

DENISE

WORK [XII]

After they lock up, Denise and the other late shift people head out for some drinks. She's sitting in a booth, running her finger over the gouged wood of the table, when she notices him. He's sitting at the bar, talking to the bartender. She's sure it's him: he's got the microphone set up and everything.

After a minute or so, the bartender crooks a thumb over her shoulder, in an I've-got-to-get-back-to-work kind of gesture, and leaves the guy to himself. He drains the last of his beer and begins to gather up his recording apparatus, load it all back into his bag.

—I'll be right back, Denise says.

She goes up to the bar and takes a seat next to the guy.

—Excuse me, she says.

He turns and looks at her. She examines his eyes through the lenses of his glasses. They blink. He opens his mouth slightly, adopts a slightly worried expression. The lines in his face emerge. She can see how he will look once age has finished him.

—Do you remember me? she asks.

—Do I remember you, he says. He stops to think about it. —I interviewed you, he says. He sounds like he's guessing.

—Yes, Denise says.

He snaps his fingers. —You're one of the record store girls.

—Yes, Denise says.

—Angels, he says. —I *do* remember. That was a while ago.

Denise smiles thinly.

—You didn't really want to talk to me for very long, he says.

—I think I'm ready to now, Denise says.

#

001: My name is Denise Ross, and I work at Tympanum, a record store. In Chicago. But I also paint.

002: The painting is my *work*, in a way that working at the record store *isn't*. Do you know what I mean?

003: This is what I was trying to say. This is what I was trying to say before. Everyone has something inside them.

004: Something that they like doing. Something that they liked doing once.

005: It could be anything. For me it's painting. For somebody else it could be singing, or playing an instrument. For you maybe it's making these recordings. For somebody else it could be sculpting.

006: That's what we kill, in the end. Because we begin to see that it's not valued. That no one is going to pay us to do it.

007: So we end up doing something that someone will pay us to do.

008: Helping someone else to make money, usually.

009: But mostly that's not what we like doing. Maybe not for everybody but for most people. It's not what we'd *most want* to be doing.

010: And it's painful. It's *painful* to know that there's this thing that we like doing and *painful* to know that we're not doing it. To know that it's not valued. So what do we do? We stop *enjoying* it. The pain makes us stop enjoying it. We stop doing it. And then there's *only* the work.

011: Like—I have this friend. Who's a sculptor, right? And he's pretty talented. And there are these people, in Amsterdam, who want him to like come over there and do sculpture in their space. *All he needs to do* is get the money together to get over there. So he got a job. He's working in a video store. And every day that he works there I can tell that he's thinking less and less about Amsterdam, even though he should be thinking about it *more and more*, because he's getting closer and closer to having the money.

012: I don't think he's going to. And it hurts me to watch that.

013: No. We think that getting the money will help us achieve some dream, but the process you have to go through to *get* the money is exactly what *kills* the dream.

014: What do *you* think happens to people once that happens?

015: You know what happens. People go out and get fucked up in bars. They sit on the couch and take drugs. They watch TV. They find some way to kill off the rest of themselves.

016: The angel—the angel is the part of us that remembers what we like doing. When it dies we begin to die. It just takes a while for us to catch up.

017: Sometimes years.

018: Sometimes less.