

Delrin Jannis

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Friday

Delrin was lost and miserable. He knew where his body was, that part was easy: it was sitting in the living room of his pathetic apartment, surrounded by the litter of student life; books and papers, dirty dishes, cardboard boxes slimed with the remains of pizza and Chinese food. He could sit in the middle of this apartment and throw a shoe and hit any of its far corners. His world, as defined by beige walls and greasy carpet.

He knew where his mind was, too: crushing under the end-of-term workload, straining against the books, trembling in anticipation of tests. In his art class his fingers were as dead as the clay they tried to form, his mind coarse and unrefined, his visions leaden. His current sculptural study, an uninspired head, stood on the flimsy dining room table, slowly developing a crust as his mind slumped, useless.

No, it was his spirit that was lost, his soul, his heart, his muse. It had wandered away while he wasn't paying attention and now he missed it. The world around him was drained of color and warmth, the faces of his fellow students were like wax masks; laughing and talking and grimacing, but without any real life.

Then there was today, and that girl. He could still see her in his memory; standing under a tree in the quad, talking to some other girl. Though deep in conversation, her dark eyes were on him, intent. As he walked by he could feel her presence like a flame, his face burning. It would be the work of a moment to meet her, any excuse would do; a dropped book, a presumptuous grin, a bump, anything. And then she was gone.

Afterwards, Delrin sat in his living room with his head in his hands, limp hair falling across his pale expanse of forehead, feeling the ache in his soul. What else could he do?

The wine was gone, the bottles scattered in a corner of the kitchen. No beer. No alcohol. No parties. No pot. The carpet felt grimy under his hands, burdened by the passing of innumerable feet, the lives of innumerable students. To clean it would be a waste. What student cares about their carpet? He fiddled with a loose strand, poking his finger through a tight loop. The carpet mirrored how he felt; he was at peace with the filth, one with it.

Delrin drifted to the futon in the only other room of his apartment, taking his clothes off as he went. The end-run before the holidays was always hard, with the growing frenzy at school, the stark emptiness of his wallet, the specter of friends and family all around with gifts in their hands while he had nothing to give in return. This holiday season promised to be no better. He curled up around a pillow, wrapping himself in blankets, and allowed the grayness in his mind to engulf him as he slipped away into dreamless sleep.

Saturday

Delrin's night was haunted by regrets. He woke up the next morning sluggish and strangely tense, unrested, with a sense of having just... missed... something important. His blood felt like sand and every beat of his heart abraded his nerves into further oblivion. The room reached his eyes leached of color, grey, its shadows thick.

He found the empty coffee tin. He knew that it was empty yesterday, of course, but he didn't remember at any of the right times to actually get more coffee. Searching the tiny kitchen, he found some old bags in a cupboard with about three beans between them. Delrin contemplated chewing the beans for a minute and then, sighing, dragged himself out into the cold morning. He would have to make the necessary trip to Seattle's Best for a cup of expensive, but hot and tangible, coffee; that blessed elixir of morning, better than any dream. He could buy beans on the way home once he felt human again.

He noticed her immediately upon entering the door and nearly tripped over his feet. All of the things he had kicked himself for not saying earlier flooded into his brain, toppling it like a badly built sandcastle. She smiled at him and greeted him in an accent that he could not place... not German, not... well, a soft accent with pleasant consonants, a gentle voice. She gave him the shop's generic greeting and he, bravely, and with a firm voice, ordered a festive cinnamon coffee, with whipped cream yes, please, thank you. He busied himself with napkins and stared at the Chronicle and generally tried to calm the kettle-drum of his heart, his mind otherwise entirely blank.

She smiled at the next customer and greeted him with that mysterious accent of hers.

He was kicking himself before he even got out the door, ashamed of his cowardice. Sipping his coffee, he went home. He still had to buy some more coffee for the tin, but that could wait.

Once home, he started to tear down the insipid bust on his table. He had a new face in mind.

Her name was "Rose", or at least that's what her name-tag said. It was probably something more exotic and harder to pronounce, but no matter. She must be an exchange student. He wondered what classes she was taking. The day vanished behind him with nothing to show for it but a small pile of hardware, some well conditioned, if somewhat dry, clay, and a dream.

Delrin went to bed early and failed to fall into any kind of sleep. A grey numbness filled him, seeping the life out of his arms and legs, his head, his heart. Sleep itself always seemed just around the corner. Ghosts paraded around his bed, apparitions just out of reach, just out of the corner of his eye; the darkness of the room crawled with them. His dread of these restless dead eventually wore him out, dragging him beneath the surface of wakefulness, and the remainder of the night crept by without him.

Sunday

The clay store was closed so Delrin could only think about making a full sized sculpture, but not actually begin. Instead, he took his board, his plumbing, his wire and bits of tin, and he made an armature for a bust and started filling it with clay.

And he took it down, adjusted the armature, and built it up again. And tore it down again. His old hacksaw was good for making some of the metal bits smaller, but other bits refused to grow under its toothy ministrations.

Morning came and went and Delrin became aware of the emptiness in his stomach as his hands grew unsteady on the clay. His thoughts turned to food.

There was no food.

He forged out into the world to buy bread and cheese and some bits of thin sandwich meat, some cheap beer; he almost got coffee too, but no -- he decided start a new luxury: the luxury of pre-made coffee. He could always skimp here and there to afford it.

Since groceries were close to the hardware store, the lure of the plumbing section drew him irresistibly through those double doors. After that, a casual saunter past the coffee shop showed him that Rose was not working today. His cheese was probably limp in the car by now, though the cold that had turned his nose red and his fingers numb was probably keeping the food from growing too much life. He headed home.

Back in his apartment, Delrin took down the rough bust again and started planning the armature for a full-size sculpt. He needed more clay.

Night snuck in as he was finagling his friends for financial assistance, calling his parents (who were not happy to hear from him), and cutting pipe. He went to bed happy and with busy thoughts, though as he tried to see Rose in his imagination she slipped away from view again and again.

Sleep came as he was chasing ghosts down dark alleys, the girl he sought always one step ahead, invisible in the shadows, falling into the night.

Monday

Monday jangled into Delrin's awareness with the strident screeching of his alarm, which was too far away from his bed to destroy without awaking, so he awoke.

Tests loomed ahead; an evil conjunction of Monday and Art History and Greek Language that was too cruel to be from anything other than malice. On the bright side, if Delrin could survive to Tuesday he could make the pilgrimage to buy more clay. Powdered clay would be cheaper than wet, and it would take some conditioning. But that was okay, because Wednesday held more tests.

Dragging his comatose body into the aromatic warmth of the coffee shop, Delrin looked in vain for Rose while he waited behind the line of yuppies in overcoats. In glacial time a coffee-based beverage was delivered into his hands, warming them, and he distractedly inhaled its sacred vapors.

Delrin left the coffee haven and found his way to school, and to a parking space that was almost even legal, and then into the classroom. Before long, he also found a sharp pain behind his eyes as he valiantly pried arcane knowledge out of the cluttered warehouse of his memory.

Tuesday

Perhaps he hadn't failed both exams. That would be good.

On his way to the south end of town, Delrin stopped to trickle a meager portion of gasoline into his car's thirsty tank, counting the pennies as they flew by in a blur on the machine's dial. Click! An almost perfect \$10.

He hummed to himself, intent on his mission.

Friday

Delrin sat staring at his latest armature with its core of clay. The posture seemed wrong. The head was too small. Or too big. He feared it might topple over on its unstable base. Tubs of moist clay surrounded him, filling the room with their earthy scent, memorials to his latest artistic block. When the first Rabbi of ancient traditions made his golem, was his hand this hesitant, was the form so reluctant to take shape? When God trailed his spittle-covered finger in the dust, did he have to struggle to balance Adam's proportions? Or was the first man an ugly lump, distorted and uneven?

Rose was not in the coffee shop Tuesday or Wednesday, or Thursday. Or today. Delrin wondered if he remembered what she looked like, what it was that drove him to buy this clay, to grind his hands into it with such frustration.

He was out of beer again, nearly out of money. Sardines and bread made a homely companion that night, the tangy fish odor floating sharp and dead over the clay's solid olfactory foundation.

Delrin went to bed early and lay staring at the ceiling, watching the textures invert into little dimples and spring back out into bumps, until it was too dark to see. He continued to stare until, without noticing, he fell into a dark, dreamless sleep.

Saturday

Dawn broke sharply through his window, cutting into his closed eyes and through the fog in his brain. Delrin woke up alert and refreshed with only a vague memory of the frustration that plagued him yesterday. No matter; that was the end of the week and now he had the beautiful vista of the weekend ahead, with no studying that couldn't be postponed.

But first, coffee.

A light jacket and a sense of optimism carried Delrin through the cold morning air. His pathetic little car seemed almost cheerful today, pattering along under its mantle of dust and scratches; it sighed and squeaked to a stop at his Mecca of Coffee.

On a Saturday, the shop should have been filled with shambling figures not unlike the walking dead, pulled towards their chemical awakening like zombies to brains; instead, it was quiet. Two baristas stopped gossiping as Delrin approached the counter. When he reached it Rose appeared like magic, looking tired but otherwise as radiant as ever, her beauty unmarred by the dark crescents under her eyes.

She greeted him twice before Delrin found his voice, pulling his eyes away from her elegant bone structure and down to his own clay-stained cuticles. The snickers from behind the milk steamer went unnoticed.

"A large, mmm, coffee, please."

Rose paused and looked at him as if he had two heads. Delrin remembered that these places don't sell mere coffee, nor do their exotic and variously named beverages come in sizes so simple as "large". He stared at the menu board trying to decipher its blobs and squiggles while a queue formed behind him, the shop suddenly busy again. He burned red as he stammered out a nearly coherent order and then hurried to the napkins to stare at his shoes until it was ready.

One of the snickering mules behind the counter, perhaps the milk-foaming one, called his name and delivered his life-giving beverage. Delrin glanced at Rose as she helped another customer. He drank in the beauty of her; her grace as she leaned over the counter to take the money, her poise as she turned to tamp the grounds. The world spun around her; she was the center of his universe; and then with a snap he was back in his own body.

A gentleman in a long coat and holding a newspaper asked his pardon as he reached around Delrin for a napkin.

Delrin fled the shop and to his apartment, burning with shame and flying in the clouds over having seen *her* again. She was sullied with a name as base as 'Rose' -- so common! Just a flower, the softness of petal, a blush of color, but then faded and brown, dead, an ephemeral thing. Purchased in grocery stores by dolts looking to escape some just wrath or to soften up the object of their affections. Her name should carry the breath of spring, eternal and yet ever changing; the mystery of the morning light and the deep warmth of a hearth-fire on a cold day.

Delrin saw that, in fact, his armature was all wrong. It was a simple job to put it right and fill in a new clay foundation. A rough form grew quickly under his hands as he quickly yet precisely pressed each new blob of clay tightly against its neighbors and smoothed it into place, each piece melding with the whole. The tubs of clay had been separated into blocks; each block was cut with a wire into slabs; each blob was picked off a slab and massaged and warmed in his hands and placed... exactly... so.

By the end of the day Delrin had hardly eaten anything, nor had any liquids passed his lips. Sunset surprised him when its darkness spilled through his window, the sky the color of diseased orange juice, twilight's unhealthy colors dripping through the clouds.

A ghostly presence stood in his living room, in the shape of his beloved Rose. Its posture spoke of her grace, the lines of its muscles traced out, in soft earth, her strength and elegance; the arch of its cheekbone and the tilt of its head reflected her beauty. Even this crude sketch shone with her glamour. Delrin rubbed lotion into his drying hands, amazed that something so momentous, so overwhelming, had come out of them. He didn't want to sleep, afraid that whatever spell had come over him would pass, and that tomorrow would see him clumsily destroy this work. Or worse, that when the honest light of dawn shone, he would see that it was a flawed piece, like the ones that came before; to be torn apart

and restarted, or perhaps abandoned entirely. He was tired, though, and couldn't lift another piece of clay. His fingers were numb, their tips raw and tender; his arms as heavy as granite and his eyes hot and gritty with staring.

He spritzed the sculpture with a gentle mist and draped milky-white plastic over a rectangular frame he had built around it. A pot of water inside the plastic represented his attempt at climate control; hopefully, the clay would remain moist and pliable for days.

Delrin collapsed into bed, barely taking the time to undress. In his dreams he watched Rose dance across a ballroom, her dress forming to her every muscle and curve. Radiant reflections honored her across the floor; every crystal in the chandelier mimicked her fractured image in adoration. The night passed quickly, blissfully.

Sunday

The dawn light sprang across his room, fresh and cheery. The mystery of Texas weather remained unsolved for Delrin as he pondered on how it could be so foggy and cloudy one minute and so bright another. A happy lethargy remained with him as he rolled over, turning his back to the happy ray of sunshine. He knew there was work to do but it could wait a bit longer. As long as he didn't look at the sculpture with this morning's fresh eyes, he could still pretend it was perfect, but once he opened that box of uncertainty he would know if Schrödinger's cat was alive or dead -- always with the awful chance that it was dead. Until then, it could be whatever he wanted.

Hunger, that persistent nagging from deep inside, finally drove him from bed, though the beginnings of this headache would have to be appeased with coffee before his day could truly begin. He skirted the ghostly shadow in its pale obelisk, his eyes on the baseboards, the cobwebs and dust that lay there, the bits of scrap paper and dust bunnies of hair and carpet fluff that had blown into the corners. A simple snack of cheese and some watery cottage cheese and milk stilled his body's burgeoning mutiny.

Delrin wove his way through late morning church traffic, dodging giant cars driven by small, expensively attired matrons and large SUVs with small families rattling around inside of them. He wondered at some of those behemoths, imagining that a young child could get lost in their cavernous interior; he smiled at the image of a search party criss-crossing the echoing depths of a cargo area.

By a miracle of traffic he arrived at his sacred destination intact, and by the further grace of some beneficent god he was able to place a coherent order to the tired but smiling Rose. He smiled back at her, meeting her eye perhaps for the first time ever. His hand touched hers with an electric jolt as he handed her his money. It was cool and soft. He paused ever so briefly and then reluctantly moved on to his napkin stand. Well, "the" napkin stand. But he knew its every scratch and mar; the persistent stain in its corner near the bent aluminum trim, the barely tamed chaos of sugar packets and stirring straws and lids. As always, he pulled two napkins from their holder and waited for his name to be called.

As he waited he watched the ballet of coffee behind the counter: the baristas dumped and tamped and steamed and poured and mixed. Customers buzzed in like bees, depositing their laboriously gathered coins and bills and receiving their carefully measured dose of life, then buzzing out again to gather more coins and bills for the next day. Delrin's name was called and he pulled out of his reverie just enough to receive his own dose and drift home, his thoughts all a-hum.

Delrin drank nearly all of his blessed coffee on the drive home. He drained the last sweet sticky dregs and dropped the empty shell of the cup into the dumpster as he made his way through the parking lot to his little living space in the complex. Standing in his doorway he could see the sculpture calling to him; still skeletal, gaunt yet full of the promise of lush fullness and soft curves.

Peeling the translucent cover off, Delrin busied himself clearing his workspace. Finally the plastic was folded, the frame set aside, the water moved, the clay bins shifted and adjusted, a slab or two cut, and everything else made just so. Somehow, through all of this, he managed to only glance at the figure from the corner of his eye. Now was the time to see full-on what he had made, and to judge if it was good.

Delrin's eyes were weighted by stone, rusted in place. His vision shifted in jerks, up from the floor to the rough forms of her feet, up the rough blobs defining her calves, resting for a moment on a knee. His eyes jolted up, taking in the hint of thigh, the rise of the iliac crest, and down to a smooth space that Delrin blushed to think of. There was never any question of sculpting clothes onto this form. He examined the narrowing of the waist, the arc where ribs emerged; there was no hint of breasts yet. In one glance he took in the face; shoulder, neck, chin. Nose. Then the torso again. Moving back he could see the relationship of the arms to the shoulders to the spine, all the gentle twists and bends. The figure's weight settled over one foot, the other heel lifting gracefully in a step. Edging around the statue, new vistas flowed into Delrin's view; the swell of a buttock, the stretching of a calf.

Maneuvering sideways around the statue, crab-like, he could feel its form regrow in his mind; his hands could almost taste the smooth grit of the clay. Blood rushed in his ears as he saw that his work was good, while his stomach flipped gently with the fear that he would mess it up. Delrin picked up a piece of clay and absently massaged it between his forefinger and thumb. Some part of the incomplete sculpture would call to him soon, cry out to be lifted from its center, rounded, made full and smooth and pregnant with earthy shape.

That place called to him and he pressed the ball of clay into it, smoothed it. And the next, and so on, until he was lost in the trance of form; wire scraper tearing down, and smaller and smaller balls and ovals and disks of clay lifting up. When he could no longer grip the clay or even raise his hands, Delrin covered the sculpture and collapsed into bed, spent.

There were no dreams.

Monday

Delrin crawled into consciousness late Monday morning, still groggy as the sun sat high in the sky, its beams dulled to gray homogeneity by clouds and icy mists. A sudden panic took him as he realized that he was late for a final exam and then it left him just as quickly. Feeling cold and brittle, he realized that in fact he had no commitments today. The test was tomorrow.

School was bad for his nerves.

He felt hot today, his skin dry and sensitive. He ached down to the roots of each hair on his head, arms, and legs. Sitting up in bed made the world slosh so he sagged back into his pillow. In time, he stopped wondering how he wanted to approach the sculpture today and began wondering if this was going to be a lingering death or perhaps the end would come quickly. But no, that would be merciful and there was no mercy in the world.

Delrin did not die and, in the ticking of thirty thousand seconds, the day crawled to an end. Night descended and sleep bludgeoned his fevered mind into disturbing dreams. In them, each particle of clay in his cuticles and in his fingerprints burned with life, pulsing, burrowing, joining with his cells. He could hear the sympathetic humming of the clay in the other room, a blurry wet sound; in it lay buried the singing of ancient gospels, the praise of a dark, warm goddess. The darkness embraced him and seeped into his visions; slowly, even the dreams faded until there was just the least whisper of them, deep within his blood.

Tuesday

Daylight exploded into his room and Delrin's head spun and whirled in shocked rejection of it. Test! Work! School! He staggered off his bed and nearly managed a vertical posture

as a hundred years of pain cracked and fell off him like so much dried clay. He felt much better today, he was sure of it.

Yes.

Coffee.

After cursory ablutions and donning whatever clothes fell easily to hand, Delrin stepped outside. The chill of the late dawn air burned his skin and made his eyes tingle and water. The steering wheel was cold in his hands; the last warmth from his legs quietly seeped away into the cracked vinyl seats.

Coffee.

Delrin barely noticed the swirl and bustle of the uncaffeinated addicts today. His world consisted of Rose, just Rose, as he shuffled forward in the line; a conga in slow motion, dancing to the hiss and burble of the espresso machines.

Delrin was at the counter and Rose stood before him. He could see how the sculpture compared to her and he was ashamed of it; embarrassed at the crudity of his work. As he counted out his coins into her hand, his offering to the goddess in the hope that she would bless him with life giving elixir, a rash enthusiasm took hold of him.

"Rose," he croaked. He cleared his suddenly constricted throat. "Umm, Rose, I was wondering." He stopped moving, a quarter clutched in his fingers. His eyes found their way to hers; found her looking at him quizzically. The ritual was interrupted and both of them were unsure of how to proceed.

Time stopped for a moment.

"If, umm, you would go to lunch with me today?" A breath. A heartbeat. "If you are free. That is. Or. Something." Delrin fitted a question mark into his eyes and waited in agony.

She looked down at the incomplete payment. Her eyes flicked back up, looking at Delrin through thick eyelashes. "I can't today. Thanks?"

"Some other day then?"

"Okay."

Delrin rapidly counted the remaining money into her hand. "I'll, ummm, talk to you later then, okay?"

"Sure."

Somehow coffee appeared and Delrin drank it and drove to school and took his test and went home and ate and stared at the walls for a while before going to bed. He thought he might be feverish again.

Saturday

When Delrin returned for coffee and more conversation on Wednesday, Rose was not to be seen. Nor on Thursday or Friday. The week passed in a blur of those tasks that fill the days. Finals were almost over and winter break was lurking just around the corner.

In his few spare waking moments Delrin added to the sculpture. Its shape was good, the face recognizable, the hair sketched in, and every curve luscious and pure. All of the tiny dots of clay were nearly blended. As he worked, he could feel the surface shift under his fingers from a rough and lumpy sketch into a smooth final form.

His nights were a mixture of terror, of blackness crushing him and death leering at him from every crack in his ceiling; intermixed with blissful interludes where he chased after the ghostly figure of Rose, flitting always away from him. Sometimes she would pause a moment and look over her shoulder and he could see the arch of her eyebrow, the flick of

her lash and the dimpling of her cheek as she almost smiled. And then she was gone again, leaving him chasing after, always just out of reach, tantalizing.

Delrin woke Saturday morning with a smile, rested and feeling better than he had all week. Seattle's Best was still a hollow lifeless place without his Rose, though. While ordering, he asked "Timmy" if Rose was working today and learned that she was out sick. Discouraged, Delrin sped home, intent on finishing his work.

Stepping in through his apartment door he was almost overwhelmed by the smell of clay, hot and primal and wet. The shadows seemed darker, the light crisper, his mind felt sharper under the influence of the clay.

Delrin slid his hands along Rose's body, feeling for imperfections. The clay was warm today, though it should be cold. Its texture was soft against his abraded fingers and its touch filled his worn muscles with new enthusiasm. The dirty apartment took on a soft focus and faded into insignificance. His world was filled by the smell and touch and sight of Rose, there, before him, unfinished, incomplete, and yet more beautiful than anything he had ever seen.

He caressed her lips, feeling their smoothness. With a feather touch, he finished the slight wrinkles in them, clearing the space between them so gently; with a gentle flick, he formed the dimpled tuck at the corner of her mouth. Her dainty philtrum; the soft curve of her nose. With slow, deliberate precision, his fingers and tools uncovered the least details of Rose's face, clearing away the excess clay to reveal the beauty beneath. The hint of eyelashes, eyes glancing through them demurely at her raised hand. He could almost feel each individual hair of her arched brow as he caressed her, smoothing away the grit that clung to her temple.

The fever took hold of him again and the world became fuzzy, permeable, unreal. There was nothing except him and the clay in a dark void of shadows and half heard murmuring.

Rose's hair was silky smooth; Delrin tried to capture its lightness in the heavy clay using every technique he had ever heard of. He finally simply let the strands of hair fall through his fingers and into place down Rose's neck, gently tickling the tops of her delicate scapulas. The muscles in her shoulder showed the strength and determination that Delrin admired so much. The curve of her back was supple, the gentle rise of spine brushing the inside of the skin; its smooth lines blending into the curve and dip of her hips. Delrin ran his fingers along the cleft between her buttocks, intensely embarrassed by this intimate contact; and yet, there was work to be done.

The tiny hairs of her stomach gave it a delicate texture. The comma of her navel marked the center of the universe that was Rose, behind which could grow new life, rebuilding all that is, perpetually; the engine and power behind creation; that sacred center that cultures have feared and worshipped since mankind first crawled out of the mud and looked inward at the workings of their own mind. Those delicate hairs trailed down from the navel across soft skin where they spread out in a gentle sweep along the hillock of her mons pubis. A flick here and a dusting there and excess clay fell away from the pure form, hot and soft. Delrin's breath came in gasps, his face flush. The smell of clay filled him as he worked; a hot narcotic, hypnotic, smelling of sex and life and promises, and of dark primordial history.

Her outer labia lay beneath his fingers, those gentle protectors of deeper secrets; guardians of that private world of terror and ecstasy. He felt the softness there, the heat radiating from inside. A pressure and a gentle motion and his finger slipped inside, caressed an anatomical structure that he did not recall forming in the clay. He screamed and fell back, staring wildly.

The pale clay rippled in the heat, or perhaps it was Delrin's vision that rippled; the walls around him breathed and the shadows watched. A weak, tired light sighed from the naked bulbs around the room. Delrin crawled backwards, still watching the figure, until he

could pull himself up onto the couch. He curled up on his side, a pillow between his knees, another under his head, and he lay there, watching.

Almost done.

Soon.

Sleep crept up into Delrin with the rhythmic rocking of the room and the soft lullabies of hidden ghosts and carried him off to the lower passages of dream.

Rose was waiting for him, dressed not in her coffee uniform but in simple jeans and a sensuous black sweater that cried out to be touched. She smiled at him, looking him in the eyes, and he fell to his knees to beg forgiveness for being so bold, so presumptuous in his touching. She reached out and caressed his forehead, a benediction of forgiveness. Brushing the hair out of his eyes, she leaned down and kissed his forehead.

Delrin's eyes burst open and the ghosts fled back to their hidden corners, waiting, expectant. A shadow moved in the room, startling him. His eyes strained to penetrate the night; but there was just the sculpture in front of him. Delrin sat on the couch, rubbing his hot eyes with clay-stained hands while the world spun around him. The dryness of his fingers itched, the skin cracking like the dusting of clay that covered them. The wrinkles in his clothes cut into his skin; they felt grimy, greasy, smothering. He took off his socks, pants, shorts, shirt, and stood in front of Rose, pale and insignificant. The room spiraled around them, shadows embraced them in their womb.

Delrin stepped into the darkness, across the pitching and heaving floor, and reached out to touch Rose's shoulder. His fingers made contact with soft skin and a jolt ran up his arm. Rose smiled at him, her hand reaching up to take his. Her lips moved, soundlessly mouthing the words "thank you". He had not sculpted vocal cords, trachea, lungs; not yet. His work was far from finished.

Rose raised his hand and placed it on her breast. She stepped off the board and her body, soft and warm with life, flowed against his; her lips brushed his lips, her breasts pressing softly against his chest. She put her hands on his shoulders and pushed him down until he was sitting, and then lying, on the littered carpet.

Delrin's hands dug into the grime, holding himself steady in the spinning world, as Rose, delicate Rose, took his wildly erect member in hand and slid herself over it, shifting, moving. Her hands pressed on his chest with a strength and weight that squeezed the air out of him. Chips of clay fell around him, an earthy snow in the hot room. The world had turned inside out; Delrin was just a lump of clay to be massaged and manipulated and drawn into exotic forms, while Rose, real and alive, pressed down on him from above with a hot and primal ecstasy. Delrin's every fiber strained up into her; his life his love his essence reached up to her, filling her; she was the only thing he had ever wanted, ever loved. The room swirled around him and he fell into her dark eyes, gasping, heart bursting, explosions filling him as he died and then died again and yet still he lay gasping and squirming in the hot room, the scent of clay permeating every cell.

Blackness filled the room and Delrin's body lay motionless at its center, while a deeper shadow moved up, away, and out into the night.