who’s jealous, I want to smash the mirror with my fist that, fucking traitor. I’d like to cut off his ears and stuff them in his mouth because he’s not worth hearing a kind word from you, he doesn’t deserve it, don’t let him near you, he doesn’t deserve it, don’t listen to him because he’s rotten.

He might bite your balls off.

Don’t get mad at me, it was only a dream. Press your hand against my forehead like that, it makes me feel better.

I should start working out more, shouldn’t I?

Then I could take you easy, if I wanted to.

Only kidding.

I’d protect you.

Except sometimes I feel a little mad at you because you’re always telling me what to do—yap-yapping at me all the time, till I get a little sick of hearing it or you want to have sex when I don’t which to be
perfectly honest is quite a few times even though I say okay and you say if you don’t want to and I say just let me finish this beer.

   Don’t get mad.
   I do have feelings for you.
   I appreciate all you did and shit.
   Pass me a beer, would you?

   Yapping and yapping in my head until the nightmare was finished, ‘cause there’s nothing you can do while it’s happening, if somebody you care about is wearing a black tuxedo in the most high-class Mafia restaurant in the world and you are his ace and the two of you are ruling the fucking world but suddenly he is reaching out to touch the fucking asshole that does not even respect him, there’s no way of waking up from the nightmare.

   Just leave me alone when I get like that, don’t take it personally, I don’t even know you’re in the room, I can’t get the dream out of my head and I begin to believe that it’s really happening, I know it’s not your fault but I’ll kill you if you come near me.

   I didn’t mean you, I meant him.

   Give me a kiss.

   I’ll tell you about that fish—listen to me—I’ll tell you all about him: he can’t see. That’s why he comes up real close when you put your lips on the glass, he comes to see what it is. Then when he does, there’s something in his lips that makes them stick to the glass, and he’s stuck there—isn’t that bugged out—and you think he’s kissing you. But he’s stuck there and can’t get away.

   If I was that fish, and I had a fist, I’d smash it right through that glass, then the water would come spilling out all over that guy’s kisser and wouldn’t he be surprised, maybe his mouth would fall open, and I’d slide inside it—swim right through him and punch him in the guts with my fins.

   Or bite his balls off.
Imagine a fish biting a guy’s balls off. It’s bugged out, isn’t it?

I suppose I should tell you that when I was in the bar the other night I met this dude and he said I have cocaine, why don’t you come over we’ll do some. When I came over he did have coke and he kept trying to tell me to take off my gloves and I wouldn’t. He even got my pants off, but I wouldn’t take off the gloves. Then finally he said why don’t you take off one glove I promise you won’t have to take the other off.

I took it off.

We got it on and he gave me some money which I gave most of it to you, you remember you asked me have I got any of the cash you gave me and I gave you back three fins? Well, that wasn’t what you gave me I spent that, but what I gave you back I got from him.

Then tonight I saw him in the bar and I said hey I want my glove back, I left it at your house, I forgot to take it.

And he said, I threw it away.

You couldn’t have thrown it away I said because you made me take it off. You couldn’t have thrown it away.

Well, I did he said that money I gave you was worth a lot more than that stupid glove anyway.

I grabbed him by the shirt and slammed him up against the bar, said give me my fucking glove, you stole my fucking glove you bastard.

And he said, what’s the big deal about a glove. Then he got scared for a second and pulled out a twenty and said here will this take care of it, and I took it and said it would, but I didn’t really feel that way.

And he said, can I buy you a drink my friend?

And I said I’d love one thank you.

And he said I really had a good time with you.

It’ll be better the second time I said, and he went and talked to somebody else.
To tell you the truth I had another dream. We were at a shopping mall and you were going to buy me a new pair of Adidas. Where are they I said, I want to try them on, give me the box, oh you said I left the box inside the store. So I went to wait for you in the parking lot and then I kept walking, there was a tree by the side and on a branch hanging from it was a whole bunch of bees. The bees had formed in the shape of a head like your face and the mouth was open like a big hole as if to kiss me and I laughed.

Sometimes I wish they’d put me in a shoebox and leave me there for a while with the cover on it—just leave me alone—I don’t want to watch what some people do to other people. That little pup always knew when something wasn’t right.

I guess I should tell you I went home with that guy again tonight. Please don’t be mad at me. You remember you bought me those gloves.

After he gave me the bill and bought me the drink and then he came back he was a little high and he said maybe I should, maybe I should try it again. Let’s go I said.

We went over to his place.

And what do you think: there was the glove lying right there on the couch where I had left it.

But I thought you threw it away.

I thought I did, he said, go ahead take it. Take your pants off.

But I wouldn’t and I made him suck my dick with my pants on this time.

Afterward he said that wasn’t so good, it was better last time.

I didn’t say anything so he said that again. Okay, he said then no hard feelings. But I’ve got to get up early.

Okay, I said. I took the glove.
He said see you.
Aren’t you forgetting something, aren’t you forgetting to give me the money?

But I gave you twenty in the bar he said.

That was for the glove.

You got the glove back.

Look, are you going to give me some money? You said you threw the glove away.
I already gave you money. Now take the glove and get out, you lied to me anyway, it wasn’t better the second time.
You lied to me, you said you threw the glove away, I said, now give me my money or I’ll work your face over.
Get lost he said.
I hit him so hard he fell over and I worked his face over really good with my boot.
You’re not mad at me, are you?

To tell the truth that fish was in my house. We had quite a big tank, all us kids got together and bought it and put rocks in the bottom and we bought a whole bunch of fish little by little, that tank was something, but my favorite was that fish that couldn’t stop kissing.
One night, the old man came home drunk and they had a fight so he picked up the tank and smashed it. The water went all everywhere and the fish were flip-flopping on the floor, but do you know that one fish’s lips were still stuck to a piece of glass?
He didn’t flip at all.
He was like stone stuck to glass. I guess he was scared.
I had to work that smartass over. There’s no respect in this world. He’ll wake up with a face the size of a watermelon and he’ll know better next time. He’ll know not to cross me when I’m thinking of you. I mean when I’m thinking about protecting you.

Sometimes you make me feel like I can’t take it anymore, you never let up. There’s a wheel in my head spitting out nightmares. It’s taking everything I got to fight those nightmares. Bees are stinging me in every part of my body and I’ve got to take care of them one by one. But your voice is out there saying pay attention to me, can’t you hear what I’m saying, I told you before.

Pay attention to you? I’ve got a whole hive of bees on me and I’ve got to punch out each of them with my fist. Get away from me or I’ll kill you too.

I was talking to the bees, I mean I was talking to one of them.

Open up another beer, padrino, turn out the light, let’s stop thinking about this. Now that’s better.

In the dark like this your face hanging over me keeps changing. Something is crawling over it making it look different each moment that passes. I’d like to kiss it, too, touch it, but it keeps getting away from me.