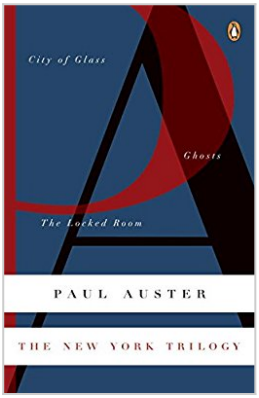

The New York Trilogy: City of Glass; Ghosts; The Locked Room (Contemporary American Fiction Series)

By Paul Auster

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The remarkable, acclaimed series of interconnected detective novels – from the author of *4 3 2 1: A Novel*

The *New York Review of Books* has called Paul Auster's work “one of the most distinctive niches in contemporary literature.” Moving at the breathless pace of a thriller, this uniquely stylized triology of detective novels begins with *City of Glass*, in which Quinn, a mystery writer, receives an ominous phone call in the middle of the night. He’s drawn into the streets of New York, onto an elusive case that’s more puzzling and more deeply-layered than anything he might have written himself. In *Ghosts*, Blue, a mentee of Brown, is hired by White to spy on Black from a window on Orange Street. Once Blue starts stalking Black, he finds his subject on a similar mission, as well. In *The Locked Room*, Fanshawe has disappeared, leaving behind his wife and baby and nothing but a cache of novels, plays, and poems.

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Editorial Review

Review
Praise for *The New York Trilogy:*

“Eminently readable and mysterious. . .Auster has added some new dimensions to modern literature, and – more importantly even – to our perspectives on our planet.”
– Fanny Howe, *The Boston Globe*

“Exhilarating. . .a brilliant investigation of the storyteller’s art guided by a writer who’s never satisfied with just the facts.”
– The Philadelphia Inquirer

“It’s as if Kafka had gotten hooked on the gumshoe game and penned his own ever-spiraling version.” ***– The Washington Post***

“Auster harnesses the inquiring spirit any reader brings to a mystery, redirecting it from the grubby search for a wrongdoer to the more rarified search for self.”
– The New York Times Book Review

About the Author
Paul Auster is the bestselling author of *The New York Trilogy* and many other critically acclaimed novels. He was awarded the Prince of Asturias Prize in 2006. His work has been translated into more than forty languages. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Praise from Around the World for
The New York Trilogy

“By turning the mystery novel inside out, Auster may have initiated a whole new round of storytelling.”

—The Village Voice (USA)

“In his vivid modern New York the energies of literary creation are brought vitally alive, in a great American tradition.”

—The Sunday Times (England)

“A stunning, hypnotic book…Auster’s virtuosic storytelling achieves a tone at once passionate and detached, and the result is as curious as it is convincing.”

—The Glasgow Herald (Scotland)

“One of the great revelations of American literature in recent years…Auster has talent to burn.”

—L’Express (France)

“Paul Auster is a writer of rare intensity.”

—El Correo Gallego (Spain)

“A breathtakingly intense and nerve-wracking book, a game of life and death…This is strong stuff—hold onto your seats.”

—Elstra Bladet (Denmark)

“Paul Auster’s taut and remarkable prose works have enriched the American literary tradition.”

—De Groene Amsterdammer (Holland)

“Auster is one of the most inventive writers of his generation.”

—Corriere della Sera (Italy)

“Paul Auster has written a sublime and clear-as-glass book, a book of almost frightening transparency and openness, a crystal that refracts light into colors that have rarely been seen before.”

—Jan Kjaerstad (Norway)

THE NEW YORK TRILOGY

PAUL AUSTER is the author of the novels The Brooklyn Follies, Oracle Night, The Book of Illusions, Timbuktu, Mr. Vertigo, Leviathan (awarded the 1993 Prix Medicis Étranger), The Music of Chance (nominated for the 1991 PEN/Faulkner Award), Moon Palace, and In the Country of Last Things. He has also written two memoirs (The Invention of Solitude and Hand to Mouth), a collection of essays, and a volume of poems, and edited the book I Thought My Father Was God: And Other True Tales from NPR’s National Story Project. He has won literary fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts in both poetry and prose, and in 1990 received the Morton Dauwen Zabel Award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. He wrote the screenplays for Smoke, Blue in the Face, and Lulu on the Bridge, which he also directed. His work has been translated into more than thirty languages. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.

LUC SANTE’s books include Low Life: Lures and Snares of Old New York and The Factory of Facts. He teaches writing and the history of photography at Bard College.

PAUL AUSTER

The New York Trilogy

CITY OF GLASS
GHOSTS
THE LOCKED ROOM

Introduction by
LUC SANTE

PENGUIN BOOKS

Introduction by Luc Sante

City of Glass

Ghosts

The Locked Room

Introduction

Paul Auster has the key to the city. He has not, as far as I know, been presented with the literal object, traditionally an oversized five-pound gold-plated item, dispensed to visiting benefactors and favored natives on a dais in front of City Hall by a functionary in top hat and claw hammer coat, but I doubt he needs one of those. Auster's key is like the key to dreams or the key to the highway. It is an alchemical passe-partout that allows him to see through walls and around corners, that permits him entry to corridors and substrata and sealed houses nobody else notices, as well as to a field of variegated phenomena once considered discrete, but whose coherence Auster has established. This territory is a realm within New York City, a current that runs along its streets, within its office buildings and apartment houses and helter-skelter through its parks—a force field charged by synchronicity and overlap, perhaps invisible but inarguably there, although it was never identified as such before Auster planted his flag.

Auster's characters peregrinate along this corridor as if it were a moving sidewalk, or like the dream subway devised by the cartoonist Ben Katchor, which stops in individual apartments. Quinn, in City of Glass, and Blue, in Ghosts, both stumble into it, to their enlightenment and discomfiture, and the unseen Fanshawe, in The Locked Room, has gone to live there—the question is whether any of them is able to emerge from it. If you have spent time in New York City and fully engaged with the place, chances are that you will have caught glimpses of that space-time continuum. You will have noticed certain cryptic graffiti, certain glossolaliac manifestos crammed onto photocopied sheets that you did not understand because they were

written in the language of that slipstream. You will have wondered about various street characters—itinerant performers and site-specific eccentrics and inexplicable middle-of-the-night apparitions—who are, it turns out, commuters from that realm into the workaday world. But it may be, in fact, the essence of the city, while what passes for the city in the average experience is nothing more than a thin coat of paint.

Auster's characters know that you can practice a form of divination by reading the sidewalks, that capricious telephone calls can link people in ways that may seem random but end up sealing their fates, that you can pass through the streets completely unseen while making no special effort to disguise yourself or hide, that you can pass through your life in the city without leaving any more of a mark than if you had never been born, that you probably have a double out there somewhere among the eight million whose life runs such a close parallel to yours that the lines never converge—although if they ever do: beware. These things prove that the city has been around for millennia, although it was not always located at the mouth of the Hudson River, or even in North America. It was not even always a city. For a long time it was known as a forest. It was, in fact, the primeval forest, inhabited by trickster foxes and stolid pigs and woebegone wolves and the occasional shape-shifting human, but it was recognizably the same labyrinth of chance.

The chief difference between Auster's city and that forest is that the trees have become buildings and their leaves have become paper. The paper is covered with writing and gathered into manuscripts and notebooks, of preference red. Some of these are eventually transubstantiated into printed books, but often they subsist as manuscripts and notebooks, which usually find a readership of one besides their authors. Their contents are often cryptic, often coded, sometimes dull, sometimes so disturbing that their readers cannot responsibly give an account but can respond only by destroying them. Those manuscripts and notebooks that cannot be published usually have the deepest connection with the truth, and that truth is either arcane and difficult to perceive or else it is painful enough to be considered an abomination.

Fates pivot on these unread texts, which are in each case the focus or the result of an inquiry by a metaphysical detective. These detectives may bear a superficial or circumstantial resemblance to the classic detectives of the eponymous genre of fiction—about the same kind of resemblance that those characters in turn have to actual workaday investigators—but in essence Auster's detectives are pilgrims, questers. They would be more immediately recognizable in the forest, striding along with staff in hand and bindle on back, maybe whistling to keep the shadows at bay. And like the blameless pilgrim who ventures forth into the forest with resolve but not without qualms, the detective ultimately finds that his mission has led him through the labyrinth on a path that describes an irregular circle.

There is also an author, who appears in each of the novels, who may or may not be called "Paul Auster" and may or may not share personality traits or biographical elements with the person whose name appears on the spine. He is, in the finest tradition, merely a witness, moved to transmit the story while maintaining a measured reserve. Or is he perhaps the central character, setting up a lookalike as a blind to cover the degree of his involvement? Auster encourages this line of speculation, which is a labyrinth of another sort and bears a pedigree which—as he reminds us, riffing under his own name on the conundrum of Don Quixote—far predates postmodernism. If the city is a forest and the detective is a pilgrim, the author is a pilgrim as well. He is the one who makes it out alive, who can exchange his story for supper and a bed of straw.

There have been, in two hundred years, a great many novels and stories set in New York City, but until Paul Auster's trilogy no one had made a serious effort to demonstrate its extreme antiquity, its surface flimsiness compared to its massive subterranean depths, its claim on the origins of stories far older than written culture. But now we know, and that truth will inhere no matter how many times the city is reconfigured and how thoroughly living memory is banished from it. Auster, who owns the key, makes its use available to all readers.

CITY OF GLASS

It was a wrong number that started it…
by PAUL AUSTER

1

It was a wrong number that started it, the telephone ringing three times in the dead of night, and the voice on the other end asking for someone he was not. Much later, when he was able to think about the things that happened to him, he would conclude that nothing was real except chance. But that was much later. In the beginning, there was simply the event and its consequences. Whether it might have turned out differently, or whether it was all predetermined with the first word that came from the stranger's mouth, is not the question. The question is the story itself, and whether or not it means something is not for the story to tell.

As for Quinn, there is little that need detain us. Who he was, where he came from, and what he did are of no great importance. We know, for example, that he was thirty-five years old. We know that he had once been married, had once been a father, and that both his wife and son were now dead. We also know that he wrote books. To be precise, we know that he wrote mystery novels. These works were written under the name of William Wilson, and he produced them at the rate of about one a year, which brought in enough money for him to live modestly in a small New York apartment. Because he spent no more than five or six months on a novel, for the rest of the year he was free to do as he wished. He read many books, he looked at paintings, he went to the movies. In the summer he watched baseball on television; in the winter he went to the opera. More than anything else, however, what he liked to do was walk. Nearly every day, rain or shine, hot or cold, he would leave his apartment to walk through the city—never really going anywhere, but simply going wherever his legs happened to take him.

New York was an inexhaustible space, a labyrinth of endless steps, and no matter how far he walked, no matter how well he came to know its neighborhoods and streets, it always left him with the feeling of being lost. Lost, not only in the city, but within himself as well. Each time he took a walk, he felt as though he were leaving himself behind, and by giving himself up to the movement of the streets, by reducing himself to a seeing eye, he was able to escape the obligation to think, and this, more than anything else, brought him a measure of peace, a salutary emptiness within. The world was outside of him, around him, before him, and the speed with which it kept changing made it impossible for him to dwell on any one thing for very long. Motion was of the essence, the act of putting one foot in front of the other and allowing himself to follow the drift of his own body. By wandering aimlessly, all places became equal, and it no longer mattered where he was. On his best walks, he was able to feel that he was nowhere. And this, finally, was all he ever asked of things: to be nowhere. New York was the nowhere he had built around himself, and he realized that he had no intention of ever leaving it again.

In the past, Quinn had been more ambitious. As a young man he had published several books of poetry, had written plays, critical essays, and had worked on a number of long translations. But quite abruptly, he had given up all that. A part of him had died, he told his friends, and he did not want it coming back to haunt him. It was then that he had taken on the name of William Wilson. Quinn was no longer that part of him that could write books, and although in many ways Quinn continued to exist, he no longer existed for anyone but himself.

He had continued to write because it was the only thing he felt he could do. Mystery novels seemed a reasonable solution. He had little trouble inventing the intricate stories they required, and he wrote well, often in spite of himself, as if without having to make an effort. Because he did not consider himself to be the author of what he wrote, he did not feel responsible for it and therefore was not compelled to defend it in his heart. William Wilson, after all, was an invention, and even though he had been born within Quinn himself, he now led an independent life. Quinn treated him with deference, at times even admiration, but he never went so far as to believe that he and William Wilson were the same man. It was for this reason that he did not emerge from behind the mask of his pseudonym. He had an agent, but they had never met. Their contacts were confined to the mail, for which purpose Quinn had rented a numbered box at the post office. The same was true of the publisher, who paid all fees, monies, and royalties to Quinn through the agent. No book by William Wilson ever included an author's photograph or biographical note. William Wilson was not listed in any writers' directory, he did not give interviews, and all the letters he received were answered by his agent's secretary. As far as Quinn could tell, no one knew his secret. In the beginning, when his friends learned that he had given up writing, they would ask him how he was planning to live. He told them all the same thing: that he had inherited a trust fund from his wife. But the fact was that his wife had never had any money. And the fact was that he no longer had any friends.

It had been more than five years now. He did not think about his son very much anymore, and only recently he had removed the photograph of his wife from the wall. Every once in a while, he would suddenly feel what it had been like to hold the three-year-old boy in his arms—but that was not exactly thinking, nor was it even remembering. It was a physical sensation, an imprint of the past that had been left in his body, and he had no control over it. These moments came less often now, and for the most part it seemed as though things had begun to change for him. He no longer wished to be dead. At the same time, it cannot be said that he was glad to be alive. But at least he did not resent it. He was alive, and the stubbornness of this fact had little by little begun to fascinate him—as if he had managed to outlive himself, as if he were somehow living a posthumous life. He did not sleep with the lamp on anymore, and for many months now he had not remembered any of his dreams.

It was night. Quinn lay in bed smoking a cigarette, listening to the rain beat against the window. He wondered when it would stop and whether he would feel like taking a long walk or a short walk in the morning. An open copy of Marco Polo's Travels lay face down on the pillow beside him. Since finishing the latest William Wilson novel two weeks earlier, he had been languishing. His private-eye narrator, Max Work, had solved an elaborate series of crimes, had suffered through a number of beatings and narrow escapes, and Quinn was feeling somewhat exhausted by his efforts. Over the years, Work had become very close to Quinn. Whereas William Wilson remained an abstract figure for him, Work had increasingly come to life. In the triad of selves that Quinn had become, Wilson served as a kind of ventriloquist, Quinn himself was the dummy, and Work was the animated voice that gave purpose to the enterprise. If Wilson was an illusion, he nevertheless justified the lives of the other two. If Wilson did not exist, he nevertheless was the bridge that allowed Quinn to pass from himself into Work. And little by little, Work had become a presence in Quinn's life, his interior brother, his comrade in solitude.

Quinn picked up the Marco Polo and started reading the first page again. "We will set down things seen as seen, things heard as heard, so that our book may be an accurate record, free from any sort of fabrication. And all who read this book or hear it may do so with full confidence, because it contains nothing but the truth." Just as Quinn was beginning to ponder the meaning of these sentences, to turn their crisp assurances over in his mind, the telephone rang. Much later, when he was able to reconstruct the events of that night, he would remember looking at the clock, seeing that it was past twelve, and wondering why someone should be calling him at that hour. More than likely, he thought, it was bad news. He climbed out of bed, walked naked to the telephone, and picked up the receiver on the second ring.

“Yes?”

There was a long pause on the other end, and for a moment Quinn thought the caller had hung up. Then, as if from a great distance, there came the sound of a voice unlike any he had ever heard. It was at once mechanical and filled with feeling, hardly more than a whisper and yet perfectly audible, and so even in tone that he was unable to tell if it belonged to a man or a woman.

“Hello?” said the voice.

“Who is this?” asked Quinn.

“Hello?” said the voice again.

“I’m listening,” said Quinn. “Who is this?”

“Is this Paul Auster?” asked the voice. “I would like to speak to Mr. Paul Auster.”

“There’s no one here by that name.”

“Paul Auster. Of the Auster Detective Agency.”

“I’m sorry,” said Quinn. “You must have the wrong number.”

“This is a matter of utmost urgency,” said the voice.

“There’s nothing I can do for you,” said Quinn. “There is no Paul Auster here.”

“You don’t understand,” said the voice. “Time is running out.”

“Then I suggest you dial again. This is not a detective agency.”

Quinn hung up the phone. He stood there on the cold floor, looking down at his feet, his knees, his limp penis. For a brief moment he regretted having been so abrupt with the caller. It might have been interesting, he thought, to have played along with him a little. Perhaps he could have found out something about the case—perhaps even have helped in some way. “I must learn to think more quickly on my feet,” he said to himself.

Like most people, Quinn knew almost nothing about crime. He had never murdered anyone, had never stolen anything, and he did not know anyone who had. He had never been inside a police station, had never met a private detective, had never spoken to a criminal. Whatever he knew about these things, he had learned from books, films, and newspapers. He did not, however, consider this to be a handicap. What interested him about the stories he wrote was not their relation to the world but their relation to other stories. Even before he became William Wilson, Quinn had been a devoted reader of mystery novels. He knew that most of them were poorly written, that most could not stand up to even the vaguest sort of examination, but still, it was the form that appealed to him, and it was the rare, unspeakably bad mystery that he would refuse to read. Whereas his taste in other books was rigorous, demanding to the point of narrow-mindedness, with these works he showed almost no discrimination whatsoever. When he was in the right mood, he had little trouble reading ten or twelve of them in a row. It was a kind of hunger that took hold of him, a craving for a special food, and he would not stop until he had eaten his fill.

What he liked about these books was their sense of plenitude and economy. In the good mystery there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word that is not significant. And even if it is not significant, it has the

potential to be so—which amounts to the same thing. The world of the book comes to life, seething with possibilities, with secrets and contradictions. Since everything seen or said, even the slightest, most trivial thing, can bear a connection to the outcome of the story, nothing must be overlooked. Everything becomes essence; the center of the book shifts with each event that propels it forward. The center, then, is everywhere, and no circumference can be drawn until the book has come to its end.

The detective is one who looks, who listens, who moves through this morass of objects and events in search of the thought, the idea that will pull all these things together and make sense of them. In effect, the writer and the detective are interchangeable. The reader sees the world through the detective's eyes, experiencing the proliferation of its details as if for the first time. He has become awake to the things around him, as if they might speak to him, as if, because of the attentiveness he now brings to them, they might begin to carry a meaning other than the simple fact of their existence. Private eye. The term held a triple meaning for Quinn. Not only was it the letter "i," standing for "investigator," it was "I" in the upper case, the tiny life-bud buried in the body of the breathing self. At the same time, it was also the physical eye of the writer, the eye of the man who looks out from himself into the world and demands that the world reveal itself to him. For five years now, Quinn had been living in the grip of this pun.

He had, of course, long ago stopped thinking of himself as real. If he lived now in the world at all, it was only at one remove, through the imaginary person of Max Work. His detective necessarily had to be real. The nature of the books demanded it. If Quinn had allowed himself to vanish, to withdraw into the confines of a strange and hermetic life, Work continued to live in the world of others, and the more Quinn seemed to vanish, the more persistent Work's presence in that world became. Whereas Quinn tended to feel out of place in his own skin, Work was aggressive, quick-tongued, at home in whatever spot he happened to find himself. The very things that caused problems for Quinn, Work took for granted, and he walked through the mayhem of his adventures with an ease and indifference that never failed to impress his creator. It was not precisely that Quinn wanted to be Work, or even to be like him, but it reassured him to pretend to be Work as he was writing his books, to know that he had it in him to be Work if he ever chose to be, even if only in his mind.

That night, as he at last drifted off to sleep, Quinn tried to imagine what Work would have said to the stranger on the phone. In his dream, which he later forgot, he found himself alone in a room, firing a pistol into a bare white wall.

The following night, Quinn was caught off guard. He had thought the incident was over and was not expecting the stranger to call again. As it happened, he was sitting on the toilet, in the act of expelling a turd, when the telephone rang. It was somewhat later than the previous night, perhaps ten or twelve minutes before one. Quinn had just reached the chapter that tells of Marco Polo's journey from Peking to Amoy, and the book was open on his lap as he went about his business in the tiny bathroom. The ringing of the telephone came as a distinct irritation. To answer it promptly would mean getting up without wiping himself, and he was loath to walk across the apartment in that state. On the other hand, if he finished what he was doing at his normal speed, he would not make it to the phone in time. In spite of this, Quinn found himself reluctant to move. The telephone was not his favorite object, and more than once he had considered getting rid of his. What he disliked most of all was its tyranny. Not only did it have the power to interrupt him against his will, but inevitably he would give in to its command. This time, he decided to resist. By the third ring, his bowels were empty. By the fourth ring, he had succeeded in wiping himself. By the fifth ring, he had pulled up his pants, left the bathroom, and was walking calmly across the apartment. He answered the phone on the sixth ring, but there was no one at the other end. The caller had hung up.

The next night, he was ready. Sprawled out on his bed, perusing the pages of The Sporting News, he waited for the stranger to call a third time. Every now and then, when his nerves got the better of him, he would stand up and pace about the apartment. He put on a record—Haydn's opera Il Mondo della Luna—and

listened to it from start to finish. He waited and waited. At two-thirty, he finally gave up and went to sleep.

He waited the next night, and the night after that as well. Just as he was about to abandon his scheme, realizing that he had been wrong in all his assumptions, the telephone rang again. It was May nineteenth. He would remember the date because it was his parents' anniversary—or would have been, had his parents been alive—and his mother had once told him that he had been conceived on her wedding night. This fact had always appealed to him—being able to pinpoint the first moment of his existence—and over the years he had privately celebrated his birthday on that day. This time it was somewhat earlier than on the other two nights—not yet eleven o'clock—and as he reached for the phone he assumed it was someone else.

"Hello?" he said.

Again, there was a silence on the other end. Quinn knew at once that it was the stranger.

"Hello?" he said again. "What can I do for you?"

"Yes," said the voice at last. The same mechanical whisper, the same desperate tone. "Yes. It is needed now. Without delay."

"What is needed?"

"To speak. Right now. To speak right now. Yes."

"And who do you want to speak to?"

"Always the same man. Auster. The one who calls himself Paul Auster."

This time Quinn did not hesitate. He knew what he was going to do, and now that the time had come, he did it.

"Speaking," he said. "This is Auster speaking."

"At last. At last l've found you." He could hear the relief in the voice, the tangible calm that suddenly seemed to overtake it.

"That's right," said Quinn. "At last." He paused for a moment to let the words sink in, as much for himself as for the other. "What can I do for you?"

"I need help," said the voice. "There is great danger. They say you are the best one to do these things."

"It depends on what things you mean."

"I mean death. I mean death and murder."

"That's not exactly my line," said Quinn. "I don't go around killing people."

"No," said the voice petulantly. "I mean the reverse."

"Someone is going to kill you?"

"Yes, kill me. That's right. I am going to be murdered."

"And you want me to protect you?"

“To protect me, yes. And to find the man who is going to do it.”

“You don’t know who it is?”

“I know, yes. Of course I know. But I don’t know where he is.”

“Can you tell me about it?”

“Not now. Not on the phone. There is great danger. You must come here.”

“How about tomorrow?”

“Good. Tomorrow. Early tomorrow. In the morning.”

“Ten o’clock?”

“Good. Ten o’clock.” The voice gave an address on East 69th Street. “Don’t forget, Mr. Auster. You must come.”

“Don’t worry,” said Quinn. “I’ll be there.”

2

The next morning, Quinn woke up earlier than he had in several weeks. As he drank his coffee, buttered his toast, and read through the baseball scores in the paper (the Mets had lost again, two to one, on a ninth inning error), it did not occur to him that he was going to show up for his appointment. Even that locution, his appointment, seemed odd to him. It wasn’t his appointment, it was Paul Auster’s. And who that person was he had no idea.

Nevertheless, as time wore on he found himself doing a good imitation of a man preparing to go out. He cleared the table of the breakfast dishes, tossed the newspaper on the couch, went into the bathroom, showered, shaved, went on to the bedroom wrapped in two towels, opened the closet, and picked out his clothes for the day. He found himself tending toward a jacket and tie. Quinn had not worn a tie since the funerals of his wife and son, and he could not even remember if he still owned one. But there it was, hanging amidst the debris of his wardrobe. He dismissed a white shirt as too formal, however, and instead chose a gray and red check affair to go with the gray tie. He put them on in a kind of trance.

It was not until he had his hand on the doorknob that he began to suspect what he was doing. “I seem to be going out,” he said to himself. “But if I am going out, where exactly am I going?” An hour later, as he climbed from the number 4 bus at 70th Street and Fifth Avenue, he still had not answered the question. To one side of him was the park, green in the morning sun, with sharp, fleeting shadows; to the other side was the Frick, white and austere, as if abandoned to the dead. He thought for a moment of Vermeer’s Soldier and Young Girl Smiling, trying to remember the expression on the girl’s face, the exact position of her hands around the cup, the red back of the faceless man. In his mind, he caught a glimpse of the blue map on the wall and the sunlight pouring through the window, so like the sunlight that surrounded him now. He was walking. He was crossing the street and moving eastward. At Madison Avenue he turned right and went south for a block, then turned left and saw where he was. “I seem to have arrived,” he said to himself. He

stood before the building and paused. It suddenly did not seem to matter anymore. He felt remarkably calm, as if everything had already happened to him. As he opened the door that would lead him into the lobby, he gave himself one last word of advice. “If all this is really happening,” he said, “then I must keep my eyes open.”

It was a woman who opened the apartment door. For some reason, Quinn had not been expecting this, and it threw him off track. Already, things were happening too fast. Before he had a chance to absorb the woman’s presence, to describe her to himself and form his impressions, she was talking to him, forcing him to respond. Therefore, even in those first moments, he had lost ground, was starting to fall behind himself. Later, when he had time to reflect on these events, he would manage to piece together his encounter with the woman. But that was the work of memory, and remembered things, he knew, had a tendency to subvert the things remembered. As a consequence, he could never be sure of any of it.

The woman was thirty, perhaps thirty-five; average height at best; hips a touch wide, or else voluptuous, depending on your point of view; dark hair, dark eyes, and a look in those eyes that was at once self-contained and vaguely seductive. She wore a black dress and very red lipstick.

“Mr. Auster?” A tentative smile; a questioning tilt to the head.

“That’s right,” said Quinn. “Paul Auster.”

“I’m Virginia Stillman,” the woman began. “Peter’s wife. He’s been waiting for you since eight o’clock.”

“The appointment was for ten,” said Quinn, glancing at his watch. It was exactly ten.

“He’s been frantic,” the woman explained. “I’ve never seen him like this before. He just couldn’t wait.”

She opened the door for Quinn. As he crossed the threshold and entered the apartment, he could feel himself going blank, as if his brain had suddenly shut off. He had wanted to take in the details of what he was seeing, but the task was somehow beyond him at that moment. The apartment loomed up around him as a kind of blur. He realized that it was large, perhaps five or six rooms, and that it was richly furnished, with numerous art objects, silver ashtrays, and elaborately framed paintings on the walls. But that was all. No more than a general impression—even though he was there, looking at those things with his own eyes.

He found himself sitting on a sofa, alone in the living room. He remembered now that Mrs. Stillman had told him to wait there while she went to find her husband. He couldn’t say how long it had been. Surely no more than a minute or two. But from the way the light was coming through the windows, it seemed to be almost noon. It did not occur to him, however, to consult his watch. The smell of Virginia Stillman’s perfume hovered around him, and he began to imagine what she looked like without any clothes on. Then he thought about what Max Work might have been thinking, had he been there. He decided to light a cigarette. He blew the smoke into the room. It pleased him to watch it leave his mouth in gusts, disperse, and take on new definition as the light caught it.

He heard the sound of someone entering the room behind him. Quinn stood up from the sofa and turned around, expecting to see Mrs. Stillman. Instead, it was a young man, dressed entirely in white, with the white-blond hair of a child. Uncannily, in that first moment, Quinn thought of his own dead son. Then, just as suddenly as the thought had appeared, it vanished.

Peter Stillman walked into the room and sat down in a red velvet armchair opposite Quinn. He said not a word as he made his way to his seat, nor did he acknowledge Quinn’s presence. The act of moving from one place to another seemed to require all his attention, as though not to think of what he was doing would

reduce him to immobility. Quinn had never seen anyone move in such a manner, and he realized at once that this was the same person he had spoken to on the phone. The body acted almost exactly as the voice had: machine-like, fitful, alternating between slow and rapid gestures, rigid and yet expressive, as if the operation were out of control, not quite corresponding to the will that lay behind it. It seemed to Quinn that Stillman's body had not been used for a long time and that all its functions had been relearned, so that motion had become a conscious process, each movement broken down into its component sub-movements, with the result that all flow and spontaneity had been lost. It was like watching a marionette trying to walk without strings.

Everything about Peter Stillman was white. White shirt, open at the neck; white pants, white shoes, white socks. Against the pallor of his skin, the flaxen thinness of his hair, the effect was almost transparent, as though one could see through to the blue veins behind the skin of his face. This blue was almost the same as the blue of his eyes: a milky blue that seemed to dissolve into a mixture of sky and clouds. Quinn could not imagine himself addressing a word to this person. It was as though Stillman's presence was a command to be silent.

Stillman settled slowly into his chair and at last turned his attention to Quinn. As their eyes met, Quinn suddenly felt that Stillman had become invisible. He could see him sitting in the chair across from him, but at the same time it felt as though he was not there. It occurred to Quinn that perhaps Stillman was blind. But no, that did not seem possible. The man was looking at him, even studying him, and if recognition did not flicker across his face, it still held something more than a blank stare. Quinn did not know what to do. He sat there dumbly in his seat, looking back at Stillman. A long time passed.

"No questions, please," the young man said at last. "Yes. No. Thank you." He paused for a moment. "I am Peter Stillman. I say this of my own free will. Yes. That is not my real name. No. Of course, my mind is not all it should be. But nothing can be done about that. No. About that. No, no. Not anymore.

"You sit there and think: who is this person talking to me? What are these words coming from his mouth? I will tell you. Or else I will not tell you. Yes and no. My mind is not all it should be. I say this of my own free will. But I will try. Yes and no. I will try to tell you, even if my mind makes it hard. Thank you.

"My name is Peter Stillman. Perhaps you have heard of me, but more than likely not. No matter. That is not my real name. My real name I cannot remember. Excuse me. Not that it makes a difference. That is to say, anymore.

"This is what is called speaking. I believe that is the term. When words come out, fly into the air, live for a moment, and die. Strange, is it not? I myself have no opinion. No and no again. But still, there are words you will need to have. There are many of them. Many millions, I think. Perhaps only three or four. Excuse me. But I am doing well today. So much better than usual. If I can give you the words you need to have, it will be a great victory. Thank you. Thank you a million times over.

"Long ago there was mother and father. I remember none of that. They say: mother died. Who they are I cannot say. Excuse me. But that is what they say.

"No mother, then. Ha ha. Such is my laughter now, my belly burst of mumbo jumbo. Ha ha ha. Big father said: it makes no difference. To me. That is to say, to him. Big father of the big muscles and the boom, boom, boom. No questions now, please.

"I say what they say because I know nothing. I am only poor Peter Stillman, the boy who can't remember. Boo hoo. Willy nilly. Nincompoop. Excuse me. They say, they say. But what does poor little Peter say? Nothing, nothing. Anymore.

“There was this. Dark. Very dark. As dark as very dark. They say: that was the room. As if I could talk about it. The dark, I mean. Thank you.

“Dark, dark. They say for nine years. Not even a window. Poor Peter Stillman. And the boom, boom, boom. The caca piles. The pipi lakes. The swoons. Excuse me. Numb and naked. Excuse me. Anymore.

“There is the dark then. I am telling you. There was food in the dark, yes, mush food in the hush dark room. He ate with his hands. Excuse me. I mean Peter did. And if I am Peter, so much the better. That is to say, so much the worse. Excuse me. I am Peter Stillman. That is not my real name. Thank you.

“Poor Peter Stillman. A little boy he was. Barely a few words of his own. And then no words, and then no one, and then no, no, no. Anymore.

“Forgive me, Mr. Auster. I see that I am making you sad. No questions, please. My name is Peter Stillman. That is not my real name. My real name is Mr. Sad. What is your name, Mr. Auster? Perhaps you are the real Mr. Sad, and I am no one.

“Boo hoo. Excuse me. Such is my weeping and wailing. Boo hoo, sob sob. What did Peter do in that room? No one can say. Some say nothing. As for me, I think that Peter could not think. Did he blink? Did he drink? Did he stink? Ha ha ha. Excuse me. Sometimes I am so funny.

“Wimble click crumblechaw beloo. Clack clack bedrack. Numb noise, flacklemuch, chewmanna. Ya, ya, ya. Excuse me. I am the only one who understands these words.

“Later and later and later. So they say. It went on too long for Peter to be right in the head. Never again. No, no, no. They say that someone found me. I do not remember. No, I do not remember what happened when they opened the door and the light came in. No, no, no. I can say nothing about any of this. Anymore.

“For a long time I wore dark glasses. I was twelve. Or so they say. I lived in a hospital. Little by little, they taught me how to be Peter Stillman. They said: you are Peter Stillman. Thank you, I said. Ya, ya, ya. Thank you and thank you, I said.

“Peter was a baby. They had to teach him everything. How to walk, you know. How to eat. How to make caca and pipi in the toilet. That wasn’t bad. Even when I bit them, they didn’t do the boom, boom, boom. Later, I even stopped tearing off my clothes.

“Peter was a good boy. But it was hard to teach him words. His mouth did not work right. And of course he was not all there in his head. Ba ba ba, he said. And da da da. And wa wa wa. Excuse me. It took more years and years. Now they say to Peter: you can go now, there’s nothing more we can do for you. Peter Stillman, you are a human being, they said. It is good to believe what doctors say. Thank you. Thank you so very much.

“I am Peter Stillman. That is not my real name. My real name is Peter Rabbit. In the winter I am Mr. White, in the summer I am Mr. Green. Think what you like of this. I say it of my own free will. Wimble click crumblechaw beloo. It is beautiful, is it not? I make up words like this all the time. That can’t be helped. They just come out of my mouth by themselves. They cannot be translated.

“Ask and ask. It does no good. But I will tell you. I don’t want you to be sad, Mr. Auster. You have such a kind face. You remind me of a somesuch or a groan, I don’t know which. And your eyes look at me. Yes, yes. I can see them. That is very good. Thank you.

“That is why I will tell you. No questions, please. You are wondering about all the rest. That is to say, the father. The terrible father who did all those things to little Peter. Rest assured. They took him to a dark place. They locked him up and left him there. Ha ha ha. Excuse me. Sometimes I am so funny.

“Thirteen years, they said. That is perhaps a long time. But I know nothing of time. I am new every day. I am born when I wake up in the morning, I grow old during the day, and I die at night when I go to sleep. It is not my fault. I am doing so well today. I am doing so much better than I have ever done before.

“For thirteen years the father was away. His name is Peter Stillman too. Strange, is it not? That two people can have the same name? I do not know if that is his real name. But I do not think he is me. We are both Peter Stillman. But Peter Stillman is not my real name. So perhaps I am not Peter Stillman, after all.

“Thirteen years I say. Or they say. It makes no difference. I know nothing of time. But what they tell me is this. Tomorrow is the end of thirteen years. That is bad. Even though they say it is not, it is bad. I am not supposed to remember. But now and then I do, in spite of what I say.

“He will come. That is to say, the father will come. And he will try to kill me. Thank you. But I do not want that. No, no. Not anymore. Peter lives now. Yes. All is not right in his head, but still he lives. And that is something, is it not? You bet your bottom dollar. Ha ha ha.

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