

The Magnificent

Third Rail: A

Retrospective

Prologue

It was a day much like any other. The austere chilliness of this February morning was not unlike that of many others. The crowded, subterranean, subway platform was full of commuters, bums, and the local wildlife chiefly represented by rats. Some people fiddled with their cell phones. Others chatted amongst themselves or looked to the ever-present performers for their entertainment. There were — of course — also those who simply stood staring. They either purposefully searched for incoming trains or vacantly stared off into space.

Ultimately, no matter what they did, or how physically close they stood, there was an insurmountable distance between each and every one of them. That was the inherent gap between minds, hearts, souls, or whatever term one might prefer to use when talking about such things. The contrast between their physical proximity, and the inner distance it failed to shorten, was most likely lost on the majority of these people. Even the few who recognized it probably had no strong thoughts or opinions on the matter. That too, was an everyday occurrence.

Every now and then a train would pull into the station. A few people got off, a few got on, and a few came in from the stairs. The overall equilibrium of the platform was maintained through these small exchanges. If one were to obsessively philosophize on the nature and meaning of the overall process, they would most likely come up with a nauseatingly pedestrian, vapid, Philosophy 101 level statement. Something along the lines of claiming that this subway station is a microcosm of life where the comings and goings of people who may or may not ever see each other again represent the transience of our human existence. Much like everything else here, it was as typical a thing as one could hope to find anywhere.

Now, at long last, we find ourselves face to face with our would-be protagonist. He is a wholly unremarkable man. There is no aspect of his life, from birth up until this moment, which can be considered extraordinary or particularly interesting. If one were to sensationalize the mundane achievements and events of such a life — as people are wont to — there may in fact be a vaguely compelling Human Interest story to be had there for those who enjoy such things. Isn't it great that he graduated from college? Isn't it amazing that he's Gainfully Employed? Isn't it just swell that he has

a fiancé? These middling qualities would no doubt be inflated to absurd proportions in that sort of yarn. We however, aren't concerned with pretending to be impressed by such trifles. No, our purpose here is in no way comparable to anything of the sort, and will make itself apparent in due time.

So there he stood, this painfully ordinary young man. If one were to categorize him based on his actions here, he would fall into the ranks of those who vacantly stared. Although he gave off the appearance of a man lost in thought that was quite simply the deceptive nature of the human face. In truth there was absolutely nothing profound, meaningful, or urgent on his mind. You can rest assured knowing that entirely mundane thoughts such as “I wonder what’s for dinner?” and “Jerry from accounting is a psycho” filled his head. Occasionally our guy would whip out his cell phone; betraying his comrades in staring to join the fiddlers. Many of his brethren did the same, so this was in keeping with the social order of the platform.

This was one of those dreadful days when the train seemed to be taking forever to arrive. This was a regularly scheduled pain in

the ass —an event nearly every commuter here expected at least once a month. However, merely knowing it would happen failed to take any of the bite out of the experience for those prospective passengers who were lacking in patience. While some of them simply fumed in silence, others would anxiously pace back and forth, and the most volatile among them angrily shouted obscenities at no one in particular. Not our boy though. As the poster child for “well adjusted”, socially acceptable behavior, he merely felt mildly bored by the wait. Naturally, he didn’t even imagine acting in such an uncouth and silly manner.

And why should he? After all, he had seen this sort of thing more times than he could recall or count in his twenty five years of life. What purpose would getting riled up and acting like a petulant child serve in this situation? Absolutely none. Moreover, he had nothing in his life that frustrated him enough to provide a source for the sort of vitriolic — yet impotent — rage these people were expressing. This was simply a minor nuisance in a comfortable and fulfilled life. It would just be another regular day filled with all the normal chores, tasks, activities, interactions, and people his world consisted of. For all intents and purposes his reasoning was entirely

reasonable. There were absolutely no signs suggesting that this day would be different from any other in his life. That too, was perfectly normal.

Amidst the commotion and confusion it would be exceedingly difficult to definitively determine exactly what set off the sequence of events which led to our protagonist finding himself on the train tracks, or why it happened. Yet in truth, neither of those things matter much. The fact of the matter is that one moment he was idly staring off into space, and the next he was lying face-down on the tracks. At that moment, the various factions of commuters united into one. They all endeavored to see or hear about the sudden commotion which had shattered the harmony of their ecosystem. First came the act of ascertaining what had happened. This was a relatively quick process of either directly observing the situation or obtaining the information from someone else, so far so good. The second step was processing the information gathered through the first. That too went off without a hitch in a matter of seconds. It was the final phase, of deciding how to act on the information where things went awry.

Our imperiled protagonist didn't quite understand his predicament. All he knew was that he'd fallen and needed to get up. So before anyone could stop or warn him, he reached out and grabbed the nearest thing he could. What he had in fact grabbed was the third rail. After a brief fit of electrically induced convulsions, he went into cardiac arrest before collapsing back onto the tracks. At this point one Good Samaritan or another informed the appropriate authorities who promptly halted all incoming train traffic and summoned the police along with the requisite EMS detachment.

Before long the ambulance arrived outside of the train station, shortly followed by a few police cruisers. It was obvious to the paramedics that there was no longer anything they could do for our *hero*. However, they weren't allowed to acknowledge that fact. In order to appease the crowd of onlookers — and reduce their chances of being sued or terminated — they went through the motions of a resuscitation attempt on his obviously dead body. After carrying on with that charade for what they felt was an adequate period of time, the paramedics transferred the corpse to their stretcher and loaded it into their “bus”. They would take him to the nearest hospital where he would officially be pronounced dead.

Under normal circumstances they wouldn't go to these lengths for such an obvious DOA, but due to the public outrage over the obligatory police incident of the month still being fresh, every city agency had to do its part to save face. That too, was a routine part of life in this city.

Detective O'Reilly

“Goddamn it! Why the hell do we have to deal with this shit?!”

As always, it takes my partner a few moments to respond.

“Clam down, Pat. It’s just another slip and fall subway fatality. It’s only Monday too. You should save it for one of the more legitimately shitty cases we’ll probably catch later in the week.”

I really hate the know it all routine this fucker always tries to lay on me. Maybe I can beat him at his own game if I explain exactly why this is bound to be a total shitshow.

“Can I ask you a question, Danny?”

That “here we go again” look is on his face again. He’s not even pretending to hide it anymore.

“I already know what you’re about to say, but go ahead anyway. Get it out of your system.”

The captain has a real sick sense of humor, partnering me up with this passive aggressive asshole.

“How long have you been on the force? You’re not some rookie fresh out of the academy are you?”

Now he’s sighing. Like some dainty little girl.

“Do we really need to go through this every time? Can’t we just skip the foreplay for once? Just say your piece and be done with it already.”

This is clearly starting to get to him. That warm and fuzzy feeling of satisfaction wells up in my chest. I can’t help but smile at the cocksucker.

“Alright, if you want me to skip the bullshit, I’ll skip the bullshit and cut to the chase. You’re not a rookie. We both know that. Since you’ve been around for a while you should know how these kinds of cases are handled. Especially after that incident earlier this month. It’ll be a fucking media circus! A goddamn political circlejerk!”

Just by looking at his face, I can tell. He still doesn't believe me at all. How can someone with this much experience understand so little about these things?

“Come on. It can't possibly be — that — bad.”

If he honestly believes that, he's either crazy or retarded. Maybe even be a bit of both, actually.

“What part of how bad this clearly is aren't you seeing?”

He's pretending to think with whatever he's got in that head of his in place of a brain.

“That's just the thing. I'm not seeing anything at all. There's no angle. He seems to be a well-off white kid who happened to die in an accident. There's no racial angle, no police impropriety or brutality angle, no sex, drugs, money, corruption, or anything at all. I just don't see a single potential complicating or rabble rousing factor. There's nothing. It's just an open and shut accident.”

Is he fucking serious? What kind of dumbass would actually come to that conclusion after looking at the pile of shit we just stepped into?!

“Holy shit, you’re hopeless! Let me explain this to you slowly so even someone like you can understand. Listen up, because I’m not going to repeat myself. It’s the timing. The goddamn timing of this is more than enough to fill in for all those other things you mentioned and then some. This is an all-around shitstorm with no way out. If this guy was a skell no one would care. If he was black, maybe Al Sharpton would show up to give one of his usual speeches and make the media rounds for a few weeks. But this is a well-to-do white kid we’re dealing with here; that’s already a story. Now people are going to be watching us closely. If we do too much they’ll all complain about how much attention we’re giving to one dead white kid. If we do too little, the prick’s parents are going to sue the fucking city. Either way, the brass are going to crawl up our asses to make sure we do everything by the book. Though really, they’re just going to be looking for any excuse to throw us under the bus.

Whether it’s the media, some stupid protestor kids who have nothing better to do, or even random chucklefucks online, it doesn’t matter at all. If absolutely anyone raises a stink over how we handle this, we’re done. Forget that unpaid suspension bullshit, we’ll get fired, sued, prosecuted, and what have you. Hell, we might even get

lynched. They'll all be out for blood and it'll be our heads that'll be presented to them on a silver fucking platter! Do you get it now?! Do you see it!? If they get any excuse to do it, they'll use us as the scapegoats because we're expendable. We're nobodies as far as everyone's concerned and this is the perfect time to sacrifice us for some political agenda or another."

He looks a bit shaken up. Even if he still doesn't agree, he must at least be starting to see my point by now.

"But that's... No... Come on, really? Well, shit. I hate to admit it, but you might be right about this after all. It would be just like 1PP or the mayor to screw us like that if it happens to be convenient for them."

So he finally admitted it. Took him long enough. Though if he's capable of getting it after all, maybe he's not as hopelessly retarded as I thought he was.

"Alright, so now that we know things can go south on this one, what are we going to do about it? We're not just going to bend over and take it, are we Pat? There's just got to be something we can do here."

We're definitely making progress now if "Do-Gooder Danny" here is getting roped into my paranoia to this extent. Maybe the captain isn't the sadistic motherfucker I thought he was after all.

"Well Danny-boy, it's not looking good at all but there may still be some cards we can play to make it all suck just a tiny bit less. Our guy here grabbed the third rail, didn't he? We can anonymously spread some rumors about it being a suicide online and to the press. If those catch on, it might confuse the story enough to get a bit of the heat off us and onto this schmuck's family instead."

He's considering it. He better not say anything stupid about how that'd be *immoral* or *illegal*.

"We should definitely do that but will it really be enough? If this is as much of a disaster as you convinced me it's going to be, shouldn't we do more than just spread a few rumors around?"

It's a bit annoying that he's stating the obvious as if I hadn't thought of it, but on the bright side he isn't laying any moralistic horseshit on me.

“Sure, that’s just the beginning. There are at least three or four other angles we can take at the same time. Another thing we have to do is keep records of every single step of this, and I mean every last detail of every second of the investigation. That way we’ll be ready when they come asking questions. Besides that we should make backup copies of the records and have them ready to ship out to all the major news outlets in case shit hits the fan.”

He nods but still looks unsatisfied. I’m obviously not going to start off big. You’ve gotta save the nuclear option for last.

“That’s always a good idea on the messier cases, yeah. What else do you have up your sleeve though? Come on Pat. Don’t hold out on me now. Just come out with everything you’ve got left.”

He’s such an impatient little prick, isn’t he? Well fine. If he wants everything now that’s what I’ll give him.

“I don’t know what you’re in such a hurry for but fine. I was saving the best stuff for last but if you’ve gotta hear it all now I guess I might as well just tell you. This first idea’s really gonna knock your fuckin socks off Danny-boy. We’re gonna round us up a few skulls. Some hardcore winos and druggies who don’t have an

ounce of credibility to their names, you know the type. Then, we'll pay these degenerates to come out publically one or two at a time every couple of days, and claim that they saw exactly what happened at that train station.

Now this is the important part so pay attention. Their stories all have to be different, but enough of the individual details need to line up; so that any of them might sound true. The public and media want a circus, so we'll give them one; the kind of goddamn three ring circus that'll put their typical two-bit sideshows to shame.

Then, while they're busy running around like headless chickens, trying to confirm the nonsense those lowlifes are spouting, we'll throw another monkey wrench into the whole mess. We're gonna pretend to be tinfoil hat wearing wingnuts and anonymously release a *documentary* online. It'll be full of ridiculous conspiracy theories that connect this with all sorts of other incidents to paint the whole thing as a government job. Maybe we'll allude to the involvement of the FBI, CIA, NSA, Homeland security, FEMA, the fucking postal service. We can even toss KFC and the goddamn DMV in for all I care. The more batshit the better. We need to make

sure as many people as possible see this thing. If it manages to get any play in the news or online that'll divert attention from us even more.

And finally, we have our last resort. This is just something to keep in store in case we end up getting fucked in spite of everything else we've done. We'll dig up all the dirt we can on everyone who's liable to screw us; the chief, the commissioner, the mayor, hell maybe we'll throw in the governor and our best pal Al for good measure. If we go down they'll all come down with us. This will go into our little rainy day package along with that other stuff about the investigation. Our options with it will be either using it as a bargaining chip, or just springing it on them without any warning. Personally I'd just let it loose on them without a word. Just to watch the fuckers squirm.

That's all I've got. So what do you think Danny? Do you think we've got a snowball's chance in hell of getting out of this mess?"

The little shit still looks unsatisfied. What more does he want from me? This sort of stuff is all we've got left in times like these.

“I don’t know Pat... It all seems very... shaky to me. All you’ve got is this smoke and mirrors routine and some vague threats. Don’t we need something a bit more...concrete? I’m just not sure if your ideas are aggressive enough for something this big. Isn’t there anything better we can do?”

Fucking kids these days and their instant gratification bullshit. Brats like this just can’t appreciate some good old fashioned showmanship. It might seem roundabout but if we give an Oscar Winning performance out there it’ll definitely get us through this.

“Listen kid, you’re too young to understand the ins and outs of this sort of political bullshit, but there’s one thing you should always keep in mind: It’s all about putting on a show. No one really gives two shits about results. All results ever got anyone was a pat on the ass and a bullet to the back of the dome. To get ahead in life all you need to do is make yourself look good. It might all seem like a retarded dog and pony show to you, but watch — I bet if we go through with it, and do it well, they’ll give us both fucking medals for how *professionally* we handled the case. This is our best shot. Just trust me on that.”

Come on damn it. Agree with me already! I wanna go home.
This shit's taking way too long!

“Heh. Well you’ve got a point there I suppose. Alright, we’ll do it your way. Besides, I’d be lying if I said I had any better ideas. Let’s put on a show they’ll never forget.”

So the fucker finally caved, did he? Thank god almighty! I was starting to think we’d be here in this dump all night. We exchange the usual empty platitudes as we go our separate ways for the night, and conclude this little after-hours powwow. As we’re leaving, I take a moment to look back at our improvised private murder board. After taking one last look at our photos of the victim I flip them off. There. Now I’m satisfied. Having done everything that needed to be done today, I leave the room behind and head home.

Salvatore Stabile

“NYPD detectives Patrick O’Reilly and Danny Rivera continue their investigation into the gruesome subway fatality of Brooklyn native Matthew Asher Ambrose. They face some unique challenges due to the highly public circumstances of the case, as well as the current nationwide rise in anti-police sentiments. Coinciding with the release of a conspiracy theory laden online documentary “Skating on Thin Ice” yet another set of witnesses have come forward. They claim to have seen exactly what happened on that fateful February morning. NYPD commissioner Tom Patton praised the detectives for what he called a “dedicated effort” in attempting to uncover the truth behind this increasingly complex incident. In other news- “

Yeah... that’s enough of that for one morning. After turning the TV off my attention turns to the clock above it. I don’t really feel like it, but it looks like it’s time to check on the preparations for today’s service. Yet another mind-numbingly boring day has begun for me; the seventh generation owner, manager, and head funeral director of the Stabile Funeral Home. My life is a lot like that song “9 to 5 at the morgue”. The fact that this is technically a funeral

parlor is a very minor difference. The distinction seems academic and technical, like the one between a grocery store and a supermarket. Or maybe like that of a meat processing plant and a restaurant. Whatever. I've never been good with metaphors or analogies. The point is they're both soul-crushingly boring, immensely unrewarding jobs.

Heading towards the room where this particular service will be held, I see my son standing at the door with a sour look on his face. The gas mask hanging around his neck adds a surreal quality to the sight. Although I already know what he'll have to say, as his father I have no choice but to ask him about how he's doing anyway.

“Good morning Johnny. How's it going? Are the preparations all in order? These are very important clients.”

He scoffs and rolls his eyes. Given the situation I can't really blame him for responding that way. If I were in his shoes I'd probably hate this even more than his does.

“Morning, dad. There's not much for us to *prepare* for this one. The contractors took care of the details. You already know what

I think about this. This whole thing's a joke and we look like clowns for going along with it."

Believe me kid, if I could get out of this somehow I'd do it in a heartbeat. But these people are paying good money and we've got families to feed here. I have to give you the old "be a responsible adult" routine, even if we both know it's complete bullshit.

"You're right Johnny, I know all about it. It's perfectly natural for a good, honest, kid like you to hate these kinds of idiotic games — and that's fine. No one's asking you to change your mind about them, but you do need to at least learn to live with these things if you want to take over this place someday. That's the way running a business is. You can't turn down a paying customer just because they're batshit crazy. When you've got a family to feed and bills to pay you just don't have the luxury of picking and choosing clients like that."

He sighs deeply. It's a resigned sound. Some people would say I'm an awful parent for destroying my son's idealism like this. I'd say they're dirty hippies or trust fund babies who've never had to

do an honest day's work in their lives. Idealism is a luxury very few can afford. You either get with the program or get left behind.

“Well yeah, I understand all of that. There's nothing wrong with what you're saying, dad... but it still sucks. I wish things didn't have to be this way.”

Don't we all. This is reality though, and we have no choice but to accept it if we want to survive.

“That's fine. Do what you've gotta do, and sort out your feelings later. It's all we can really do in this crazy world. You're a grown man now. Dealing with things like this is part of what that means.”

We've already had this conversation a million times. Neither of us really has anything left to say about it at this point. He puts the gas mask back on and returns to the room. That's exactly like him, dutiful to a fault. I was pushed into this role because the other Stabile children all followed their dreams; dreams that all just happened to lead out of this miserable place. I never had any of those. Johnny though, he's a different breed altogether. Unlike me and my siblings, he actually loves and values this place. He believes in what it

supposedly represents to an extent that no one else in the family ever has. No matter what culture they come from, he takes pride in arranging the traditional sendoffs people have been giving their family members for generations. However, he feels the exact opposite way about unconventional or hastily conceived funerary rites. Those traits make this a terrible place for the boy in spite of his attachment to it.

The Stabile Funeral Home isn't the biggest or fanciest one in the five boroughs. No, our claim to fame — and main selling point — is our willingness to put up with more bullshit than any similar facility in the nation. So long as the price is right, anyway. In other words; as long as our lawyer can clear it with the city and state, and our clients are willing to fork over the cash, we'll perform any kind of funeral service no matter how bizarre or just plain stupid it may be. We're able to do this because the larger homes see the wackier kinds of services we're willing to provide as being beneath them. Regardless of how much money a prospective customer has, an average funeral home will refuse their business if their request is too outlandish, or if there's too much drama to deal with. Once someone is sent away from one funeral home it sets off a chain reaction where

every other one follows suit until they have nowhere else to go but here. Needless to say, this is one of those cases in all the worst ways.

The Ambrose family itself isn't the source of the problem. They wanted a normal, traditional, funeral for their son; the kind of service no one would have found objectionable. However, the kid's fiancé had other plans. She produced some kind of dubious-looking document, which essentially boiled down to an agreement between him and her that would give the survivor the exclusive rights to make all funeral arrangements for the other in the event of an untimely death. Mrs. Ambrose wouldn't stand for it, so she insisted that the documents be thoroughly examined. The results shocked everyone. Against all odds, it somehow ended up being a genuine legally-binding contract complete with authentic signatures from both of them. No one in the Ambrose family had a say in the matter (and quite frankly, most of them didn't seem to care all that much) but Mrs. Ambrose was determined to bitch and moan about the whole thing every step of the way. So to sum things up: in addition to the dead kid's crazy hippie girlfriend and her ridiculous demands, we also have to deal with a pissed off mother who insists on being part of it all. It's no surprise that no one other than us would be

willing to put up with any of this. In exchange for dealing with things like this we charge anywhere from eight to twenty times more — in addition to any extra costs for particularly unusual arrangements — than the competition would have if they were willing to put on these freak shows.

I take a brief peek into the room to see how it's going. What I see in there assures me that this will be the sort of travesty that none in attendance will ever be able to forget no matter how much booze they quaff, how many pills they swallow, or how many shrinks they see. As the clock ticks closer and closer to the appointed time, there's no doubt in anyone's mind that there's absolutely any part of this whole affair that can possibly go right. Those of us in the funeral services business are taught that funerals are meant to help the deceased's loved ones by providing them with an organized venue for confronting and coming to terms with death. Even under normal circumstances, I've always had serious doubts about that premise, doubts which were reinforced once I saw what goes on at the average American funeral over and over again. This case in particular though, is such an extreme example of what I've always understood that even those who aren't cynically inclined can see

how much of a farce it'll inevitably be. The fact that the deceased, Matt Ambrose, is the young man who has become a *media darling* after his death is just the icing on this insane cake.

Since the preparations weren't particularly involved on our end — due to it being more of a landscaping or gardening sort of task than the types of things we're prepared to do ourselves — I pass the remaining time by losing myself in my thoughts. However, it seems as though I had less time than I assumed I did. The first of our oh-so *esteemed* guests of the day chooses this particular moment to make her appearance. It's little miss sunshine and rainbows herself. Looking at my watch I can see that we actually have a bit over three hours left. As much as I'd like to turn her away, there's no choice but for me to deal with her.

“Hello Miss Gaia. What brings you here so early? There are still a few hours before the service is scheduled to begin.”

She tosses her green hair behind her. I've never asked, but I assume she dyed it green to match her eyes. Though she may be wearing contacts, and this is all a part of her “Earth” theme. Another item of note is her outfit, which looks like the sort of thing Lady

Gaga might wear if she was a hooker. I can already imagine how Mrs. Ambrose will react if this crazy girl shows up to the funeral wearing that thing.

“It’s Pangaea now. I had it changed over the weekend.”

Right... Of course you did. I can only imagine what sorts of thoughts, if any, went into that decision.

“Sorry. Miss Pangaea. There really isn’t much of anything to do here right now. I can’t imagine why you’d want to be here so early.”

She stares vacantly at me for a couple of minutes. I’m starting to suspect she may be high on something.

“I’m here to check on the preparations. The alignment of the stars today tells me that I need to be personally involved in order for the ideal outcome to manifest.”

She’s probably referring to her occupation as an astrologist. Surprisingly enough, she’s very successful. Bankrolling this mess would’ve been difficult for her if she wasn’t.

“Well, we’ve already taken care of those. Maybe you’d rather get home and get changed for the service?”

The look on her face can only be described as stupefied condescension. It’s as though she’s amused by how stupid and ignorant she thinks I’m being. Like she thinks it’s cute or something.

“No, that’s ok. I’ll be fine so just show me the room if you’d please. If there are any last minute details to attend to, I’d like to see to them personally.”

I’d really like to say no, but she seems very adamant about this. She probably won’t give up so I might as well let her have a look already. Just for form, I make one last attempt to dissuade her.

“Are you sure about that, Miss? It might be upsetting for you, and it’s really unsanitary in there besides.”

She gives me another condescending grin before replying.

“Thank you for being so *concerned* but I assure you I’ll be fine. I’m not like Matt’s silly mother who’d balk at the sight of something this natural and real.”

Oh well, at least I tried. Putting on a gas mask of my own, I lead her into the room. I offer one to her as well but she refuses to wear it as a matter of principle. Wasting no time she calls out to my son. He's still in the room doing a last minute inspection.

“Hello there. Sorry to interrupt, but your father and I need the room to ourselves. It's not quite ready for the vibrational frequency of more than two people yet.”

Johnny looks at me with an “is this bitch for real?” expression. I have no idea what she's on about either so I just shrug at him. He decides to do the politic thing here and leaves. I really wish he hadn't done that. The prospect of being left alone with this crazy hippie girl is horrifying. She scans the room; which — unfortunately — is exactly the way she asked for it to be. As per her request, we put a layer of soil over the floor. Exactly one hundred twenty three flowers (each of a different species) have been planted in it. In the center of the room is the mound of dirt where her fiancé lies buried. She initially wanted him to be nude but his mother wouldn't stand for it so she compromised by allowing us to dress him in his best suit before burying him. We needed the gas masks

because she wouldn't let us do anything else about the decomposing corpse smell, insisting that it was "natural". Looking things over, "Pangaea" seems unsatisfied. I don't like where this is going so I attempt to placate her before she does anything stupid like asking for three hundred twenty one more flowers at the last minute.

"What's wrong Miss Pangaea? We've done exactly what you asked for down to the last detail. If you'd like us to make some last minute touch ups, that's ok but please don't ask for anything too outrageous. There isn't much time left before we're scheduled to start the service."

She replies while continuing to examine the room.

"It looks fine. Perfect, in fact. You've done a great job here Mr. Stabile. The problem is that it still feels incomplete in some way. It's missing a certain... vital spark, if you will."

I'm not entirely sure how to respond to that. Before I can think of anything she continues.

"Oh! I know exactly what we need. It's just the thing to complete the cycle of life and death we're representing here."

It all happens in an instant. One moment I'm standing there talking to her, and the next she's tripped me, pinned me down underneath her to the dirt, and unzipped my pants. It was all so sudden and unexpected that I couldn't react at all. After pulling her skirt down, she feverishly explains what she's doing.

“This is exactly what was missing. You see, the cycle of life and death is endless. It's important that we symbolize the beginning of a new life before marking the end of another.”

In spite of the entirely un-arousing circumstances she manages to get me hard and inside of her. I want to push her off and say no but at the same time I don't want to start a scene. There's no choice left for me other than to let her do whatever she wants. Hopefully she's satisfied soon enough for me to get cleaned up before the service begins. After what feels like an eternity, we both orgasm and put our clothes back on after moving apart. She thanks me in her typical bizarre manner before moving to the lounge where she waits for the service to start. I quickly sneak off to my personal room where I take a shower and change.

I've never felt this dirty before in my life and I don't think anything can ever make me feel as dirty as I do now. As I adjust my tie and prepare to start the service, I think to myself that I should've just been a garbage man after all. At least that's a service this city actually needs. At least they're not treated like truck stop whores by crazy hippie bitches...

Charles Michael Ambrose

Maria's been getting out of hand these days. But I guess that doesn't really matter since I've got a top guy on the case anyway. The family stuff will always sort itself out eventually. Like it always has. The Ambrose family is, after all, *immortal*.

What does concern me is the Ambrose Corporation's future. Survival is a matter of course, but it'll be wishy-washy if we hurriedly prepare a cobbled together successor. Matt was being groomed his whole life to take over once I'd retire. Neither Sarah nor Jimmy have the right temperament to take his place. This is a disaster. Now I won't be able to retire for at least another 20 to 30 years!

Though... now that I think about it maybe it was a good thing that Matt died. That boy was always a disappointment. Always just a little less than perfect. Always falling just short of the mark. I thought he just wasn't living up to his potential, but the fact of the matter may have been that he never had the potential I assumed he did. He may have been my son, but now that I really stop to think about it his death was a blessing in disguise; a *gift from god*, if you

will. He'd have no reason to complain about this anyway. After all, I let him do whatever as he pleased while he was alive. I let him play around with that silly hippie girl, and do little to no real work as an "executive vice president" at the corporation. It may not have been a particularly long life, but I'm sure he enjoyed himself as much as any kid his age could have.

But enough about him. It's the future that I need to think about now. The way I see it there are two options here. First, there's the more immediate, simple one. Choosing another successor from outside of the family for once certainly is an option worth considering. It may give the next generation of Ambroses an incentive to take what's rightfully theirs back from whatever *evil* usurper I put in their way. We've been stagnant — complacent even — for three generations now. None of us have had the vision or drive to take the corporation to the next level. Maybe this sort of crisis will finally foster that in whoever may come after us, or awaken some hidden nugget of dormant potential in Jimmy or Sarah?

I flip through my Rolodex looking for likely candidates, or headhunters who may be able to find the person I'm looking for. None of them seem to be any good though. The headhunters are all too different from me to truly understand my intent. The candidates themselves are all brilliant, but far too problematic for what I have in mind. They're all opportunistic vultures who'll tear the corporation limb from limb and pick the bones clean. People don't understand just how *human* corporations really are; that they need to be nurtured and cared for, or they'll be raped, killed, and eaten.

Since that option has proven to be far too much of a gamble, the other one is my only alternative. It's a far more long term investment but it really is the only way. This happens to be one of the few times when Sarah and Jimmy are both home. That's perfect. We need to do this as a family after all. I'll start with Sarah since she's the eldest child. Walking up to her room for the first time in what seems like an eternity, I see she hasn't changed at all from the anti-social teenager she's been her entire life. That sort of Peter Pan syndrome is most likely one of the defining traits of an *artiste*. Although this is my chosen starting point, my expectations for her are realistically low.

“Hey Sarah. Mind if I come in? I want to talk to you.”

I can’t imagine she’ll be all that enthusiastic about any of this. We don’t talk much these days.

“What do you want? I’m busy, dad.”

As I thought, she hasn’t changed at all. I can see it clearly. She’ll always be the same at any age. Whether she’s 8, 18, 28, 68, or 108 this girl will always be a sulky teenage contrarian at heart. It’s completely impractical and bizarre, but I can’t help finding it endearing as a parent. There’s no doubt in my mind that she’ll always be my favorite.

“Come on, don’t be like that. I just want to talk to you about something.”

She sighs in her typically moody manner before slowly opening the door. I can tell her “artistic” sensibilities are present in every motion — every act — no matter how slight. It’s adorable how melodramatic she’s being by opening the door at a snail’s leisurely pace.

“Fine. Just come in already. Talk. I’m only giving you five minutes. No more, no less.”

Seeing what she’s done with the room only serves to strengthen my initial impression; all the dark, moody, adolescent colors swirling around the catacomb-like room along with the grotesque and visceral imagery of her paintings; it all screams out to me in total affirmation. My daughter’s predictability makes me smile.

“That’s fine. I’ll just get straight to the point. I know you’re a sexually active young woman-“

She cuts me off before I can finish.

“Eww... That’s gross dad! I don’t need your weird birds and bees lecture or whatever it is you’re doing here.”

This certainly is an awkward subject to broach with one’s child but I’ve never been shy enough to let things like that impede me.

“No babygirl, trust me, it’s not what you think. Hear me out.”

She sighs again, then motions for me to continue with a “hurry up” gesture. I oblige her.

“I was wondering what your thoughts about having a kid or two of your own are.”

Her eyes widen in exaggerated shock. It soon subsides into amusement. After laughing a bit she answers me.

“You’re right dad. It wasn’t what I thought it’d be at all. It’s way more gross than anything I could’ve possibly imagined. Are you trying to tell me that I should *settle down* and be a good little housewife to some random guy? That’s disgusting.”

She’s still a bit off about my intent so I correct her.

“No. Nothing like that. Whether you find someone isn’t really the point. I just thought you might enjoy being a mother, single, married, or otherwise. That and I want some grandkids already.”

A knowing gleam shows up in her eyes. She’s always been a suspicious one, hasn’t she?

“How good of you to be so concerned about me, daddy! Is that what you expected me to say? Don’t think I can’t see through your games. I know you have some kind of ulterior motive for bringing this up. What do you really want these so-called *grandkids* for?”

I can’t help but chuckle. She saw right through me. She’s the best.

“You’re absolutely right babygirl. I do have an ulterior motive. Your dad is exactly the kind of villain you think he is. But you know, villains have their own sort of pride too. I can’t tell you what I’m scheming until you join me as a partner in crime.”

Those words should stoke her interest.

“God, dad... You’re such a freak. This is exactly why I never want to introduce you to any of my boyfriends. You’re just too fucking creepy.”

She’s just acting tough to keep up appearances. I can tell because in spite of her harsh sounding words, she’s smiling from ear to ear. I’ve done about as much as I could’ve hoped to here. I begin

making my way towards the door at the same soporific pace she opened it at.

“Just think about it. That’s all I’m asking for.”

Leaving her with those words I start looking for Jimmy next. It doesn’t take long to find him. Unlike his sister and me — he’s an earnest, straightforward, kid. He takes after his mother in that sense; wearing his heart on his sleeve much like she does. He still looks depressed. He’s taking Matt’s death harder than any of us.

“Hey there, kiddo. Are you feeling ok? If you’re up to it I’d like to talk to you.”

He forces a strained smile onto his face. It’s sad to see him like this when he’s usually so cheerful and optimistic.

“Don’t worry about me, dad. I’m fine. If there’s anything you or mom need, don’t hesitate to ask.”

Oh Jimmy... So dutiful, so manly, I don’t deserve a kid like you. God must have a twisted sense of humor, giving you to a warped man like me.

“Oh no Jimmy, it’s nothing like that. Thank you for being so concerned about us, but it’s you I’m worried about.”

He’s confused by my words. Of course he would be. He’s too pure to understand someone as contrary and conniving as me.

“Me? Why would you be worried about me? This must be much harder for you and mom. Please don’t concern yourselves with me. I’m fine. Really.”

I feel kinda bad about manipulating him when he’s so vulnerable. Not bad enough to stop though.

“No, no. We’re both fine ourselves. We’re adults Jimmy. We’re far better equipped to deal with tragedies than kids like you. More importantly, are you still seeing that girl? Maybe you should be with her instead of hanging around a depressing place like this house?”

He blushes and shakes his head. This kid’s a lot more girly about these things than his brother and sister ever were.

“I told her we should take a break for a while. It wouldn’t be proper for me to have fun with her when you guys need me.”

I sense some discord in his voice. Looks like our innocent little boy is hiding something. He's finally growing up. It's a bittersweet feeling. I'm proud of him, but seeing one's children grow up is always a wistful affair. I can still take some solace in how terrible a liar he is though.

"That's sweet of you Jimmy, but please don't put your life on hold for our sake. We'll survive. You're too young to be doing this to yourself."

He gives me more platitudes with a pained, guilt-ridden, expression. That's good, very good. Guilt is what I want from him; it'll lead to impulsiveness, which may in turn lead to the happy mistake I'm hoping for. He's always easy to deal with, just like his mother. Yes. Exactly like his earnest to a fault mother. Matt and the corporation have always been the biggest problem children in this family.

Sei Jaw

This whiskey is disgusting. Though of course, that's exactly the way it should be, since no one buys anything this cheap honestly expecting a quality product. People don't think about it all that much, but you can't appreciate the finer things without first exposing yourself to the crappier ones as a way of priming your senses. Besides that, composing is always thirsty work. This particular movement has been very troublesome. Just like the friend who inspired it.

It's as good a time as any, so I take a break. I'm not a very *profound* or philosophically-inclined person. Simplicity has always been my domain. But if there's one silly philosophical statement I'd make, it's that life is beautiful. Not the deepest or most thought-provoking thing ever, I know, but I sincerely believe those words. I've been called all sorts of things: ghoulish, morbid, dark, depressing, ominous. And so on and so forth. But that's all wrong; I love everything about life.

Matt was one of the few people who understood that part of me. He was able to look past my grim exterior and see me for who I

actually was. People dwell too much on appearances. If something looks a certain way, they'll just assume that it is that way. But Matt, in his own strange way, was able to see past the obvious and look directly at the true substance that it tends to hide. Don't judge a book by its cover, I guess.

Things aren't what they appear to be, and common sense is a futile attempt at trying to pretend anything can really be understood. For instance, people think that an *artist* needs to be *artistic*. My whole life has been about proving that restrictive line of thinking wrong. I technically have a *creative* profession, but I'm the least creative person I know. I compose the way people go to a mindless, dead-end, job; the kind which requires nothing more than a droning, repetitive, effort. It's more like the way a construction worker would approach a task than any sort of *artistic* or *creative* type of *professional* is supposed to. Though maybe that's exactly what people like about my stuff. It's so simple and straightforward, that they have to overanalyze it and make up their own dumb interpretations to find any *meaning* in it. I never confirm or deny any critical analysis of my work because pretending it might *mean* something is good for business. That and I like laughing at their

pretentious, *DEEP*, analyses with my friends. It sucks though, because the friend who understood the humor of it all and laughed about it louder than I ever have is gone now.

I miss Matt. I really do. But at the same time... Losing him feels right in some perverse way. I'm not clever enough to come up with any fancy words to describe that feeling. I just know that it's there, and that it's a good thing for me. Matt was a really normal guy. That's probably why he liked weird people and things so much. They must have given him the kinds of feelings and experiences that I can't ever describe — but always enjoy — and feel are necessary.

It's been a while so I decide to get back to work. Slacking off is important, but nothing will ever get done if I abuse the privilege of being able to do it. I take a huge swig of the stomach-turning bum swill before getting back to work. It really is a brainlessly automatic process. I'm probably the only weirdo in the world who can successfully compose like this. While I don't get paid by the hour, there's still no need to rush. I've got plenty of money and even more time. I can afford to take breaks after completing portions that feel like they're *big* enough in an arbitrary way.

Sipping on more and more of the godawful whiskey, I'm starting to get drunk. The bottle is still almost completely full despite how much I thought I drank and how small it is. That's normal though, because my tolerance has always been absurdly low. I wonder what my fans would say if they knew I drank this kind of garbage for fun. My critics and those silly people who think everything I do is the most *DEEPLY ARTISTIC* thing ever would probably have funny things to say about it too. It's a shame that Matt isn't around to get drunk and laugh about it all with me. But that's the way it has to be. His untimely death was something I needed to appreciate life more *DEEPLY*.

Shit, I must be completely wasted if I'm having thoughts like that. I only make clumsy sarcastic attempts at *STATEMENTS* when I'm drunk. There are also embarrassing things that I can't get out of my head when I'm like this. Like the fact that I'm still a "wizard" in spite of my success while Matt, who didn't care much about succeeding or failing in material terms, and is now dead, has had countless lovers, girlfriends, and maybe even a boyfriend or two. Maybe he was able to enjoy that part of life in a far less awkward way than me because he never really cared about trying, and was

willing to live in a goofy, fairy tale-like, fashion. There are certain things I envy about that way of living, but knowing myself I could never pull it off. We were close friends and spent a lot of time together, but in a way I could only admire him from a distance.

Ah... Thinking about how much of a man-whore he was is pissing me off! I'll return the favor by fantasizing about that last girlfriend of his. He talked about her a lot. He couldn't stop talking about her. From what he said and showed me, she must be a nasty little slut. Fucking crazy too, since I know only the sleaziest bitches dye their hair. I wonder if the carpet matches the drapes? Maybe I should try to find out. He did leave her business card here at some point didn't he? Here it is. "Verdant Gaia"... What the fuck kinda name is that anyway? It'll be perfect if I can steal Matt's girl from him after his death. It'll prove that *life always prevails over death...* or something retarded like that.

As I dial her number I'm starting to wonder... What the fuck am I doing? This isn't like me at all. I'm never this much of a disgusting pervert. I'm never this disrespectful to people who I've never met or seen for myself. But it's too late. I've already dialed the

digits and pushed the button. Shit... What am I going to do? I should just pretend I got the wrong number. Yeah that's what I'll d-

“Hello? How may I help you today?”

Shit! Shit! Shit! I lost my train of thought. Well I have to say something so I don't sound like a freak. Nothing really comes to mind though so I blurt out a series of random words.

“Oh, uh... yeah... Hi. Um... Is there a “Verdant Gaia” here?”

What the fuck's wrong with me!? I wasn't supposed to say that!

“Indeed. This is she. Though it's “Verdant Pangaea” now, you must have one of my old business cards.”

I don't even know how to react to that. My mind goes blank. My mouth runs automatically, without any input from me.

“I was a close friend of Matt's, he told me a lot about you. You seem like a very interesting person.”

Her voice loses the dreamy quality it had before and gets strangely aggressive. Maybe she thinks I'm a telemarketer or something? I really hope so. Please hang up on me already!

"A friend of Matt's you say? You wouldn't happen to be a Mr. "Sei Jaw" would you?"

Oh shit... She knows who I am?! Of course she would. Why was I so stupid!? Matt would've definitely talked about me to her. Well I might as well end this already.

"Yeah that's me. Did Matt tell you about me while he was still around?"

She giggles. Wait, what? Why is she giggling?

"Oh yes... He told me all sorts of things about you. But talking on the phone like this is so fruitless isn't it, Mr. "Jaw"? Let's meet up right now. In fact I'll head over to your place immediately. Don't go anywhere."

And she hangs up. That was a joke right? She's not actually coming here is she? She shouldn't even know how to get here or where — this — even is. Well whatever. I'm glad that's over with.

I'm sorry Matt, I won't even think about anything like this again. I should apologize to her too for making such disgusting, perverted, assumptions about her. I'm sure she's a nice, normal girl even if she has weird tastes.

Anyway, it's time to get back to work. I labor away for a while, take a break, and get back to it again. The repetitiveness is relaxing. About an hour passes like this before the doorbell rings. It's probably one of my neighbors or my mom again. Without even thinking or checking through the peephole I open the door. No fucking way... Is this for real?

"Hello Mr. Jaw. Would you mind if I called you Sei? I'll call you Sei. It's a wonderfully *ominous* name your parents gave you."

She just barges in without even asking for permission. Well whatever. It'd be rude to kick her out, so I'll chat with her until she gets bored of whatever game she's playing.

"Call me whatever you want, I don't mind. You're Miss "Pangaea" right?"

She smiles and nods while making her way through my house like she owns the place.

“Yes. You can call me whatever you want too. You know, I’ve always wanted to meet you Sei. Matt was just too jealous to let me.”

I don’t like where this is going.

“Well I can see why he’d be jealous.”

That was probably a really stupid thing to say, but if it’ll creep her out enough to make her leave, it’ll be worth it.

“No. You’ve misunderstood me. It’s not me he wanted to keep to himself.”

Huh? That makes no sense at all. What’s she on about?

“What do you mean? I don’t get it.”

She chuckles and turns to face me. Slowly, she inches closer and closer.

“He wanted to keep you away from me. Because he knew I’d steal you from him. Matt used to joke about how I could have you

after he died. But he wouldn't allow me to *corrupt* you before then. He wanted you to be *pure* for him."

I don't like this at all. Please stop. Please just go home already.

"I see. Well it's getting late isn't it? Should I call a cab for you?"

She's not listening at all. She just keeps coming closer and closer like some unavoidable, all-powerful, star of calamity.

"Oh don't be so coy, Sei. This needs to happen. The progression from Taurus to Gemini is a necessary one."

After that she does all sorts of things to me. An hour later we're both lying naked in bed. I'm not sure if I've lost the right to call myself a "wizard" or if this makes me a "warlock". Though anyway, I'm sorry Matt but thank you. *Life has prevailed over death* after all.

Verdant Pangaea

A complete moon's cycle has passed since Matt's phase transitional rite. With my aid, he has properly transcended this plane of existence and moved on to the next. I suppose that silly man at the funerary pavilion deserves some of the credit as well for his role in the rite. His feigned reluctance truly was adorable. Had he been openly eager, I may have needed several more men and a woman or two there to properly complete the ritual. His awkward energy was potent enough to fill in for an entire legion of acolytes. The universal will is serendipitous indeed.

Reminiscence is always an interesting, ever-winding road to go down, but I must now turn my attention to the present. I caress my spirit sisters before getting out of bed. Their presence is currently necessary due to Venus presently being anterograde. In order to go out in public, I must dress myself and comply with some level of this society's hygienic standards. In an ideal world we would be able to express ourselves with our bodies and souls alone. However, very few people in this world are ready for that level of spiritual emanation. For the time being, we can only publically bare our souls before others in a limited capacity through our choice of dress. It is

still possible to close the gap through physical contact, yet — for obvious reasons — that isn't practical in a public setting. It truly is a shame that our society has such misplaced priorities.

On the other hand, rejecting the ways of the world entirely — as some of my fellow seekers of enlightenment choose to — is mere folly. The most effective methods for effecting lasting change involve entrenching one's self within a system and working from the inside. It's with that idea in mind that I've obtained a so-called *occupation*, and used the proceeds from it to fund my more profound pursuits. If more of us were amenable to embarking on such a path, the world may have already been a far better place.

Soon enough, I arrive at the office and turn in my handwritten manuscript. My editor greets me as always.

“Good afternoon Vera, Excellent work as always.”

I respond in kind, as is customary in the mundane world.

“Thank you kindly. It's a pleasure guiding as many others down this path as possible.”

If they could only see how simple and beneficial these endeavors are, I'm sure more of my comrades would be clamoring to take less anti-social approaches in advancing our cause.

"I'd like to ask you something. Feel free to ignore me if you find the question to be too frivolous or insulting."

I smile at her excessive platitudes. There's no need to fret about such things when interacting with me. People truly are amusing when they get caught up in the hollow niceties of society.

"Please do. And don't worry about silly things like offending my sensibilities. I assure you, that would be quite a difficult feat to accomplish."

She chuckles in a most patronizing manner. I find her thinly veiled shamelessness endearing.

"Ah yes, of course. Forgive me for lumping you in with the sorts of commoners who would take offence at such trifles. Anyway, onto the question. I'm always fascinated by your readings and astrological interpretations. I've never seen anything like them before you began working here. The sheer artistry and vision of your

work is unrivalled by any of your colleagues. What I want to know is; what inspires someone like you? Frankly, I'm envious of your talent. If I may be so bold, I'd like to steal just the tiniest bit of it for myself."

Those words bring a smile to my face. On some level, she must already realize that any advice I may have to offer will be entirely useless to her. Nevertheless, I'll make an earnest attempt at addressing her inquiry. Futile, though it may be.

"I'm quite flattered that you hold my offerings in such high regard. Though honestly speaking, I seriously doubt my experiences will be of much use to you. We are — after all — fruits fallen from vastly different sorts of trees. Be that as it may, I'll still answer your question to the best of my ability. If I were to simplify or distill the precise difference between those who also peer beyond the veil to discern the truth and myself, it would be the fundamental discrepancy between our philosophies. They seek to grasp the intangible and unattainable mysteries of our universe. They do this by hastily clutching at anything which manages to find its way into their grasp and tainting it with their own color. I, on the other hand,

am perfectly content to let the universe itself embrace and enter me, then leave whatever it may choose to in the fallow field of my consciousness. There are instances where lustily taking what one desires is the appropriate course of action, yet I've found that the pursuit of universal truth is not one of them. When dealing with forces far greater than ourselves, such an approach is too narrow-minded and restrictive. In short; insight is a thing to be graciously received rather than crudely pilfered."

The look of false contemplation on her wrinkled face tells it all. Essentially, this exercise has been exactly as meaningless as we both knew it would be before it even began. She can only pretend at comprehending such alien, esoteric principles of the soul. They're simply too detached from the world she inhabits and was weaned by to make even the vaguest form of comprehensible sense to her. She'll still put up a front of studious observation — but we both know that it'll ultimately be just for show. There's a hapless beauty to such frivolously self-conscious efforts at duplicity regardless of whether one's own self or another is the intended target.

“I see. That’s a rather extreme stance to take. But I suppose that all true vision ultimately stems from extremes rather than places of idle — perhaps lifeless — moderation. You’ve given me a lot to think about. Thank you for indulging the silly whims of an old woman.”

I smile affectionately. While this has been entertaining, the mood is clear. The time of our parting is at hand. We’ll have to wait until next we meet to continue basking in the incompatible glows of one another’s psyches.

“It was my pleasure. Anything I can do to help is never too much or too little to offer. Till next week, then.”

She nods at those words and replies with some of her own. Upon exiting the office and later the building, I recall a thousand such conversations; a million such experiences. The mere thought of them makes me smile. As if on cue, my phone begins ringing. I don’t even need to look at it to know exactly who it is. Upon answering the call, I’m immediately greeted by the coolly passive-aggressive voice of the Ambrose matriarch. She’s making her regularly scheduled daily *entreaty* to me once again, no doubt.

“Hello, *Miss* Weintraub. I believe you already know why I’m calling.”

It’s just like her to address me with my mundane family name which I’ve long since cast off. What a delightfully pedestrian attempt at provocation.

“Of course, I would need to be stricken with Alzheimer’s or an advanced state of dementia before I could ever forget the *ever-so-pleasant* purpose of your daily calls.”

At the other end of the line I can hear her grinding her teeth in a rather rough manner. It would sadden me greatly if our cordial little chats contributed to the poor Ambrose matron’s dental expenses. She continues after regaining a bit of her composure.

“Your *wit* is matched only by your *taste* and *decency*, *Miss* Weintraub. But I digress, I’m calling — as you must surely know — to inform you that my legal action against you is well underway. It *pains* me to say this but you may very soon be left to ply your *wares* from the inside of a homeless shelter. I just thought it’d be fair to warn you first.”

At this point I can no longer resist the urge to laugh. It's useless to even try now. After a protracted laughing fit, I finally reply to her adorably inept attempt at intimidating me. That little quip about "*taste* and *decency*" was especially cute.

"Why thank you! Your son certainly appreciated my *wit*, *taste*, and *decency*. I suspect his father would have *appreciated* them as well, had we spent more time together. As for your warning; while I do appreciate the *regard* you clearly have for me, I'm afraid your concerns are woefully misplaced. You see, while I enjoy and appreciate the things money can buy, I ultimately acknowledge their quintessential meaninglessness. Ignoring how low your odds of succeeding are, if I did by some chance end up in a homeless shelter it'd be as liberating and fun to me as a casual camping trip would be to you. After all, it is quite rare in this world of boundless desire and impenetrable illusions which we inhabit, to commune with such simple, unpretentious, folk. It is no exaggeration to say that I would greatly relish the opportunity to partake in their company."

This too I can hear; she's gone past the boiling point now. That awkward attempt at iciness is about to give way to a violently vibrant eruption of passionate fury.

“Alright... I'm done playing games. Listen here, you filthy hippie whore, you're going to pay for what you did to my son! All that potential, all my effort, all of his father's money that was spent on his upbringing... Wasted! All of it! And for what, I ask? A scrawny hippie bitch that spreads her legs for anyone with a pulse!? They may be saying it was probably an accident now but I don't believe them. I know — a mother knows these things. It was all your fault wasn't it? You killed Matt with all your insane hippie bullshit! You must have plied him with sex and drugs, along with false promises of *meaning*. Then, after you were done with him — once you were about to marry into our family for the money, things got out of hand didn't they? Your efforts were far too successful. He wasn't just in your clutches; he was so strung out and used up that suicide seemed like his only way out, didn't it? But he wouldn't have been able to do it in private, no. Certainly not under your watchful gaze. The only option he had was making a public display of it all! A theater of grotesqueries that's dragging our entire family

through the mud! What do you have to say for yourself? Tell me, you crazy bitch! Tell me how you can even sleep at night knowing what you've done to us?!"

It's quite depressing. What may have begun as grief in the face of unexpectedly losing her son, has transformed into an ugly mass of self-serving venom. She's even gone as far as to invent a paranoid conspiracy theory about my supposedly *evil* influence over Matt. I know I triggered this by bringing him up directly, but that's wrong too. This whole issue has been about him from the start. It's only the twisted way of this world that made addressing the heart of the matter directly a taboo act when it's an integral part of the process.

That's exactly why I won't back down. She needs this. She needs someone to blame and curse and hate or else those overwhelming emotions will devour her from the inside out. So I'll gladly play my part. I'll eagerly take up the role of the villain she needs. And I'll win. I'll win because she needs to be defeated so utterly; so thoroughly that she'll have no choice but to admit she was

wrong. Although that may outwardly appear to be an evil act, it is the surest way for me to save her.

“How do I sleep, you ask? Like a newborn baby. My conscience is clearer than crystal. There is absolutely nothing I’d change about the time Matt and I spent together. I loved him more than you if you’re capable of getting upset over the *humiliation* his death caused for you. I feel sorry for Matt, having a mother that cares more for her family’s public image than him must have been horrible.”

As ruthless as those words must sound, I know they’re exactly what she was hoping to hear from me.

“How dare you!? You insolent little-“

I take this opportunity to drive the point home by acting even haughtier.

“Sorry, I don’t have time to talk all day like you seem to. We’ll talk when we see each other in court. Bye-bye.”

She’s still screaming something when I give the phone an exaggerated loud kiss and turn it off. I stop to think for a bit. While I

certainly wouldn't have minded spending a little more time with Matt, I'm somewhat glad that things ended the way they did. If he hadn't died in the exact way he did, at the exact time he did, none of this would be happening. His death was a positive fluctuation in the universal order. I'm thankful for it all, truly I am. For those two delightfully sleazy policemen who connived and cajoled their way through it all, for that amazingly awkward funerary pavilion director who helped me consummate the ritual of life's end with an act symbolizing the beginning, for Matt's mother who has taken up the role of a dear enemy that I must save, and of course, last but most certainly not least, to Matt himself for unintentionally sacrificing his life so that I could fulfill the mission of mine. The sublime universal will that arranged everything so beautifully must also be praised. As silly as the act of reiteration is, I'll say it once more. The universal will is most serendipitous indeed.

Maria Theresa Ambrose

She hung up on me! That filthy little prostitution whore actually had the nerve to hang up on ME! I really do hate that bitch. My hatred for her is the only thing that's keeping me going. She's the source of all our problems. She just has to be. Why else would Matt disgrace us like this? Why else would Sarah and Jimmy be so moody of late? Why would my husband suddenly become so disagreeable? There's no other explanation for all of these calamities occurring all at once. Only a naïve fool would be incapable of noticing all the obvious signs.

I knew that slut was trouble as soon as Matt introduced her to us. Even before I actually knew anything about her, I could just tell. As cliché as it sounds; as a mother I sensed that this horrible, lewd, girl would be nothing less than anathema to our family. The more I found out about her, the more my suspicions were confirmed, my anxiety justified. After all, what kind of person changes their name at the drop of a hat based on some sort of pretentious crazy hippie ideas? What sort of woman dresses like an avant-garde interpretation of a truck stop whore just to — and I quote — “impress the nurturing nature” she's “chosen” for her “soul” to take on “upon as many

people as possible.” Anyone who spouts such incomprehensible gibberish can’t possibly have anything good to offer anyone.

It was just so obvious, but no one would listen. No matter how much I begged Matt to leave her for his own good, or how desperately I implored Charles to talk some sense into him... Even my attempts at getting Sarah and Jimmy on my side, all of it failed miserably and this is the outcome. None of them would listen to reason or take action even if they saw my point. Matt said he loved her; needed someone like her in his life. He said these foolish things in spite of how impractical and bizarre she clearly was. Charles dismissed it as a passing phase — something that our son would soon grow tired of as he grew a little more mature. He said we should let Matt have fun with his silly little hippie girlfriend since that sort of thing was what youth was all about. The children too, were incapable of understanding just how terrible she truly was. They both said that if she made Matt happy, it didn’t matter how much or little I liked her, or what sort of person any of us thought she was.

None of them listened, and things turned out exactly the way I told them they would. The worst case scenario that everyone should have seen coming from thousands of miles away. Charles only admitted the folly of his ways after it was already too late. The kids scoffed and dismissed the clear truth, and still continue to do so. Even this travesty has failed to open their eyes. Honestly, they're just as hopeless as their brother was. Where did Charles and I go wrong in raising these children? I'll have to keep a close eye on them from now on to make sure they don't follow in Matt's tragically misguided footsteps. Losing one child in such a publically humiliating manner is terrible enough. I simply cannot allow a repeat performance of this atrocity, this farce, from either of those two or — god forbid — from both of them. My heart would simply be incapable of taking another shock of this magnitude, especially when it may be so easily prevented through more vigilance on my part. I'm done simply standing by and watching as this family I've built is destroyed.

What I need to do now is absolutely clear. Nothing's going to happen unless I take action. I'm going to call that lazy lawyer and really light a fire under his ass this time. For all the money we're

paying him, he's been far too slow to act. Each ring of the phone enflames my impatience further and further still. By the time the receptionist picks up, I'm fully prepared for battle.

“Weil, Grossman, and Gingrich law offices, how may I help you?”

It's very much like these places to hire little girls with saccharine voices as their receptionists. Without even seeing her, I can imagine what this girl must look like. She probably looks cute in her fancy little dress; a sexist parody of professionalism. Even someone like that would've been better for Matt than the horrendous harlot he was fatally fascinated with.

“Yes, I'd like to talk to Mr. Sternberg. Can you connect me to him?”

She pauses. They probably just hired this girl. She seems new to this. I'll forgive her inexperience — at least this time anyway.

“Yes of course, it it's alright with you, may I ask who is calling? I apologize for the inconvenience, but Mr. Sternberg likes to know who he'll be speaking with before a call is transferred to him.”

Maybe I gave her too little credit. She's a lot less naïve than she initially seemed to be. I wouldn't be at all surprised if this frail sounding little girl was in fact manipulating the patronizing old men who must have hired her to be just another pretty face and sugary voice for them. I'm actually somewhat impressed with her now. It's a shame that Matt didn't have the taste to find someone like her. Hopefully Jimmy proves to be more sensible than his older brother in that regard.

"My name's Maria Ambrose. But before you transfer me, I'd like to speak with you for a bit longer. If you don't mind, that is."

It's a slightly unreasonable request but if she's as clever as I suspect she is, I'm sure she won't be thrown off by it.

"I don't mind at all Mrs. Ambrose. Is there anything else I can do for you before transferring your call?"

She really is perfect. That previous awkwardness of hers may have just been a put-on as well. I like this girl more and more with each word we exchange.

"What's your name dear? And call me Maria."

It's refreshing to encounter a young lady this refined and ambitious after dealing with that slovenly skank for so long. My own daughter isn't much better either.

"Of course, the formalities of this business are a bit stuffy aren't they? It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance Maria. My name is Delilah Hemingway."

Delilah, is it? How appropriate. This girl is clearly nothing less than a weapon. Her parents chose her name well.

"No, I assure you the pleasure is all mine. I'm going to call your boss after this to demand that you be given a raise. Why, if the people running this place had any sense at all, they'd start preparing you to be their next president immediately."

She giggles at my bold words.

"Why thank you Maria! It's nice to be appreciated for once. I'm sure you could run this place yourself if you wanted to. I've kept you waiting long enough so I'll transfer the call now."

Pleasant and efficient, yes this girl knows exactly what she's doing. Talking to her was a nice change of pace after dealing with

that hippie whore for so long. The ridiculous lawyer I'm about to deal with will also be frustrating in comparison. I should set Jimmy up with a girl like that. Men need someone who'll keep them on their toes; someone who'll whip them into shape. Matt definitely wouldn't have ended up the way he did if he was with her.

“Hello Mrs. Ambrose. What can I do for you today?”

Ah, he just had to ruin it. I do need to talk to him but it's just like this insipid little man to ruin a perfectly good mood just by existing.

“Hello Mr. Sternberg. You should already know why I'm calling. That's the least I'd expect from you — considering the amount of money you're being paid here. I won't bother skirting around this since we should both understand exactly what the other wants here. How are the preparations for the trial proceeding?”

Knowing him, he's probably barely resisting the urge to sigh or scoff derisively right now.

“Ah yes, the preparations... Look, Mrs. Ambrose, I know how much this means to you but there's nothing to worry about. I

may not be the flashiest lawyer around but I assure you that I know exactly what I'm doing. These daily calls of yours are entirely unnecessary."

He's such a terrible liar, this man. If I hadn't called him, he would have been scratching his ass doing nothing. I know his type; he's the sort of man who needs to be poked and prodded and pressured at every turn or else he'll never get anything done.

"Oh yes of course. Please excuse me for being so rude. If that's the case, then I'm sure there's nothing for us to discuss right now after all is there?"

It won't do to be too forward. I have to pull the punch he was bracing himself for at the last second, right before it seems as though it'll connect. That's the proper way to stir up dissonance in a man's fragile mind. It is the blow that doesn't come which deals the greatest amount of damage.

"No. There isn't. Just have faith in my abilities. I wouldn't have gotten this far in my line of work if I hadn't reached a certain level of proficiency."

Oh yes, that's exactly what I was aiming for. My subtle provocation has stirred up the need to validate his supposedly prodigious ability. Men are so easy. So very, very simple they are.

"No, I suppose not. Well this has been a pleasant conversation. Thank you for your time Mr. Sternberg. I won't distract you from your preparations anymore."

Now he's trapped. He has no choice but to go out of his way to fight tooth and nail for me; for my family.

"Thank you for checking in, it's good to have a client that actually cares about how I'm preparing for their trial for once. Next time I'll call you with an actual update. How does that sound?"

He's played right into my hand. Exactly as I knew he would.

"That sounds great. I won't keep you any longer, take care Mr. Stenberg."

Yes, take care to not give me any reasons to go after you next.

"You too Mrs. Ambrose, we'll talk again soon, bye."

And he finally hangs up. This was a productive day, but I do loathe dealing with silly men like him. That false bravado they put on display doesn't suit them at all. Speaking of men, my husband chooses this moment to show up. How good of him to pull himself away from whatever he was doing for the five seconds it'll take to have one of our patented non-conversations. I don't think we've ever truly talked at length since Matt's funeral. His mind must be far too weak to cope with the shock of it all. Men are always unreliable when they'd actually be useful for once.

"Hey honey. How are you doing? Do you have any good news for me today?"

It's sad that he has to be this way but I'll play along.

"I'm fine dear, Thank you for recommending that Sternberg guy, he really knows his stuff."

He too, obligingly plays his part in blissful ignorance.

"That's *great*. I'm sure old Ardy Sternberg will straighten *that naughty girl* out for us. Yes... I'm sure of it."

“Arden Sternberg”

She finally hung up. I’ve dealt with many women like her over the years, but Mrs. Ambrose is a real piece of work. Most of them at least somewhat understand what’s going on even while they pretend not to. She’s different though. In spite of how transparent this entire charade is, she’s buying into it more and more with each passing day. I wouldn’t be surprised at all if she thought that a fishy, fake-sounding, name like “Arden Sternberg” was real. Or that I’m an actual lawyer in spite of the complete lack of any legal work I’ve done so far. It’s sad that her husband has to play along with her bizarre and unhinged whims.

The fact of the matter is, I’m not a lawyer and there never was an “Arden Sternberg”. What I am is part actor, part therapist. This is a highly specialized form of shock therapy where a patient is referred to me by a concerned family member or friend and I play the role of a hitman, lawyer, con artist for hire, or any number of other characters. The overall theme is usually revenge or comeuppance. My patients are mostly looking to reclaim the agency which they feel they’ve lost. They do this by employing me as the

one who has whatever skillset they're looking for to exact their revenge; to set all wrongs to right, if you will.

Most of the time they realize what's really going on after a certain point when the premise wears thin and we go our separate ways after saying a few parting words. The shock of being taken in by such an obvious charade helps them see how unreasonable and maladaptive they were being. In rare cases however, they don't suspect a thing and an *intervention* of sorts needs to be held to shatter their delusions that I've been building up in a half-assed manner. Those can get ugly but they never fail to illustrate the point.

While I suspect this may indeed be one of those cases, that's not important right now. I've got an appointment with a man who thinks I'm a gangster that can have his wife's rapist brutally attacked in prison. He's doing this because he feels the rapist's sentence was too lenient. I started out in a fairly subtle manner — with only a slightly scruffy appearance and mildly gruff demeanor, pretending to be one of *that man's* henchmen. The goal here is to slightly ramp up the unbelievable quality of my presence with each session, in order to allow the patient to piece things together on their own. This is our

sixth session so I'm going all out now. I'll be adding an eye patch and fake beard to the outfit, while making all sorts of completely absurd claims to bring it all full circle. I hear a knock on my office door. That's probably my assistant, who Mrs. Ambrose spoke to earlier under that ridiculously fake name.

"Come in, Jenny. Is he here yet?"

She chuckles at my costume. I always look silly at this point in the sessions.

"He'll be here in around twenty minutes. So you went from "Ardy Sternberg" to a Snake Plissken knockoff? That's quite the transformation you've pulled off, *big boss*."

I do enjoy the showmanship that comes with this job. There aren't many other professions where you can make money for dressing up in costumes and playing silly games. If only there were tunes to whistle and goons to piss on in the jungle, the reference would be complete.

"Yes, yes. I like copyright-infringing jokes too. But let's get back to business. When he gets here make him wait for ten minutes

or so, then give him a set of geographic coordinates to go to next instead of an address. It'll add to the razzmatazz."

I'm really pulling out all the stops for this one. Getting into the spirit as well, she plays along.

"Sir, yes sir! Or should I call you *Captain*? No, I guess this isn't a Navy thing so using your exact fake rank isn't appropriate."

She stands at attention and gives me an exaggerated military salute before leaving me to my preparations. I make a few final adjustments to my costume before heading out myself. At this stage in the game, I've decided to completely throw away any pretense of plausibility and just run with the premise. A dimly-lit abandoned warehouse has been prepared as the scene of this presumably final meeting of ours. I hope my client enjoys this as much as I do.

An hour later I've arrived at the appointed meeting place well ahead of my client. I love all of my characters, but these sorts are especially fun to play. They make me feel like a kid again. The rules of this game demand a particularly shady atmosphere. That means I have to hide in a spot where I can easily ambush my client as soon as he gets here. It takes a while but I find a suitably concealed hiding

spot by the entrance. To further camouflage my presence, I roll around on the dust and dirt covered floor before fully assuming my chosen position. That should help me blend in with the *scent* of this place, giving me a few more seconds to successfully complete the ambush.

As I crouch there in that dark warehouse, the usual sensation overcomes me; a true sense of transformation has come upon me. Once again, I've cast off my mundane, colorless, everyday identity. Though it shouldn't be possible, I've truly become *Captain Jackson* in mind, body, and soul. The predatory instincts of the man who should only exist in my mind slowly permeate every last fiber of my being. It doesn't matter if I have to sit here for ten minutes or ten hours, there's no doubt in my mind that I'll catch my prey without fail. The small fragment of my *true* self — which exists in the back of my mind — vaguely exhales a few fleeting bubbles of hope to the surface of the pool it's drowning in. It's hoping that he'll get here soon, before the weak, colorless, substance of which it is comprised is permanently dyed in this fictional man's murky, dark, color.

It feels as though an eternity has passed by the time I finally feel his footsteps approaching the warehouse. All of my senses have been sharpened to a fine point by now. I know it's him. My muscles instinctively enter a partially tensed state in preparation for what I'm about to do. I draw upon a fathomless well of invented experiences; imaginary techniques. Cautious. Measured. Fretful. Those are the impressions I'm able to read from the mere sound of the approaching footfalls. My cyclopean left eye burns with a bestial instinct that melts through the darkness itself. At long last, the moment is at hand.

“Are you there? I was told to come here. Is Captain Jackson here?”

Wasting no time, I spring forth from the shadows. Quickly, with a preternatural swiftness and strength — the likes of which should not exist within my feeble, untrained, body — I bind him against myself, holding one hand over his mouth and restraining his arms with the other. He struggles a bit out of sheer shock but he's unable to even slightly budge my vicelike grip. I whisper a

simultaneous threat and reassurance into his ear with a voice that isn't my own.

“Calm down. No sudden moves or sounds now or I'll have to snap your neck. We have business to discuss, don't we?”

He nods — shivering but slightly more sure of himself. He's ready so I release my grip.

“It's you isn't it? Captain Jackson, right? The owner of that *Borderless Vacuum Cleaner Company*?”

I respond, using *his* name without even needing to think.

“Call me Jack.”

This isn't good. As ridiculous as the character I've become is, he's taken over me. At this rate I really will become *Captain Jackson* and actually assassinate the man he wants me to after torturing him.

“Ok... Jack. I spoke with your associates and we've agreed on a price. \$60,000 is enough isn't it?”

Despite not being a smoker I take a cut cigar out of my pocket, light it, and begin smoking in one smooth motion as if I've been doing this my whole life.

“Forget that price. Pay me triple upfront and I'll personally do it within 24 hours.”

His face warps into a mask of horror and incredulity. An appropriate reaction, given the circumstances.

“You're crazy! The money isn't an issue, but you're promising something that's impossible!”

I puff on my cigar, answering in an uncharacteristically self-assured way.

“Don't worry about the details or how *sane* it is. Just pay me the money and I'll make it happen.”

Shit, this is getting worse with each passing minute... He responds even more frantically; even more accusatorily. Not because I'm lying — but because we both know that I'll manage to make good on my promise and the prospect of that scares him more than the idea of being lied to or taken advantage of. Now that he's being

confronted with the shockingly real possibility of it happening, he's realizing that he doesn't actually want this after all.

“Let me get this straight. You're saying you'll break into Riker's Island, find him, torture him, and painfully murder him. All by yourself. In one day. As soon as I pay you the price you're asking for.”

I finish my cigar and flick the useless end away.

“Yeah, it should be easy. I've carried out far more involved operations under much hairier conditions back in the day. Any operator worth their weight in shit can do at least that much without a problem.”

He stares in disbelief. The power of my words has overwhelmed him. He understands that the lie will assert itself as reality if he doesn't rebel against it. At this point, he has a very clear choice: He can either accept the delusion and allow it to become reality, or he can reject it and let it forever remain a lie.

“Fuck you! That’s bullshit! Who would believe something like that?! I bet this whole thing was a giant scam from the beginning!”

Those words bring me — the *real* me — back. They kill *Captain Jackson*, allowing me to return into being. I take off the eye patch and open the door.

“You’re right, this was just a charade. I’m actually a therapist referred to you by your wife. Congratulations, you’ve finally understood how absurd and maladaptive what you were asking for really was.”

A look of realization appears on his face. The pieces have all fallen into place.

“Oh wow... Damn... You’re right. I was so frustrated with the whole situation that I never stopped to think about how insane I was acting. I’m going to go home and thank her for looking out for me like this. Thank you too, *Jack* — or whatever your real name is.”

I — the *real* me this time — smile and nod.

“You’re welcome. You cured yourself; it’s just that you needed the right environment to be set up for the process to occur.”

He nods, shaking my hand.

“Yeah, I definitely needed this. I’ll pay you that 180 thousand after all. Consider it a fee for *killing* my delusions.”

After seeing him off I take the eye patch out of my pocket and look at it. It was naïve of me to think *Captain Jackson* could be killed that easily. That crafty old bastard is still alive and kicking inside my head, along with *Arden Sternberg*, and a whole host of other all too fictional yet all too real characters. There’s an element of irony to all of this that certainly isn’t lost on me.

Sarah Jolon Ambrose

It's positive. There's no denying that. Well shit — looks like I really went and did it this time. Looks like that old perv of a father *won* after all. I don't know how to feel about this yet. Should I be happy? Should I be pissed off? Or should I just stay in an indistinct confused haze? That might take a while for me to figure out. There's no rush though. Time is a luxury I can afford.

When I think of my family, the first thing that comes to mind is that they're all so fucking weird. It's no wonder that I turned out the way I did. But I guess Matt and Jimmy can't really be blamed in good conscience. After all, our parents are obviously the root cause of the problem. They're the freakiest, most ill-matched couple I've ever seen. Yet they somehow work together. I'll never be able to wrap my mind around that. Maybe Matt was trying to imitate them when he hooked up with that slutty hippie chick? He was nothing like her. I do admire him for that. I could never cavort with anyone that different from me for any extended period of time. If a guy is that alien to me we'll never do more than hook up once before going our separate ways. Though I recognize the intrinsic artistry in the

union of polar opposites, my own sensibilities prevent me from being able to experience it for myself.

Speaking of Matt, his tragedy may in fact have been a happy ending. Not just for everyone around him; but for Matt himself as well. I'm sure dad and that hippie girl both agree with me on that. In a sense, the three of us are far more alike than Matt, mom, and Jimmy — who can be thought of as their own little triad. Matt was as forthright and honest as the other two in his own way. But more than that he was the most normal one of the three, and while that's typically seen as a good thing, it was terrible in this case. Nothing good could have ever come from being tied to people as twisted as dad, *Pangaea*, and me — or as intense and unhinged as mom and Jimmy. It's good that he died young in an accident instead of getting old and being torn limb from limb by us, the hungry pack of conniving vultures and brazen wolves that we are. We wouldn't have been able to stop ourselves from feasting upon his flesh — even if it was not yet deceased — because that's just who we are and will always be.

Then there's Jimmy, my baby brother. Him I actually feel sorry for. He's just too straightforward and tries way too hard. He was doomed to be eaten alive by this family and world from the moment he was born. I don't know what'll happen to him in the end, but he's already being chewed up. Whether he's completely consumed, or some distorted, empty, husk of his former self is left behind — it doesn't really matter. As an artist, all I can do is cherish the tragic beauty of his inevitable, excruciating, metamorphosis. Common sense would dictate that one should intervene when they know about something terrible will happen but that's bullshit. No one seriously calling themselves an artist — no matter what their philosophy or medium is — would dare interfere with such a vital process.

Now I move on to our progenitors. Mother clearly has to come before dad. I call her “mother” while calling him “dad” because she's stuffy and intense where he's airy and relaxed. She's always been crazy, always insisted that everything be *right* or *proper* or *congruous*. She's always been obsessed with order, structure, and practicality. A sickness of spirit or heart means nothing to her. As far as mother is concerned, issues of the material world and common

sense trump the metaphysical or spiritual every single time. The irony there is that she's been caught up in a bizarre and entirely unpractical affair since Matt's death; a strange situation which only recently came to an abrupt end. I personally found her desperate attempt to set a perceived wrong to right by suing *Pangaea* — and the aftermath of it — extremely satisfying. Dad, in one of his most diabolically brilliant moves ever, referred her to *Arden Sternberg*; would-be Lawyer To The Stars. Now, Mr. "Sternberg" is a character unto himself who I could go on and on about for hours but this is a family project, so it isn't the time or place for that. The short version is that he was a therapist pretending to be a lawyer so there was never going to be a trial at all. Mother was so convinced by his act that she didn't understand what was happening until he had us all participate in an intervention for her. The point was finally driven into her skull in the greatest — and most necessary — way possible. She's still reeling a little from the shock of realizing exactly how insane she was acting. While I hate having to deal with mother's obsessiveness, that straightforward side to her is kinda cute in spite of itself. I can see what someone as backwards and consciously contrary as dad saw in her.

Speaking of dad, now it's time to address him. He's the final, and —at least to me — most important piece of our familial puzzle. Simply put; he's everything that mother isn't. Silly where she's serious, conniving where she's honest, *evil* where she's *good*, and diabolically sane where she's benignly crazy. If personalities are hereditary, I think I got more of his than hers. If there's one key element of his being that I didn't inherit, it'd be his propensity for ruthless determination when he feels it's necessary to accomplish one of his goals. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to call his disposition *demonic* or *devilish*. He's the kind of villain who always knows exactly what he wants and will use any means, fair or foul, to get it; committing one atrocity after another in pursuit of his goal with a smile on his face.

As contrary as it is, I love him for being that despicable. If he was as good and honest as mother, I'd probably have nothing but contempt for them both. This world is designed for villains. I don't know exactly how aware of that he is, but he accepts embraces and exploits all the ugliest things about it as naturally as breathing. When I see him, I can't help but think he's a man who understands — who instinctively knows — exactly what sort of world he inhabits and has

the courage to abide by it, or even bend it to his own will, without any doubts or remorse. It's beautiful in a primal, depraved, way.

Looking at the canvas I see it, the image is complete. It's now fully realized and actualized from my initially hazy, indistinct, vision. This was the reason I chose to work at our family home for once after Matt died. This is the illusion I've been chasing that entire time; a farcically macabre family portrait the likes of which none have ever ushered into this wonderfully shitty world. It is as abstract as it is concrete, as real as it is fake, vital as it is lifeless, and exquisite as it is revolting. This definitely isn't something I would've been able to create at my own place.

I have to take a step back and admire it. To take it all in now that it's finished. That's always the most satisfying part of the process. Touching it, breathing it in, tasting it, listening to its heartbeat and looking over every minute detail of it. Feeling it with my very soul, this thing which I've just finished birthing. I lose myself in the sensation, becoming completely oblivious to the inexorable march of time. Right now, in this single moment, nothing exists for me in this universe other than the sense of all-

encompassing love this thing represents. Not time, not space, not the material, and not even the spiritual. It has all been encapsulated into one condensed point of being and nonexistence.

After an unknowably long period of time I finally regain my senses. I'm not particularly interested in exactly how much time has passed. Though I do note that the sun — which was up when I began — has set and given way to a pitch-black, moonless, night sky. I know exactly what I need to do now. Since this was a family project I need to go to each of the contributing *artists* and thank them for their roles one by one. I'll start with Jimmy since that's as close to the order I went in as I can come. I find him watching TV with a blank look on his face; a look that tells me he isn't watching TV so much as looking at the TV.

“What are you watching? Is it any good?”

He quickly breaks out of his trance and diverts his attention to me. He's always so needlessly considerate.

“Honestly I don't even know. I just turned it on so the noise would distract me.”

He's a bit less reserved about his feelings with me than he is with mother or dad. That strained fake smile is both captivating and painful to look at. I'll make this brief so as to only minimally interfere with his process. Before he can register it, I wrap my arms around him in a tight embrace.

"I love you Jimmy, thank you for being yourself."

There's no need to prolong this — or confuse the poor kid any further — so I pull away as suddenly as I pulled him close. It's the most appropriate way of handling this. I quickly move away before he has the time to ask me what that was about. The thought of him anxiously mulling over what just happened in his head amuses me. Now it's time to move on to the next one.

I find mother reading one of her boring political nonfiction books. I'll never understand how anyone can shovel that tedious garbage into their mind. It's just like her to enjoy that vapid, soulless, drivel; to be so concerned with other people's idiotic pretensions of *truth*, *justice* and the *American way*. I smile when she notices me.

"What is it Sarah? Do you need something from me?"

That's what it always comes down to for her, isn't it? An issue of material, practical, need. I still can't wrap my head around the idea that I actually came from this artless woman or that I was once part of her. It's both strange and undeniable.

"No mother, I don't need anything. I just wanted to take a look at you."

She gives me that typical cockeyed, raised-eyebrow, glance. I've lost count of how many of those I've gotten from her over the years.

"What's there to look at? You're such an impractical girl, Sarah. You should be looking for someone to share your life with. Not at your mother."

I wouldn't expect anything less from her. Mother just wouldn't be herself if she wasn't always giving everyone her personal brand of unsolicited advice. She's just as she should be so I leave. It's time to finish this with the final, most significant character. Unlike the first, more simple two, he proves far more difficult to find. Of course he has to be a pain in the ass... That's exactly like him, and so very appropriate.

I'm forced to search through every room twice. Even then I still can't find him. It's only when I'm about to give up that he himself finds me. What a loser! I bet he's been sneaking around, watching me this whole time, just waiting for the perfect moment to reveal himself.

"Fancy running into you here, babygirl. You're being a bit mean to your mom and younger brother. We both know that they'd never understand the game you're playing."

I just have to say it. I should know better by now but I have to.

"You're such a stalker, dad. Admit it, you've been watching me all day, haven't you?"

He chuckles lightly before giving me an evasive — yet suggestive — answer.

"Who knows? That's for you to decide."

This'll take forever if I let it. So there's nothing to do but skip straight to the end out of sheer necessity.

“Whatever, dad. Anyway, I’ve got some good news for you. I know you’ll be satisfied by it, being the gross perv that you are.”

I can see the interest; the excitement, welling up in his eyes. He already knows what I’m about to tell him, because he knows everything, but he’s still burning with anticipation. He’s not going to say anything so I can hurry up and tell him what he wants to hear already.

“Congratulations dad, you won. I’ve got the little parasite you asked for growing inside me. His or her father is as just as much of a freak as you. In spirit you are the father, so in commemoration of that fact I’ll name him Oedipus or her Elektra.”

Jimmy Dawn Ambrose

“Take care of yourself Jimmy. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

She’s too kind to me. Just like everyone else in my life. I don’t deserve her right now, but I can’t stop myself from depending on her kindness.

“I hope not, we really should stop doing this at such an inappropriate time. Thank you anyway though.”

She smiles knowingly. She understands exactly how futile my attempts at denying her are, and clearly knows that I’ll be right back here tomorrow because I can’t stop. I need her right now even if I’m too ashamed to admit it. We both know that. To show me exactly how well she understands all of this, she pulls me in and plants a kiss on my lips. I can’t resist despite how desperately I want to. After an agonizingly long instant she pulls away, leaving me to awkwardly shamle off into the night.

I hate myself. This isn’t who I am. It’s not who I’m supposed to be! My reason for being, the purpose I’ve been given; is to be the brilliant shining light for all my friends and loved ones. A bright,

gentle sun that's meant to warm and reassure them, especially in the most troubled of times. That's when I should be burning all the more intensely for their sake. I positively know that this is my god given purpose in life. There's no other path for me to follow.

So why am I doing this? It doesn't make any sense at all. Right now I need to be reassuring and comforting my parents, but all I can give them are forced smiles and hollow platitudes. I'm spending more time and energy on wallowing in my own pain. I've become addicted to the kindness being lavished upon me rather than being the one to give it to others. I'm the worst! Why do I have to be this way? Is it really so hard for me to become what I need to be, and what the world itself has asked for me to be?

I should be going back home now but I can't face any of them like this. It's just too disgraceful, this disgusting present state of mine. There's no choice, I'll have to find some godforsaken corner of this city to hide out in until I can regain at least some semblance of normality. I'll stay in whatever wretched hole I find myself in until the morning if that's what it takes to overcome this dreadful feeling.

Slowly I make my way towards the nearest train station.

Where I'll go or what I'll do there are trifles that don't concern me right now. I just need to escape; from my feelings, from Matt's ghost, from my family, and from myself most of all. Motion, I have to stay in motion or it'll all catch up to me. When it does I'll just hate myself even more. It's a battle I'm doomed to lose but I have to try. I have to fight, and I absolutely need to reclaim what I'm supposed to be. Once I'm seated my mind goes blank for several minutes.

The train has moved for what seems like a considerable distance when I get off. I don't recognize this street, there's no doubt in my mind that I've never been in this desolate corner of town before. That's good, because I shouldn't be around anyone right now. Solitude seems like the right medicine for this sickness I've contracted.

That's what I try to do but it fails. As I wander through the artificially lit streets, I end up in the only populated segment of this forlorn segment of the city, which should have been forgotten by god

himself. I accept how futile the endeavor was, and resign myself to my incapability. This is a fate I can't avoid.

If this is how it's going to be then I'll face it head on. I'll throw myself into the pity party with everything I've got. After all, if I can't avoid it no matter how desperately I try to I might as well make the most of it. I see a coffee shop so I go in and order a drink. It takes forever for the lone barista to make it. When he gives it to me I take a sip. This is the worst coffee I've ever had, and that's a good thing. I don't deserve anything delicious or even palatable now. Hungrily, needily, I gulp down the pitch black reproach as if the fate of my mortal soul rests on my ability to consume it.

I feel like I'm going to puke but I can't let myself take such an easy way out of this. I won't make any progress if I just keep running away from everything. So this, at the very least, is something that I must endure. The man behind the counter winces at me.

"Take it easy there, kid. You don't wanna be gulping that stuff down so fast-like. It'll wreck yer insides if ya guzzle it down

that way. You've gotta know it's that bad if the gy who made it is givin ya a warning like that."

This man's odd lack of business sense is strangely endearing. Though he definitely isn't lying or even slightly exaggerating, I feel as if I've just poured the contents of hell itself down my throat. That's exactly what I wanted, no, needed, right now. Maybe god led me here so that I could receive the liquid attrition that I've been so desperately seeking?

"Thank you for your concern sir, but I really like this coffee. I wouldn't change a thing about it."

He smirks.

"Heh, you've got jokes don'tcha kid? If ya like it so much I can give ya a whole gallon of the shit. Lord knows no one else comes in here talkin bout likin this sewage."

I don't quite understand what he's saying. It must be a cultural difference, speaking of that I'm starting to notice something off about this place. It doesn't feel quite "real". Nothing particularly unusual has happened so far but there's a subtle sense of

“wrongness” to it. Take the décor of the place for instance: All sorts of clocks litter the walls. They range from ancient, priceless looking works of art, to kitschy mass-produced garbage. This neighborhood doesn’t seem like the kind of place where anyone should be able to afford a collection that prolific and display it without fear of it being stolen. The man notices me looking at his clocks.

“Admirin my collection are ya? You can’t imagine how long it took me to get all these. Calling it an eternity would be an understatement. Ya can admire em all ya want but I’m gonna hafta whup yo ass if ya plan on makin off with one. They are all for sale though, so if ya got the cash I’ll part with one.”

This guy too, there’s something strange about him. I haven’t really thought about it until now, but he’s the weirdest part of the place. The way he talks is the main problem. No one talks like this anywhere. It’s a mishmash of various stereotypical speech patterns that no one would use together at the same time. I’m beginning to wonder where I am and what I’m even doing here, but honestly I don’t think those things matter all that much. For whatever reason, I have to be here right now, so I’ll just take in the experience without

attempting to question or rationalize it. I look at the clocks again and find one that catches my eye. It's strangely normal compared to the rest of them. It looks well-made but with a really typical design you can find anywhere. I point to it and ask.

“How much for that one?”

He scratches his chin, regarding the clock in question.

“I dunno kid, you can find ones like this anywhere but this specific one is one of a kind. It might jus be a lil too rich fo yo blood, know what I mean?”

That won't do, something tells me I need this clock. I'll have to give him everything and anything I can scrounge up to get it. I take everything out of my pockets and place it on the table. My wallet phone and everything else on me is part of the pile.

“How about that? It's everything I have on me right now. If it's still not enough you can keep my IDs and credit cards as collateral while I go back home and get more money.”

He stares at me and laughs.

“Boy, you is wild n’ out. It doesn’t matter what kind of white man voodoo you try to pull here. You just don’t have enough. I’ll let you look at it while you’re her but you can’t keep it.”

It’s unfortunate but he’s absolutely right. There’s a certain “priceless” quality to all of these clocks, even the cheapest looking ones. All the money in the world wouldn’t be enough to buy any of them. They’re for sale but it takes something more valuable than money to buy them. I bet dad would be able to cheat this poor guy out of all these clocks if he somehow found his way here. It’s a good thing that dad would never come to a place like this.

Since it’s all I can afford, I take him up on his offer. Simply staring at the clock, I take in everything about it that my senses can absorb. What I’m looking for is simple. I’m trying to find whatever it is about the clock that’s so compelling to me. It’s on the tip of my tongue but still infinitely distant. No matter how close I come to the thought it feels like it’ll always elude my grasp. The only thing I can tell for sure is that there’s something nostalgic about it. Though at the same time that makes me feel silly because this sensation, the essence of this clock, is something I should have only known in

passing. Besides, I'm way too young to be getting nostalgic about anything.

At some point a man comes through the door. My attention automatically shifts from the clock to him. Not because he distracted me from it but because they feel as though they're one and the same. It wouldn't be strange in a place like this if this man only came here because I looked at that clock. At first I'm not really sure what makes him so captivating, just like the clock that's his counterpart, but after a few seconds it clicks. I know this man, or knew him. That shouldn't be possible though, even in this reliquary of time he should no longer exist in this world.

After taking a closer look at him I understand. He isn't the man I thought he was, in actuality he's merely a blank slate that I've projected the image of that man onto. An artificial phantasm conjured up by my needy mind. I'm starting to understand the true meaning of this journey. There's nothing left to do here, I need to move on to the next part already. I turn to the proprietor.

"Thank you sir, this is a really nice place you've got here."

He gives me a toothy smile. His gold and platinum teeth resemble piano keys.

“Anyone who likes the swill I serve is always welcome. Now go home already boy. Your parents must be freaking out by now.”

I shake my head.

“I’m sorry to do that to them but there’s one more place I need to go to first.”

Exiting the mysterious establishment, I make my way down a winding side street. I’m not supposed to know where it’ll lead but somehow I understand. With perfect timing, I end up at a park on top of a hill. Though there never was the whole time, now more than ever, there’s no reason to question anything about this experience. The only thing that’s left to do is finish taking it in. I find a bench at the zenith of the hill and lie down. The night, this mystically profound night, is almost at an end. In a few minutes (or maybe even seconds) it will give way to the day as it always does. I stare up into the changing sky losing awareness of everything else. The sunrise’s brilliantly warm colors fill me with all sorts of feelings and

sensations which I can't describe. A single tear wells up in my right eye.

Facebook Memorial Page

Amanda Brian posted

thanks for evrything Matt. u were thee greatest. u were and
hero to us all.

Ryan Adams posted

RIP bud. It was nice noing u.

Brian Federer posted

Its sad to lose someone as great and generous as you. But I'm
sure your in a better place now. RIP

Bonnie Boitano posted

Ill miss u matt. RIP

Jebediah lolkowski posted

RIPIP sweet prince

Annamarie Suess posted

Farewell, my dear. Though we are now apart, our eternal love will forever bind us together in spirit. Wait for me wherever you are and I'll be there soon enough.

Sei Jaw posted

I'm sorry... Who are you exactly? I was a close friend of Matt's and I never even heard of you until now.

xXxY0l0SwaGGodxXx posted

who deded???

Annamarie Suess posted

@Sei Jaw: He was merely overwhelmed by the intensity of our torrid passion for one another. Of course he would be unable to publically speak of our fated union.

@ xXxY0l0SwaGGodxXx: Silence, you verminous cretin!
He was a man far greater than a bottom feeding lowlife such as you could ever hope to be!

xXxY0l0SwaGGodxXx posted

whatevs hoe u just fiendin for that ded dudes dick bitches be
thirsty

bunk master drecks posted

Leave her alone, the poor girl is mourning “thee greatest and
hero.” And what woman wouldn’t? Surely, it’d take a god among
men to earn two appellations suggesting such incredible status, let
alone a single one!

White is Right posted

Jews did WTC Jews did Charlie Hebdo Jews did the
subprime mortgage crisis Jews did Occupy Wall Street Jews did ISIS
and Jews did Ambrose

Read all about it on my tumblr

Beware the Red Dragon posted

Naw man, the jews is just pawns. It’s really the chinks
running the show.

Malik Irie posted

Jews, Asians, and you white devils are all nothing. When Jah Rastafari returns you'll all be slaves to us.

Felix Jones posted

You're all wrong. It was the hollow Earth lizardman Empire pulling the strings all along. We humans must unite or we'll never free ourselves from their iron grip.

Clarice Ambrose posted

Shut the fuck up, all of you! How many of you actually even knew Matt? No one gives a shit about your retarded conspiracy theories or sad attempts at looking cool online. If you don't have anything to actually say about him just get the fuck out of here.

xXxY0l0SwaGG0dxXx posted

calm down shawty all u need is a good fuck and none of these clowns wil mater lol

Clarice Ambrose posted

You too, who the fuck are you anyway?

The 69th Chamber posted

He's the greatest and hero you deserve but not the one you
need right now

Chad Weisskinder posted

Yeah! The dark gnat rises!

Sei Gwai Lo posted

He's a big guy... For you.

Mattster Leaf posted

I'm still in a dream...

Look over there posted

Look over there

Sei Dailo posted

You kids need to grow up already. Your parents don't want
to be wiping your asses for your entire lives.

Billy Milton posted

I'm 12 and what is this?

Mississippi Charles posted

It's a crying shame

Alabama Carlson posted

A complete disgrace

Bison Will posted

To the human race

Foolman posted

The darkness of the universe

Simon Simian posted

A Weapon Of Peace

Douchecartes posted

I don't think therefore I am not.

The Black Goat's Egg posted

It's beautiful because it's ugly.

Terrence Semen Huffman posted

lmao

Jerry From Accounting

The day has finally come. It is a day I both dreaded and anticipated; a day that will surely live on in infamy. Everything — has — to be flawless so I go over my plans several more times before lighting a bundle of old newspapers on fire in my trashcan and heading outside. It certainly is regrettable that things have to be this way. However, recent events have left me with no alternatives. The packages I've sent to the various media outlets should probably arrive sometime tomorrow morning. As I make my way to the location, I stop to ponder the irony of the fate which has led me down this path.

Thinking back to the beginning of it all, it's clearly that dreadful incident. That Ambrose kid from the office suddenly became a celebrity overnight. Not because of anything he did or said; simply due to the way he died. That's when the wheels in my cobwebbed brain began turning for the first time in decades. If that's all it takes these days, why shouldn't I get my five minutes of fame as well? Those ridiculous men in Canada, Australia, and France all did it too. What does it matter if they actually believed in the so-called ideologies they were supposedly doing it for? Results are the

only thing that matter. Even if my putative motive is a jumbled up assortment of random nonsense (from books or the internet) so long as it helps me get what I'm after that's good enough for me.

Besides, those supposedly high-minded ideologies are nothing but bullshit anyway. Whether they claim to be doing it for God, for Country, or what-have-you, it's all a lie. What they're all truly seeking, every last sanctimonious one of them, is simply, attention. Those talking heads on the 24 hour news networks can keep chattering away till they're blue in the face but that's what it always ultimately comes down to.

And me? I'm no different from the rest of them. But at least I'm more honest about my true intentions and desires. There's this one quote I vaguely recall. The precise wording and source elude me but it resonates with me on a truly profound level. I believe it was something along the lines of "By transitioning from a living *death* to a dead *life* the motiveless mass murderer becomes the martyr of postmodernism." In other words; the five minutes of fame I'll get are as sublime and perfect to me as those supposedly lofty ideals or

seventy two virgins or whatever other rewards of self-destructive *virtue* people have traditionally sought.

I make my way into the Starbucks. They let just about anyone go in and use the restrooms at most of their locations since they're too busy catering to the idiotic hipsters to care. This is it. The perfect place for the meaningless message I'm about to send. Starbucks is the most obvious symbol of everything that's wrong with our society; a fake, watered-down, imitation of a coffee shop meant to attract the sorts of equally empty-minded fools who fancy themselves visionaries, humanitarians, or — worst of all — *artistes*. It's the nexus for all the most vapid and disingenuous aspects of modern day western civilization. I can think of no better place from which to make my so-called *stand*.

After going into the restroom and locking the door, I sit down on the toilet. Slowly, deliberately, methodically, I open the suitcase. Inside its crushed velvet interior, sits the Kalashnikov I've managed to obtain from my sojourn into the less savory part of the city. I could have just as easily purchased a legal weapon but this is one specifically is symbolic. I absolutely need to do this properly. Before

I go through with it it's only logical that I breathe in the air around my poetically significant instrument of ironic *justice*. Picking up the entire suitcase, I hold it close and inhale deeply. *Yes...* This is it. This is exactly what I need to complete this counter-intuitive quest. It will undoubtedly shepherd me through this exercise in meaningless meaning which I'm about to undertake. Much like the Balinese Cock Fighter, I'll be-

“Hey buddy! Can you speed it up in there? I'm about to shit myself!”

Ok that does it, change of plans. I was going to take this place hostage and maybe kill one or two of them before the police got me but why bother? If they won't even allow me to complete a simple train of thought I'll just murder the shit out of the uncultured hipster swine right now. With my instrument at the ready I violently fling the door open. All eyes must surely be on me right now.

“What the hell man!? What are you-“

I shoot before he has the chance to continue. My aim is surely true so there's no need to confirm whether I hit my mark or not. Paying no heed to the screams and ensuing chaos I fire

indiscriminately while making my way to the lone combined entrance and exit. As I'm making my escape I hear a shot from behind me. It merely grazes my arm but the emotional shock is severe. I thought these dirty hipsters were supposed to all be liberal pro-gun control propagandists. How dare they dash my expectations so cruelly!? I quickly turn around and spray my remaining rounds in the direction of the shot.

“Take that you little shits! You vapid mindless *sheeple*! You're what's wrong with this *world*! All of *you*!”

My “heroic” deeds seem to have attracted a crowd of onlookers. They stare at me like the cattle they are. Ejecting my magazine, I load a new one. It's a rehearsed act I perform with gusto, having lovingly practiced all sorts of things with this soviet made tool of poetic retribution as soon as I had purchased it. Just for form, I fire several shots into the crowd before once again escaping. At this point I must have left a mountain of corpses in my wake. Although my original plan called for more grand measures, perhaps it's about time to wrap this up after all? The sounds of approaching sirens make this seem like an increasingly judicious course of action.

Since I now know exactly what I must do, the next order of business is finding an appropriate venue for my glorious final stand. There isn't much time so I ruthlessly lower my standards out of necessity and choose the tallest building in sight. The feeble lock is no match for my bullets. I quickly ascend the stairs within the building, reaching the roof. Looking at the street below I see that the police have already made their appearance. One particularly fat donut addled pig steps out of his vehicle with a loudspeaker.

"This is the NYPD. We have you surrounded. Lay down your weapon and turn yourself in. No one else has to get hurt."

Stepping onto the ledge, I defiantly face the pack of domesticated pigs. Who would give up this late into the game!? This is the final movement! My most sublime, expertly-staged, tableau! I prepare to give my final speech before ending it all. They obviously won't be able to hear me but the futility of the act will only serve to increase the depth of its metaphorical purpose.

"Listen up! Clean out your ears and pay attention! This is a message to all the *mindless sheeple* and *overfed swine* out there! Every last one of you is a *worthless oxygen thief* who doesn't

deserve the life they've been blessed with! If I had my way, I'd *nuke* this entire planet to hell and back! There's no peace, justice, love, friendship, or anything of value whatsoever on this entire *miserable rock*! It's all a hideous lie! You're merely fooling yourselves! Capitalism, Communism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Scientology, and even that cult of the almighty hollow Earth lizardman empire... They're all absolutely worthless blights on our minds and souls! Unlike you *vermin* I'm taking a *stand* against it all today! Soon I will finally escape all such folly once and for all! May my act of *subversion* inspire all of you to soon follow in my footsteps! Fare thee well, you cancerous *fiends*!"

Having perfectly recited my idiotic bit of gibberish I feel completely satisfied for one glorious fleeting instant in my miserable life. There's only one thing left to do now. I, the lead actor, must make my exit in a suitably farcical, melodramatic, manner. Only then will the act finally be complete. To that end I turn my instrument around, insert it into my mouth, and play the Final Note.

"We now have breaking news on the bizarre shooting spree in midtown Manhattan. We are just receiving word that the shooter

has turned his weapon on himself, ending this truly strange incident. Miraculously, only two people have been injured and there are no fatalities as of the time of this report. For those just tuning in we're going to replay the chilling recording sent to us and all the other major news agencies. Some people have criticized the publication of these kinds of materials but we here at CNN believe that there's a need to analyze them. If it gives us more insight into these individuals and their motivations, it may allow us to prevent such tragedies from occurring in the future.

But before that we need to properly establish the context for what we are about to show you. We now turn to our expert criminologist Anthony Weiss to help us do just that.”

“Thank you Carol, it's a pleasure to be joining you here this morning despite the circumstances.”

“Likewise Anthony, so how would you describe the mind of this man given what we currently know about his actions and beliefs? He said a lot of bizarre and disturbed things in the materials he sent out.”

“Well Carol it may be somewhat early to make those kinds of judgments right now. There’s a lot we still don’t know about this.”

“But you must have some idea. Can you at least give us a preliminary assessment?”

“This is all very premature and incomplete, but my first impression is that he was a self-styled “lone wolf” terrorist in the strictest sense of the term. Rather than being radicalized by any existing group or ideology, he self-radicalized using a set of beliefs he came up with and integrated on his own. Even more so than the ISIS inspired attacks in Canada and Australia last year, he was a true “lone wolf” type terrorist due to the ultra-specific, personalized, nature of his antisocial beliefs.”

“So you would still consider him a terrorist rather than a more typical spree shooter? What’s the difference between the two in your expert opinion?”

“You see, Carol, the main factor that separates the two is their motive. A spree shooter’s only goal is to vent their frustration or lash out against a world which they feel wronged by.”

“Right and how do a terrorist’s motives differ from that?”

“Yes, I was just getting to that. Unlike a spree shooter slash killer, a terrorist commits their criminal act or acts as a means to an end rather than as the end itself. In the mind of a terrorist, their crimes are vindicated by what they see as an evil world which they’re waging a holy war against. This extends beyond the mentality of jihadists and also applies to those such as fundamentalist Christians who bomb abortion clinics. Essentially, any time a person believes that their cause justifies an extreme, socially-unacceptable, act they can be classified as a “terrorist” element.”

“I see. That’s all the time we have right now so we’ll have to end this discussion here. Thank you for your analysis as always.”

“No problem Carol, I’m always glad to be here.”

Try new exreze BNR. The number one male enhancing formula on the market today! Get it before it’s banned for being too effective.

The historic performance of a lifetime... You won't want to miss this groundbreaking music event. Call Ticketmaster today before it's too late.

Try new exreze BNR. The number one male enhancing formula on the market today! Get it before it's banned for being too effective.

“Hello citizens of the world one and all. Or more appropriately; *mindless* shit-regurgitating *sheeple* of the world. I know CNN or MSNBC or Fox will play at least some portion of this. The prevailing *ideology* of today's society is against giving people like me what they want — but I know the promise of *ratings* will prove too difficult for those gluttonous *piglets* to resist. At any rate, I have a message for all of you shit-eating *ideologues*. It's quite simple, really; *Kill* yourselves. *Kill* your lovers, your spouses, your parents, your children, your grandchildren, and etcetera. Just *kill* everyone around you and when there's no one else left to *kill*, *kill* yourselves too.

This world is a cesspit — a cancer riddled living *corpse* pathetically clinging to an agonizing and meaningless *existence*.

Money, celebrity status, and false sentiments are the only things that any of you malignant *tumors* value. There is no longer any room for genuine or original thought anywhere on this blue *space rock* of ours. It is not I, nor those who will understand me who are the insane ones; but those who will reject these words you're hearing out of some misguided and disturbed sense of *morality*. Open your eyes, for you have been deceived by the glitz and glamor of this *fucked up* world!

Ultimately, I will be remembered as a terrorist, or likened to those vapid sacks of shit over at ISIS, but none of that matters. I and those who have the sense to comprehend my message will know that we were ultimately *right*. In the end it shall be humanity's self-induced down downfall which vindicates our beliefs. *Rejoice*, my brethren — for the time of our validation is at hand! Be it thermonuclear war or a natural disaster such as a supernova, meteorite, or global warming, it shall ultimately bring us victory over the *ignorant masses*.

Although we will have perished by our own hands in a more dignified manner by then, the inevitable extinction of humanity shall

be the one and only holiday we require. There will be no more thinly veiled commercialism, false sentimentality, or foolishly masturbatory ticker tape parades which have been embalmed in napalm, and are attended by silicone soldiers clad in Versace fatigues. There will only be the significance, satisfaction, and undeniable validation that will come with knowing *we* were right; that we have vanquished all the lies fed to us by this *shitty* world! Rejoice one and all! Indulge in one final display of excess and opulence! For mankind's days are numbered — and that is a most *joyous* occasion indeed!”

Sing Look

This is a tough one. It's a really delicate issue; one which needs to be handled with the utmost care. I don't mind a challenge though. Any opportunity to prove myself is something I'm thankful for. This is so much more than that though. More than being a practical or pragmatic issue, it's a battle of ideals. That's what it's been turned into both by the man who committed the crime itself and the media's current obsession with him. More than any marketing campaign I've been a part of so far, this one finally means something.

It's as simple as it is complicated. I'm in charge of building up a marketing campaign that will make the public feel like buying more Starbucks coffee will make a difference in the world in the context of the recent incident at a midtown location. No one besides the shooter died, but there were shots fired and a few injuries. Upper management decided to capitalize on this *horrific* incident by integrating it into the next marketing campaign. They chose me to spearhead this effort.

At long last — this — will finally determine whether I make it in this industry or not. If I succeed, I'll have it made. If I fail it'll be back to flipping burgers for me. I'll be the most overqualified McDonald's employee ever. But I'll definitely deserve it if I manage to blow a golden opportunity like this. It's fine though, I'm always great under pressure. It's how I've gotten this far in the first place. Without exaggerating even slightly, I can honestly say that I've got nerves of steel.

I'll do what I usually do for ideas in these situations. It's really simple. Somehow it always seems to work though. Basically I go out and look; for the weirdest looking bum or run-of-the-mill degenerate I can find. I treat them to whatever it is they want — which is typically some combination of booze, drugs, food, or sex — then when they feel all cozy and talkative, I just ask a few questions and jot down their replies.

I started doing this out of sheer boredom but it was surprisingly effective — so effective, in fact, that I made it my go-to source for ideas. For some strange reason these bums always manage to come up with ideas that people love more than any other ones. Of

course they're also completely insane, so the ideas need a tiny bit of cleaning up and refining before they become presentable. My theory is that their ideas are outlandish enough to feel refreshing, yet uneducated enough to feel down to earth. Whatever the actual reason for this working so well is, the fact of the matter is that bums have become an inexhaustible goldmine for me.

There are always different places to look for the right bum. Here in New York City I've found the subway system to be the best most reliable place. The Q train in particular, seems to attract the Best and Brightest skulls this city has to offer. I'm not really sure why that is, but it's convenient for my purposes. I've got about two weeks so there's no pressing need to find one right away, but I do like to find the perfect one early on. I like to maintain a reasonable pace at each step of the process so I'm not rushing at any point.

It's pretty early but the competition is already heating up. That one looks too crazy; he might be a schizo. That one's no good either; he stinks too much. That one's a woman — despite being a woman myself — I don't really know how to deal with she-bums. There he is! The perfect one. I might be cheating a little with this

one actually. But that's not a big deal. If he's just crazy enough it shouldn't matter if he technically doesn't seem to be homeless.

Now comes the hard part. Earning their trust is always an awkward process but this one seems slightly more normal than most of them though so it may not be that bad this time around.

“Hey there, what's that book you're reading? It looks interesting.”

From the surprised “you're actually talking to me?” look on his face, I can tell this is the kind of guy that women only look at as an amusingly grotesque curiosity, if at all. It's definitely sex he'll be after — I'd bet my bottom dollar on it.

“This? It's called “Idylls of the Glopp”.”

It's impossible not to laugh at the nonsensical title of the book. If he reads this kind of crap, he really has to be perfect. I'll take it slowly. This might seem suspicious enough to scare him away if I don't build a rapport with him first. The more lucid ones can be annoying in that way.

“What's it about? Is it any good?”

He looks flustered now. Maybe it's a dirty or embarrassing book?

"Well... It's kinda hard to describe. The way it's written is difficult to pin down. Though yeah, I really like it a lot."

It's definitely perverted. It has to be. I mean, why else would he have so much trouble describing it when it looks like he's three fourths of the way through the thing? At the same time it's probably pretentious too. Like one of those ridiculous pornos that pretends at being high art. That makes my new friend here a "classy" pervert. Those can be a hassle if their tastes are too exacting. I'll need to probe him a bit more deeply before making my move.

"Can you at least describe what you like about it? It sounds complicated but I'm really curious now."

He seems happy that I'm paying attention to him. Good, maybe he'll be easy to deal with after all. After thinking for a couple of minutes or so he answers.

"If I had to try describing what I like about it, it'd probably be the silly subject matter being woven into a dream-like, larger than

life experience. It makes you feel like this stuff is beautiful and magical in spite of how dumb and absurd it blatantly is.”

That’s somewhat difficult to interpret. Most of the bums I typically deal with are fixated on religion or politically charged conspiracy theories. I don’t have enough experience with the *artistically* inclined literary ones. But whatever, he seems happy enough already. I’m sure I’ll be able to figure out exactly what he wants sooner or later. All I need to do now is get him to come with me and the rest will work itself out.

“I see. Maybe it’d be easier to continue this conversation somewhere more private? Would you mind coming with me?”

That’s strange, he’s been so pliable this whole time but suddenly he’s hesitating. This guy must have a paranoid side to him after all. In this case though, he’s not wrong to be suspicious. I really am out to use him. But it’ll be an equivalent exchange, so he’ll get whatever he wants out of it as well. Maybe he’s wondering if it really will be that equivalent? Damn, this guy’s a lot more trouble than I thought he’d be. This better be worth it. After several minutes, he makes his decision.

“Yeah sure, let’s go.”

Really? Just like that? That’s an oddly decisive way to answer after such a long period of indecision.

“Alright, but aren’t you curious about where I’m taking you or what we’re going to do there?”

He chuckles.

“A little, but honestly it doesn’t matter. I don’t care if you’re planning to chop me up into pieces and feed them to your dogs. It feels like no matter how good or bad the outcome of this will be, it’ll be an interesting experience.”

Woah... He’s an even bigger pervert than I assumed he was. Those words scare me a little. But on the other hand, he’s the one giving up control here. I should be the more dangerous one under these circumstances. Yeah, I’m the big bad stranger-with-candy and he’s the weird little kid who doesn’t mind getting diddled for some sweets — even though he knows that’s exactly what’s going to happen. The thought of that is amusing so I smile at him while imagining the bizarre soup of thoughts in that scruffy head of his.

The trip was fairly short, though it somehow felt longer than it was. Maybe my desire to crack open that skull and partake in its intoxicating, fermented, contents was overpowering my sense of time? Either way, we soon arrive at the hotel. I picked the most overpriced and impractical one in the city because he might appreciate the patent absurdity of using this place the way one might use a sleazy hooker motel. There's no need to play any more games, so I tell him exactly what I intend to do.

“Ok, now that we're alone I'll tell you why I brought you here. I'm a marketing executive and this is how I get my ideas; I use weird, unhinged-looking, guys — like you. I'm not usually this upfront about all of this but I think you might appreciate the exact nature of this arrangement. You seem like the kind of guy who'd get off on it.”

He smiles. Yeah, he's definitely into this.

“Well if all these guys are really that much like me, I'm sure they expect *something* in return for their *services*. What are you willing to offer me for mine?”

So he understands! Good, that should make things simple.

“Ah yes, I was just getting to that. I’m willing to *compensate* you in a variety of ways. Most of your *associates* typically take their *payments* in the form of money, drugs, booze, men, women, girls, boys, or any number of other things and people. Do any of those sound good to you?”

His grin takes on a somewhat sinister edge. From the starved look in his eyes I think we both already know exactly what he wants.

“I noticed that you left one thing out of your examples. Would it be ok if I asked for something a bit more outrageous?”

At first I don’t entirely get what he’s talking about but then the pieces fall into place. His eyes betray his intent. What a greedy man he is!

“I think I know what you want but I’m not going to give it to you unless you beg for it. It’s only appropriate for you to make a request that shameless in an equally shameless way.”

The warped, crooked, grin on his face widens even more. He’s all mine now; mine to use, abuse, and throw away like

yesterday's garbage once I've gotten what I need out of him. He grabs my ass, putting on the lewd spectacle I requested.

“Can I have you? I'll ask however you want me to.”

I already knew what he was going to say, but that only serves to increase the weight of those words. How utterly needy and sleazy can this man be? He can have anything in exchange for being used, but the only thing he wants is for me to whore myself out to him, not only in body, but in mind and spirit as well. This man would have me prostitute this very moment in time and space — just so he can live out one of his ridiculous *idylls*. That's fine by me. If that's the price I, and the world itself must pay, so be it. I'll be sure to make it as fleeting, transient, and freakish as he needs it to be.

“Sure, just remember that I'm going to take exactly as much as I give. Be prepared to hold up your end of the bargain as soon as you've had your wacky little *idyll* with me.”

He simply nods. After that we begin our farcical, greedy, exchange. It's difficult to tell. Who's the user and who's the one being used? Is he my temporary master, or am I his ephemeral

slaver? Whatever the case may be, this is a moment which will never begin or end in spite of its inherent impermanence.

Lucius Belichick

“I see. Very interesting.”

“But what should we do, sir? We’ve got enough evidence to put him away for a long time. Isn’t this the perfect time to act? What would the point of everything I’ve done be if we didn’t make our move now?”

What a tactless man. This is exactly why I’m in charge and guys like this spend their entire lives running errands for chump change. They simply lack the — vision — to make effective decisions. Their judgment is far too short-sighted and unoriginal.

“No, just keep watching him. There’s no reason to do anything as drastic as what you’re hinting at. If you follow my orders there never will be such a need either. Just watch. You’ll see that I’m right. I’m always right.”

He rolls his eyes, or I suppose eye in this case, since he wears an eye patch over the right one.

“Fine, whatever. You’re the one shelling out all this cash for my services. I just thought I’d give you your money’s worth. If that’s all you want for today I’ll be taking my leave now *Mr. Mayor*.”

He finishes his cigar then saunters out of my office. Although he’s an artless man through and through, there’s something mysterious about this *Captain Jackson*. Perhaps the reason I can allow myself to trust him with my dirty work is his decidedly untrustworthy nature? At any rate, that’s enough about the hired help. All he’s done was confirm the obvious facts everyone was already aware of.

Detective O’Reilly is quite an amusing man. He must’ve been so proud of himself when he came up with all those droll parlor tricks. I’d be willing to bet good money on that. The look which must’ve been on his face when he sold it all to his partner has to have been priceless as well. I can’t wait to see what sort of face he’ll show me when he finally understands that I saw through it all from the start, and is directly confronted with that undeniable fact.

Those two men who had this office before me would most likely be tearing out tufts of their rapidly thinning hair if they were

faced with a situation like this. I however, live and breathe for these kinds of games. And that is their quintessential nature; no matter how seriously people take the idea of politics it's nothing but a silly, overblown, children's game. Only the most obtuse fools take any of it seriously. It is a game that one must play to win — to be sure — but unless there's an aspect of entertainment; of fun involved, winning isn't possible. Cheating just makes things more amusing by adding another dimension to the diversion. There's no art to cheating out of desperation, but cheating to stay at the top, especially when one doesn't even need to, is one of the most rewarding aspects of it all.

I suppose that's also the difference between men such as Pat O'Reilly and me; they only think of surviving, or in the event of survival being impossible — avenging themselves. That's far too narrow-minded. Whatever animal cunning they may possess is wasted on those who are too self-defeating to truly benefit from it. Despite their failings, their existence is still something to be grateful for because toying with those paranoid schemers never gets old.

The preparations have all been made. There's not much left to do now. As boring as these moments are, they're ultimately necessary. Taking a step back from it all never hurts. There's always something to be gained through the act of reassessing everything from a different perspective. With a situation like this, there's never a shortage of new angles and elements which make themselves apparent only when everything is flipped upside down. No matter how many times I do it, I never fail to find a new nugget which had previously been hidden.

Since I'm bored right now, I'll do it one final time. As far as I'm concerned this is the closing act. Everything that happens after this point is merely something extra. So this one last time, as one of the principal actors, I'll examine it all over again from one of those unexplored angles. The only place to start when dealing with a case such as this is at the very beginning. That approach may seem overly conventional, but it's necessary when dealing with these things.

Here are the facts: Matthew Asher Ambrose died on February 28th 2015. Detectives Patrick O'Reilly and his partner Danny Rivera were the ones assigned to this case. They eventually

closed their investigation, stating that they found no evidence contradicting the Medical Examiner's initial assertion that the death was accidental. Over the course of the investigation, a series of people claiming to be eyewitnesses came forward with their own statements. Their versions of the events differed on various key points but were all somewhat similar to one another overall. Coinciding with their testimony, a conspiracy-theory filled online documentary titled "Skating on Thin Ice" was released anonymously. In spite of these developments, the case was soon closed and the matter appeared to have been put to rest.

Then on April 1st 2015, a tangentially related incident occurred. One of the deceased's coworkers, an accountant whose last name eludes me at the moment, went on a shooting spree before committing suicide. Although no one died except for him, the incident was fairly controversial. It sparked a wide array of debates in the public arena. They were — as such debates always seem to be — ultimately fruitless, but they happened. What's important about this though, is the conversation brought the death of Matthew Ambrose back to the public's attention; resurrecting the

demagoguery and politicking which were supposed to have died down once the investigation was closed.

Now, from my perspective, that was a good thing because I enjoy the disingenuous posturing that comes with matters such as these. However, when considering the perspective of someone such as Pat O'Reilly, it all takes on a completely different character. To a man as paranoid and shiftier as the detective this must all be a complete nightmare.

For one thing, he went through all that trouble to confuse the Ambrose investigation. That was smart of him. He must have realized how precarious his position was. Crooked cops like Pat O'Reilly always make easy sacrificial offerings to the court of public opinion. That *documentary* he cooked up, the *leaks* to the press, as well as the parade of bums he put up to acting as *witnesses*; all of it was bullshit. It was obvious to me that all of it was his doing from the start. My associate *Captain Jackson* simply observed Pat and his partner in secret while they hatched, discussed, and finally enacted their plots. He collected evidence of all the naughty, naughty, things they were up to when they assumed no one was watching. On that

note, the *Captain* certainly does deserve credit for his proficiency at espionage. Given Pat's extreme paranoia, *Captain Jackson* would have to be truly gifted to avoid all those suspicions and gather so much detailed intel, but I digress.

The overall point is simply that this is an altogether unpleasant situation for the poor detective. He'll be on edge, which will make him that much easier to screw with. That alone is the sole purpose of this dog and pony show I'm putting on today. It'll throw everyone — Pat O'Reilly most of all — for a loop. Through this I'll be opening all sorts of future possibilities. There's a vast, untapped, reservoir of potential here that no one else sees. Neither Pat, nor the *Captain*, and certainly not that psychotic dead accountant, or poor little Matt Ambrose. This'll be great.

I was so lost in thought that I almost forgot about the few preparations which I do need to make. A look at the clock tells me that I still have plenty of time. Though if I procrastinate any more I really may run out of time. It's a simple matter so I take care of it now. I need to look and smell a certain way to give off the exact impression needed here. What I'm going for is a dignified, yet subtly

dangerous image. Just the slightest hint of smoothed-over, icy, violence that tells them “I know where you live and I can end you at any second if I so choose.” It’s a bit melodramatic, but showmanship is two thirds of this occupation.

After bathing, grooming myself, and applying just the slightest hint of the appropriate cologne, I’m finally ready. A police escort accompanies me to the location. It’s a somewhat stuffy thing to have but it’s the standard procedure. Besides, it’ll add to the overwhelming impression I’m trying to send a certain someone with all of this. The NYPD loves me because unlike some of our previous mayors — who ran on platforms of reform — I didn’t have any lofty ideals to pretend that I cared about. That’s why I was able to fully embrace the racist, constitution-infringing, police culture without losing my base. My only promise was that everything would run smoothly. 90% of people don’t care about how the trains are kept running on time as long as it does indeed happen. There have been a few would-be muckrakers and self-styled social crusaders out for my blood, however they all have a way of backing down or vanishing after some combination of bribes, threats, accusations of racism, and — of course — after hours visits from the good *Captain*.

If it's just the usual media bullshit, I'll let it slide or even encourage it. But whenever someone attempts to do any serious investigative reporting on me, then they need to be taken care of. That's another area that the *Captain* excels in. There's a lot about the man that seems far too convenient to be true. I've made a few attempts at finding out who he is, but he's a ghost, it seems. I'm not sure if he's a genuine ex-government spook, or just some crazy white boy who somehow became... whatever he is, but his skills are the real deal.

We finally arrive at the destination. Once I've been escorted inside, the cops make their own last minute preparations then the show is ready to begin. It starts off the way these ceremonies all do, with some pointlessly long-winded speeches that no one other than the media even pretends to care about. I always make sure to keep mine at the perfect length; not too short so I don't look lazy, but not too long so I don't look like a typical windbag politician. After that's out of the way the music starts. It's always some overblown orchestral number that makes everything feel like it's an even kitschier high school graduation ceremony. I never understood how

that became a tradition. It always seems ridiculous to me no matter how many of these affairs I attend.

Finally, at long last, the moment I've been waiting for arrives. Pat O'Reilly himself comes to the stage. He's all decked out in his dress uniform like some *Super Trooper*. His former partner Danny couldn't make it. I suppose taking thirty bullets in a shootout with a heavily armed group of gangbangers will do that to a man. His widow and kids are here to receive their dead father's award on his behalf. I put on my vote-winning *somber* face to greet Pat. His pallor is reminiscent of a skinned and washed beet.

We begin by exchanging the requisite fake pleasantries, then proceed to our actual conversation. This auditorium has a peculiar acoustic feature; in one particular spot nothing can be heard past a distance of 2 feet. That's where we have our chat.

"Congratulations Pat, you've caught my attention now."

He gives me a toothy, aggressive, smile. From this distance it clearly says "fuck you" but from further away it may seem like he's being just a bit too friendly, or overeager, maybe even nervous.

“What is this shit? I don’t get what you’re up to here and I don’t like it at all.”

This is exactly how he should be. I’ll screw with him a bit more before wrapping this up.

“I’m just showing you how much I appreciate all your *hard work*. Rounding up all those bums and coaching them must have been quite the undertaking. It really did give the whole thing some *je ne se quoi* — if you will, so it certainly was well worth the effort.”

His pupils widen, but only slightly. I guess someone as shifty as him has to have seen this coming after all.

“Whaddya want from me? If you know I did all that shit, why not just bust me down to Traffic or fire me already? I expected this joke of an award ceremony to happen if you were too dumb to see what was going on, but it makes no goddamn sense if you know!”

He’s riled up, to be sure, but it’s still not enough for me. I need to give him one last push so this won’t be a complete waste of taxpayer money.

“I simply wanted you to see where these kinds of games can take you. Keep it up and you’ll be our next commissioner.”

There. That’s *the stuff*. *That’s* the face I wanted to see!

“Well you’re the motherfucking devil, aren’t you?”

The Wacky Misadventures of Conrad Mancuso Oblige Part I

February 28th 2015 was the day Connie Oblige's sad, counter-productive, little journey began. Unlike the horde of so-called witnesses herded and unleashed upon the public and media by Detective O'Reilly, Connie was an actual witness to the fateful events of that day. A simple soul, Connie set out to help people. He believed that tragedies such as the one he bore witness to, the one which it inspired, and every other unfortunate event — most of which he'd never see, hear, or come into any sort of contact with — all needed to *mean* something. So on that day, amidst the sounds of departing souls and sirens, Connie chose the meaning he'd give the events which had just transpired. He decided to help as many people with whatever they asked of him. Once again, it must be said that he truly was simple in every sense of the word. So considerations such as whether his help was required, appropriate, or even wanted, never crossed the boy's mind.

With about a fourth or fifth of all that in mind, our dearest Connie set out to oblige as many people's requests; as though he were contractually mandated to do so. Today's efforts were to be

focused on the homeless, who, by Connie's estimation, most likely had more to ask of him than anyone else in this city. Walking up and down the cold streets (cold through both the casual indifference of the people who shared them with him, and in a more literal sense due to the wailing wind, whose howls evoked images of a depressive lone wolf stalking a desolate arctic tundra) he searched. Was it simply human contact, company, that he was after? Or did our boy Connie have a more pathological need to feel as though he was a hero, or at the very least, someone who mattered? Those kinds of thoughts, tempting as they may be, are ultimately a waste of time in the context of a kid like Connie Oblige — a kid whose head was filled with little more than a substance as insubstantial as the lonely, frigid air, which only gains meaning through our attempts at poeticizing it.

Whenever he encountered a person who seemed to be sending out a distress signal, like that of a shipwrecked craft beached on this simultaneously populated and isolated isle of city life, Connie would greet the prospective customer with a genial "Hello", or a slightly less formal "Hi, how are you?", before attempting to ply his wares with a "Is there anything I can do to help you today?"

Naturally, he was answered with all the *good cheer* the average New Yorker reserves for particularly persistent salesmen of unsolicited spiritual wares. Yes, he was treated to more “Fuck you”s and “Go fuck yourself”s — along with more exemplars of all sorts of other variations of angry or detached dismissals centering around words such as “fuck” and “shit” and “motherfucker” — than he could count. To the calloused, cynical, eyes of these people, Connie wasn’t an idealistic young man making a sincere effort to change the world for the better, but a conniving Scientologist, or perhaps some other kind of opportunistic sort of con-artist and/or religious peddler who was out to steal for himself, or whatever corrupt deity he believed in, the souls of they; the conveniently present passerby. The objective fact of their wrongness isn’t relevant. It doesn’t strictly matter that our boy Connie was only making an attempt to be helpful and important in the only way the simple constitution of his cranial contents allowed him to conceive of. Outwardly, his manner was, in fact, quite reminiscent of the false sincerity or delusional fervor of a modern mystery religion’s maniacal missionary.

Indeed, there was no hidden guile or sinister purpose to anything poor little Connie was offering. Yet his earnest nature was,

through the lens of a cynically perverse street-wise eye, a thing which could not be trusted. Perhaps it could be surmised that it was not the potential of deceit or betrayal which so scared those grizzled urban survivalists, but contrarily, the prospect of someone, who for some bizarre, unknowable, reason, genuinely wanted to help. That thought must have been far more insidious and destructive than any two bit con-man or contrary covenant crooner could ever hope to be. It was the mere concept of hope; of idealism, which was nothing less than anathema to these people who barely managed to cling to their existence each day by allowing cynicism and despair to nourish them in ways no honeyed hymns of hope ever could. In simple terms: kindness would literally kill them. They were far too broken, damaged, and malformed to endure it. Like vampires who could only survive in the darkness, they too would be annihilated were they to allow the sun's brilliance to come into contact with their pallid, cadaverous, souls. It was the uncaring and inhospitable bile of society which was now their Ambrosia; the crack dens and dilapidated homeless shelters, their Olympus.

Unbeknownst to both Connie and his prospective clients, there was in fact a third party encroaching on their private

consultations. Known only by his online handle of “Platinum Ponyboy”, this intruder bore silent witness to the existential struggle between cynicism and ideals, and was aroused by the sight. He — formerly she — surreptitiously fondled himself while watching Connie’s efforts, welding together the roiling, metallic, waves of love and hatred with a deathless spot-torch of lust. Ponyboy became a boy (not a man) not because of any inherent dysmorphic ideations such as those of an actual transgendered person, but through sheer self-loathing. When he was still she, she decided that nothing would gratify her more than transforming into that which she hated most. Above all things, she hated boys and horses, since there was no feasible way of turning centaur, she would surgically be made into a boy (more of a manchild, given her age upon becoming a he), while only metaphysically assuming the soul of a horse-child by joining the ranks of those socially awkward men both young and old who called themselves *bronies*. Thus, “Platinum Ponyboy”; the auto-eroticized self-made vision of self-loathing, came to exist.

Considering himself a sex-aesthete, Ponyboy was constantly in search of new sensations of fan the flames of his

unified love, loathing, and lust. He simply could not experience any of those three as individual feelings without also bringing the other two along for the ride. To him, all three were a particularly grotesque set of conjoined triplets. There's no telling if he knew it yet, but whether he recognized it or not, in Connie Ponyboy had finally discovered the combined soulmate, arch-nemesis, and lover who he always desired. Yet it was far too soon for anything to come of this fated encounter. Much like the alcohol Ponyboy was partial to, their love, loathing, and lust needed time to mature; to ferment. So there was nothing for Ponyboy to do yet but continue watching.

Oblivious to his ardent admirer, Connie continued his pursuit. Surely, at least one soul among these masses would be open just wide enough to receive his overflowing generosity, it was simply impossible for everyone to be as anti-social and hostile as those he had so far encountered. Despite the naiveté inherent in those notions, they weren't wrong. Much like the broken clock whose hands, eternally fixed on a single point in time, is correct twice each day. While Connie wasn't strictly aware of, or capable of comprehending the laws of averages or any mathematical concepts

as they applied to the real world, he had inadvertently stumbled upon an instinctual nugget of understanding pertaining to one of them. Though his basis was nothing more than blind faith, the principles he had unwittingly aped through it were far more sound than one might assume they ought to be. While it's true that the battle hardened veterans of urban survival were too gnarled and leery to accept charity that seemed too good to be true, there were in fact, *contemporaries* of theirs who were more than amenable to such things.

Those among the homeless who were young, fresh to the game, or too mentally ill to care about the pretensions their elder, riper, and more lucid brethren held dear, would welcome Connie's offers of aid and succor. It was merely a matter of time before one of them would happen to stumble upon him and take what he so desperately sought to give. In fact, one such person, or at the very least, someone ostensibly resembling them, was headed in Connie's direction this very second. Ironically, she was exactly what her supposed comrades in urban survival wanted to see Connie as. Though unlike him, she wore a disguise of vulnerability to engage in

her predatory activities; a piranha in guppy's clothing who sought to devour and strip to the bone any who were gullible enough to fall for her trap. Named Rosemarie Rosenrot, she could very easily be seen, by the trained eye, as one of those withering blooms of wickedness which Baudelaire so greedily plucked as his carcinogenic muse. Neither of them knew it yet, but this encounter would prove to be a formative experience for both. As if drawn by some unknown magnetic force, Connie saw her veneer of false vulnerability and was instantly taken in.

“Hello Miss, how are you?”

She carefully appraised him, scanned him from head to toe, soul to sole, brain to heart, and so on before being satisfied that he was a Natural Born Sucker and preparing an appropriate response. This was an incredibly intricate process, yet it only took about four and a half seconds. Through years of tireless practice, Rosemarie had become a virtuoso of manipulation; an expert conductor of the orchestra of human emotion, who could effortlessly pluck any but the most corroded, rusty, heartstrings in order to produce the exact

melody she sought. She had mastered this craft to such an extent that she became bored with simply pursuing it, so she gave her would-be victims dead giveaways of who and what she truly was to further challenge her prodigious talent. Was she good enough to make them ignore her unblemished well-toned body — which was — the clear product of exercise that no actual homeless person had the time or energy for? Convincing enough to distract them from her obviously luxurious clothes, purchased with an inexhaustible sum of trust fund money? Talented enough to make them believe in all sorts of exaggerated, outlandish, claims of everything from poverty, to terminal illness, to overly-contrived visions of lower middle class suffering? Only through once again challenging herself could she find out if the carefully constructed artifice of her words and attitude would be able to overcome the obvious truth of what she chose to plainly reveal, so she finally spoke to her oblivious target.

“Hi. I’m not doing too good. These are tough times we’re living in, you know.”

Abandoning even her usual minimal level of precaution, those words were designed to be the exact opposite of convincing and well-constructed; the equivalent of bells worn by a hunter to alert their prey of their presence for the sole purpose of making the life and death struggle between prey and predator all the more sporting. Naturally, Connie was oblivious to all of this when he gave his own reply.

“That sucks. Is there anything I can do to help you? I’m fine myself so whenever I see someone who might need my help I always do my best to offer them whatever they need.”

Now would be the moment when one of the genuine urban survivalists would reject the entire premise and send poor little Connie packing, but Rosemarie — who was no urban survivalist at all, or even a card-carrying member of the RBF center for Freeganism — put on a transparent act of coyness to further whet his appetite and her own.

“I don’t know...There’s just so much I need that I’m not sure if anyone can give it to me. Besides, I wouldn’t want to impose on your kindness.”

Finally, thought Connie, finally I found someone who I can help. A huge smile unfurled on his face, betraying his absurd eagerness to be taken advantage of.

“Don’t worry about things like that. If you need anything just ask, and I’ll do my best to accommodate you. No matter what you need, don’t be embarrassed or feel like it’d be impolite to ask for it.”

Rosemarie understood exactly what kind of boy she was dealing with here, but she didn’t know exactly how far the rabbit hole went. It was time to find out. She wouldn’t even bother with the setup this time.

“Well, I really need money right now. A lot of it. As much as you can give me.”

Without even the slightest hint of hesitation, Connie removed his worn out imitation leather wallet, took out every last dollar it contained, and handed the cash over. He performed this deranged act of generosity without asking any questions or so much as batting an eyelash. If anything, he wished she'd asked for more. Luckily for him, his companion read his mind and did just that.

“Thank you so much! But if I’m being completely honest here, this isn’t enough. I need \$10,000 by tomorrow.”

Although Rosemarie knew how he’d react before Connie himself did, the intensity of the act itself washed over her, sweeping her away in a tidal wave of satisfaction the likes of which only the foolhardiest of surfers would dare challenge.

“No problem, I’ll get it for you right now. Just wait here a few minutes.”

He took off in the direction of the bank a couple of blocks in the direction he had come from. Again, it must be noted that a normal beggar, hobo, con-artist, skell, or urban survivalist would

have found this suspect; would have misinterpreted the earlier gift as a cheap ploy to win their trust, and — insanely enough — would have been wrong. Their animal instincts, which function under the assumption that the world is systematically, sensibly, cruel, would have failed them in this case where the least likely thing was being given to them with the least amount of effort expended on their part. Rosemarie however, had the vision to see past the commonplace and the expected, to perceive the actuality of this unbelievable situation. This was a virtue which was about to be rewarded, Connie would soon return with the cash to hand it all over to her, she in turn would take it and be genuinely grateful, not for his generosity in giving her money that she didn't actually need, but for the gullibility and lack of anything resembling common sense which he had just shown her. They then parted ways, each satisfied in their own way for their own reasons, each to never again see the other, each to feel moved by and sincerely thankful for the other's existence.

Star Outteridge's Tragic Tale Part I

Now, you may be thinking: if this tale is really as tragic as I claim it is would there really be a need to label it that way in the title? Would the misery conveyed in the contents themselves not do an adequate job of conveying that impression without the need for such indelicate proclamations of how you, the reader, are meant to interpret the events you are about to be told of? Well, to such criticisms I can only respond by lamenting the difficulties of life which have led those among you to harbor such cynical thoughts. After all, if you cannot bring yourselves to temporarily trust the words of a lone disembodied voice attempting to tell you a harmless little tale, then who, or what, I ask, can you believe in at all? Frankly speaking, I find such hard-hearted, world-weary, cynicism, to be quite depressing, so please do not succumb to it. I must ask that you at the very least trust *my* words — even if you choose to mistrust everyone else's. For I, as I've said, am but a simple disembodied voice seeking nothing more than a place in which to tell a few tales. Surely, an entity such as myself would have no reason to manipulate you, or to somehow falsify my account of these already fictional

events. After all, what would I possibly have to gain from such acts? I ask that if trust seems like too much for you to give me, that you at least take my account into consideration.

With that unpleasantness behind us, let us begin our postmortem look at the pitiable life of one Star Outteridge, it may seem overly forward to inform you of the tale's conclusion before its outset, but I'm merely confirming the suspicions you must have already begun formulating from the title. After all, tragedies, by design, have a very limited number of ways in which they can conclude themselves. Why beat around the bush when I can just tell you that this woman has died? The fact that she died is only the most superficial aspect of her story, so the undue import which would be placed on it — the kind of import prescribed by the common notions of storytelling — if it were only revealed at the end, would be wholly inappropriate. After all, if all biographers were fixated on the mere fact of death, then we could simply replace every biography in existence with a sign that reads "Everyone dies" and end it at all at that, could we not? By now I'm sure you can see why I've chosen to simply get that tidbit out of the way at the very beginning, so that we

can examine the details of her life itself; details far more substantive and meaningful than the blunt simplicity of death.

Rather than dwelling on her death we will instead focus on understanding her life through the aspects of her childhood, latter formative years, and final day. This will give us a well-rounded and multifaceted impression of what sort of woman she was beyond the bland and faceless Tragic Doomed Heroine whose fetid corpse the average storyteller would tastelessly lay at your feet and have you weep over. Without any further ado (or avant-garde storytelling measures of any kind) we will now start. Beginnings need to begin at the beginning so it is there, at the absolute undisputed beginning of the existence we refer to as Star Outteridge where we will begin.

There is a bit of common knowledge among those in the medical professions concerning the kinds of days and months which seem to lead — almost by design — to children being conceived. This theory postulates that the coldest days of the winter months, along with days of blackouts and power outages, have the highest incidence of conceptions. Cold leads to spooning, and spooning

leads to forking, or so the adage goes. On the topic of blackouts and power outages there doesn't seem to be an equivalently folksy aphorism, but one could probably be constructed utilizing a few choice vulgarities in the manner resembling that of those savants of the stalls; poet laureates of the privy, who publish their magnum opii on the walls of public restrooms. At any rate, the point is that Star was no exception to this rule. Her parents were artists residing in a poorly-maintained Williamsburg apartment building, minding their own business, when one early June day the power went out and the blackout led to banging, if you will (or don't, since encouraging these habits of mine can't possibly lead to anything good.)

The spermatozoon and ovum unite in the process known as fertilization, fulfilling the roles they were created for during Meiosis and forming a zygote. Through the processes of cleavage, compaction, differentiation, and cavitation the zygote becomes a morula and later a blastocyst. Once numerous other processes occur, the blastocyst which has implanted itself within the endometrium develops into a fetus at around the ninth week after fertilization. At this point the fetus has already begun developing many of the organs

and limbs it will have as a neonate. Over the next 29 weeks it continues the process of leeching off its — in this case, willing — host, the mother, to prepare itself for existence in a slightly less parasitic capacity. (Though human children can still be thought of as parasites in a financial and metaphysical sense for what may very well end up being an entire lifetime. Occasionally the roles end up reversing themselves with the parents taking on a parasitic role after their offspring have developed enough to begin sustaining them in whichever way they require. This is its own developmental process, spanning years to decades.)

Being a child of such an ambiguous, unpredictable, segment of a well-defined and understood period of conceptive significance, Star's origins always lay in ambiguity. Her parents; being sensitive to such things, found that fact frightening. Ambiguity may often be a friend, lover, or patron saint to an artist, but when it comes to define one's entire being it becomes a fearsome, dreadful, thing. For if the unknown holds the power to stir fear in the heart of man, then how much more eldritch would an existence defined by being undefined — by being mutable to the point of having no fixed state — be?

Therefore they considered it to be their duty as parents to save their child from such a fate through any means necessary. They made it their mission to define her life and quintessence into something which they, at the very least, could entirely comprehend.

From the very moment of her emergence through the birth canal, the two of them decided that they, who only truly understood art and its particular parlance, would shape the unknowable lump of ambiguity which they had inadvertently birthed in human form, into a fully defined girl and later woman through the act of binding it in the trappings of an artist. To that end they surrounded the infant with art and talked to her about it at length; even to the point of nausea. Medieval to Modern, Imperially Commissioned Fresco to Catatonically Impressionist Cheese Danish, Dada to Dali, Bosch to Banksy, and so on, and so forth. In a way, their process could be thought of as a backwards parody of CIA mind control techniques described and practiced in programs such as MKULTRA and the more mysterious Monarch, albeit employed for ostensibly benevolent purposes rather than more insidious ones. The clump of ambiguity would slowly, meticulously, and purposefully be made to

take on the shape of a person who could only be thought of as an artist. Ethical considerations aside, the sheer intensity and focus involved in the efforts was quite impressive and effective.

By the time she was first able to speak Star's first word was "postmodern", which while being by her parents' estimation an ominous portent of things to come, was still something they believed they could work with. They accepted that inclination towards ambiguity and lack of a clear meaning as an immutable part of their daughter's inborn nature, believing that her expression of it through the human mind's nomenclature, which attempts to define such a thing or at least put a name to it, was a step forward; a move away from ambiguity even as it was a step towards it. Contrarianism was never a thing which they would be able to strain out of her, but so long as it could be transformed into a thing with more potential to be defined, it was acceptable.

By age two, their efforts had turned her into an avid doodler, finger painter, and crayon drawer, allowing her to experiment with as many different artistic techniques, mediums and philosophies as

possible. Perhaps as a reflection of their desire to move her even the slightest bit away from her origins — in spite of thinking they had come to accept them — they transformed her room into a Sistine Chapel of sorts by taping Star’s own works onto every square inch of floor wall and ceiling within it, periodically replacing older works with new ones. Although the intent of this was to allow her to reabsorb and transform her own work after processing it, the method was reminiscent of an attempt to form a prison of the mind itself to trap any content which threatened to leak out from darker, more perilous, depths. This metaphysical incubator they created was cage and charcoal filter, penitentiary and pot-still, dungeon and distillery; an artificial womb for the contents of the soul to re-gestate into a form they might find acceptable. It was intended to be a safe, controlled, environment where no strange blooms of depravity or weeds of banal ambiguity were allowed to germinate. Yet no amount of control could ever completely stifle the origin they so feared, dreaded, and rejected. Every now and then they would notice clear signs of things, ideas, concepts which were too abstract and amorphous to fit into the mold they sought to establish. Moreover,

these strange, foreign, things simply arose from within rather than being imparted through any external influence.

Three was also a difficult age for them to endure. All the carefully calculated efforts, the meticulously measured designs seemed to be coming undone. They were beginning to acknowledge their failings and lose hope in the possibility of success itself. This was because three year old Star's output had now reached new extremes of arcane, esoteric, and excessively challenging abstraction. All signs were of the one way variety, seeming to only point down in spite of all the stops, detours, and railroad crossings they had so futilely attempted to implement. While they didn't openly attempt to dissuade this direction, they did make subtle, gentle nudges in the opposite one. Excited unveilings of new offerings were often met with passive aggressive rebuffs such as "That's nice dear, but are you sure you want to do *that*?" or "That's great honey, now try *this* instead." As well as many others along the same lines. They had all but surrendered, so the enthusiasm they'd displayed for the first two years had almost entirely dried up. For the

most part their contribution during this year was simply a hope that things would work themselves out.

Miraculously, despite their lack of actual effort, that was exactly what happened during the fourth year of Star's life. The gravitation towards ambiguity and all other ungainly, unmanageable, traits seemed to begin dying off at the very moment of her fourth birthday. Understanding what the number four represented, they integrated that with their understanding of her birthdate (the thirteenth of June) and reinterpreted it as a positive sign of growth and meaningful transformation. Their superstitious nature led them to believe that they had effected this change through their hopes and prayers which were, appropriately enough, more effective in matters of the metaphysical than concrete actions. Through a symbolic death their daughter seemed to be finally moving toward the life they intended her to have from birth.

Five furthered the flowery future whose facsimile they foresaw. Star was beginning to consciously embrace and engage in everything they had previously presented to her. To an almost

frightening extent she took it all in, showed enthusiasm toward it, and utilized it in ways that pleased the sensibilities of her parents. Whether this was genuine interest or merely a child's attempt at gaining their parents' attention and affection didn't matter. She was finally becoming what they wanted — needed — her to be rather than the ill-defined, inscrutable, *thing* she was in the period from conception to birth and seemingly beyond, at the time. To Star's parents it was not the four-leaf clover they valued as a good omen, but the five-petaled Canadian Anemone; a good omen which seemed to all but eradicate their previous misgivings about what they had ushered into the world, and whether it was capable of becoming something that could survive.

The quartet of six, seven, eight, and nine regaled them with an equally optimistic anthem, granting nothing but sublime bliss to the previously harried pair. They lost all the dark, despairing, notions they initially greeted their daughter with. It seemed as though all the initial doubts and concerns were just foolish figments of their hyper-vigilant parental-instinct-addled minds; as if the nameless star they named her after had indeed been one of hope and good fortune,

rather than one ill omen of calamity as it may have just as easily been. Yes, at that time it truly seemed as though everything they were concerned about or feverishly attempted to prevent had passed, either because they had previously exaggerated its import or because their herculean efforts had at long last paid off. In later years their impressions would come to take on an entirely different nature but at this time, this moment, they believed, they sincerely felt, that the worst was over, that nothing could possibly go wrong after this point. The blue skies had driven the dark clouds far away, they felt the love, and all manner of other cheesy song lyrics vaguely alluding to the acquisition of happiness that invariably turned out to be either illusory or unobtainable from the beginning.

Since I have already informed you of how this tale ends both in the title and on an earlier page of its outset, I trust that you understand why I'm alluding to the ending when referring to what is only the end of the first act. It's quite simple so there's no need to expound it further. If you still don't understand maybe this isn't the book for you? Maybe you should read something closer to your level like *Curious George*, or *Clifford*, or perhaps *Twilight*? Maybe *John*

Green is more up your alley? Those are all appropriate pieces of *well-regarded literature* suited to those who find this too nuanced or dense. Or I suppose for those of you who lack the mental capacity to understand anything this simple — but still have a burning desire to do so — you could always take a shortcut like the inevitable Cliff notes analysis or similar publications and places of *enlightenment* online. Maybe they'll come out with a “*Third Rail for Dummies*” at one point or another? What I'm getting at is that I'm not going to be doing any favors to the illiterate or brainless readers of shitty bestsellers and Young Adult blockbuster-bait schlock, or catering to their nauseatingly pedestrian tastes. No, what I seek to create here is not some worthless coffee table paperweight or Oprah's book club brick of vapid, content-free, generic shit. This is nothing less than a literary masterpiece which will go down in the annals of history as the greatest artistic achievement of the 21st century. Our book-reading culture currently revolves around dime a dozen derivative drivel that doesn't even begin to scratch the surface of any of the true classics, either those of antiquity or modern times. This “*Third Rail*” will electrocute to death the entirely worthless Social Media era culture, and utilize its corpse as fertilizer for the new age of

refined, meaningful, discourse which doesn't revolve around parasitic celebrity worship and pathetic, masturbatory, self-aggrandizement. This is only the opening salvo in what will surely be a hailstorm of artillery fire.

A Boring Day In The Mundane Life of **Wilhelm Theodore Herschel Iskandar** **Tiberius Bismarck IV Part I**

I apologize in advance for how boring and uneventful this particular man's story is, but the boredom I'm about to inflict upon you is a necessary one. After all, if everything was full of intrigue and excitement then that would become the new status quo, and eventually, a form of monotony unto itself. A sprig of boredom every now and again — much like a well-implemented spice in a dish — enhances flavor and whets the appetite when properly applied.

Wilhelm Theodore Herschel Iskandar Tiberius Bismarck, fourth of his name, was one of those exceedingly rare men whose entire essence could be summarized in a single word. That word being: plain. He was the very definition of un-remarkability, the perfect specimen of boredom, flawless paragon of stability, and so on and so forth. The exact type of man, who women past a certain age would claim to want in their lives, even as they were repulsed by the mere thought of actually being with them, and took great pains to

avoid even things which began to suggest their presence and quintessence.

In keeping with those defining characteristics, he kept to a regularly scheduled morning routine which he followed with a slavish devotion. It was quite ordinary in all its aspects as you are about to see. Upon awakening he would first make this bed. It needed to be perfectly neat and square before he could bring himself to focus on anything else. Next, he would attend to his personal hygiene — which he was also quite exacting about. He would brush his teeth for no less than a full minute on each side then brush his tongue, gargle, and spew. Of course the hygienic ritual was incomplete without a shower, so one of those was in order as well. That too was a precisely coordinated and perfectly choreographed dance of soaking, lathering, washing, scrubbing, rinsing, and repeating. After drying himself off he was almost ready to pick up his morning paper from the mailbox, but only once he had put some coffee on and prepared his usual breakfast of one bowl of oatmeal (plain), and one half of a grapefruit (the other half was wrapped in

plastic and refrigerated for the next day) it was then — and only then — that he could fetch the paper and sit down for his breakfast.

That particular orchestra's arrangement consisted of measured spoonfuls of oatmeal, grapefruit, and an accompaniment of carefully imbibed sips of coffee. Of course there were also occasional flips of newspaper pages and the more infrequent jottings of notes as well. He looked for certain items of note in the articles themselves as well as the advertisements, circled them if they belonged to what he called "Category A", put a box around them if they fell into "Category B", and surrounded them with a triangle if they were of "Category C". There was an exhaustive series of other shapes which in turn were associated with other categories, but listing them all would be quite difficult. In addition to this, there was a system for unifying all the found materials into a single decoded message but that too would be quite complicated to explain here in a timely fashion. Knowing that there was a system and a concrete end result to this process; that it wasn't simply undertaken for its own sake, is what's important for us to note about it.

Being adequately satisfied with the results of today's perusal, he put his outdoor clothes on so that he could set out. These sorts of dreary, intermittently rainy days muddled the brain. The coffee would only help for a time, so he packed a couple of caffeine suppositories in his suitcase in the event he needed to make use of them. Those, he found, were the most effective means of temporarily revitalizing one's mind when it began to lag behind the body, since they were relatively fast acting and provided the proper level of stimulation. Younger men would have surely scoffed at or been disgusted by the idea, but they were simply too caught up in their obsessive desire to be involved only in fashionable and socially acceptable pursuits to understand the uncompromising demands of true pragmatism. Indeed, the virtues of practicality demanded a mind open to such commonly disdained and unappealing measures, and youth was one of the biggest obstacles in the way of fostering those sensibilities. Even Wilhelm himself would find his own current behavior comically repellent were he two to three decades younger than he was now. In spite of the *sexy* image this sort of work gets in fiction, it requires the use of methods and practices that none but the most devout fetishists would find arousing. Many young men and

women got into the business under the influence of these false impressions. Needless to say, the vast majority of them were quickly disillusioned by the unglamorous reality of it all and quit.

There are, however, those who find it all enthralling, taking to it with a frightening ease. Matthew Asher Ambrose, Wilhelm believed, was one such operative. Whether his death was actual or feigned, the degree to which it had influenced the goings on of this city — and country — was far too profound to have been unintentional. Operation *Pala Vibraj Orangô*, which he had been on the verge of uncovering for months, was clearly the latest and most brazen false-flag operation to be perpetrated in this city since the events of the 11th of September 2001. This was abundantly clear to Wilhelm from his detached — yet deeply involved — perspective.

Wilhelm was an intelligence officer sent stateside under the auspices of the Zemblan government. His cover identity was that of an aging Illyrian swinger who had come, by way of Vheissu, for entirely libertine reasons. The US of A was seen by those at the top of the current (or at least, most recent) Zemblan regime as the most

volatile and potentially conquerable nation in the world. Given its small size and relative obscurity, Zembla was in the perfect position to harbor such antiquated 19th century ambitions of Imperialism; after all, no one would ever suspect the unassuming housecat of ever being capable of bringing down the mighty eagle. What they all failed to realize was that this *housecat* was actually a juvenile ocelot disguised by an expertly-applied coat of black paint. Yet even though the campaign's success was all but assured, Wilhelm wondered if this truly was the proper course for his beloved Zembla to take. After all, he surmised, was it not this own nation's expansionist Manifest Destiny philosophy that had brought it to its current pitifully bloated and impotent state? It was a once successful bodybuilder who had at some point lost sight of its goal; becoming fixated on the mere notion of gaining weight, entirely ignoring the vital muscle mass which it had once valued above all else. That sort of wanton monomania had but few possible outcomes, and this pudgy state of lethargy was the most likely one.

Wilhelm was nothing if not a trooper though, so he soldiered on in spite of his misgivings about his mission. There would be

plenty of time to sort out his feelings after this country became a colony of the Zemblan Crown, and that time seemed to be approaching faster with each passing day. It was all so simple, that sometimes Wilhelm thought the Americans were secretly aiding him in his endeavors and actually *wanted* Zembla to take their sovereignty. Otherwise they could only be seen as the most incompetent of imbeciles. Yet there were still occasional efforts at reclaiming the ground Wilhelm had gained, efforts like the counterintelligence measure which he believed had prompted the CIA initiative known as Operation *Pala Vibraj Oranço*. While these were clearly the last spurts of a rapidly dying candle — Wilhelm still thought they were not things to be taken lightly, as even the most insignificant seeming spark contained within it the potential to become a raging conflagration under the right circumstances. So he would remain vigilant, not allowing even the most minor act of resistance to go unchecked. False senses of security, of complacency were the weaknesses of the rash and the youthful. Wilhelm, being neither of those, had no excuse for succumbing to them.

So he sallied forth, determined to reverse this latest counterrevolutionary effort by disseminating the requisite pamphlets, leaflets, and other forms of what the Americans of this era called “*Psyops*” materials in the places where they would have the most profound effect. These targets were of course places where the youths and those who socialized or sought knowledge of various sorts all gathered. This included — but was certainly not limited to — cafes, bars, college campuses, theaters (both of the ordinary and pornographic variety), libraries, subway stations, crack dens, and clandestine meeting places of various fringe groups (both political and spiritual). Taking excessive pains to conceal oneself during such undertakings was the surest mark of an amateur so Wilhelm, wizened veteran that he was, made not even the most transparent attempt at disguising any of his actions. With a brazenness that to the untrained eye seemed to be filled with youthful recklessness and virility, he acted far more openly, more naturally than any green young operative could ever dream of making their own moves. Only those who truly understood how this profession worked knew that this calculated lack of contrivance was nothing less than the mark of a true professional.

There were of course, the requisite observers, who followed him back and forth across the city. Maybe they were FBI, NSA, or CIA, perhaps they were MI6, or Mossad, and of course they could always be that most diabolical of intelligence agencies, which had feigned its own demise to conceal itself behind a greater veil of secrecy; the KGB. Whoever they were, or whatever they saw, none of that mattered. In essence, this was a mere occupational hazard, a sure sign that he was succeeding. After all, one doesn't get mired in an alphabet soup without any good reason whatsoever. Wilhelm treated these cloak and dagger wannabes as one would treat an honor guard or secret service: as a useless, yet necessary, ceremonial badge of honor.

Everything was going according to protocol, by the books, by the numbers, and all sorts of other expressions that indicate things are progressing the way one expects and hopes they will. Though why wouldn't it? After all, if the British, Americans, Russians, Israelis, or Chinese hadn't intervened yet, didn't that mean he had either eluded them, or else, that they found his efforts agreeable in some way or another? He had been at this for years after all, so any

attempt at thwarting or ultimately reversing his endeavors would surely have come a long time ago. But still, something nagged at him, raised the hairs on the back of his neck. Wordlessly, his instincts whispered to him; warning him of something which was definitely amiss. At first the signs were subtle, nearly imperceptible, wispy, insubstantial, and seemingly hallucinatory. But the more closely he observed it all, the more he knew — felt and understood — that it was all very real indeed.

What ultimately gave it all away to him was something which had traditionally been the bane of every large scale operation's existence: The awkwardness of a hastily upswung plainclothesman, who clearly wasn't used or suited to espionage. The way he constantly checked his earpiece and shiftily swung his glance around the room betrayed the role his cobbled together costume was attempting to hide. The inescapably fatal flaw of all large scale covert operations was that there was always a shortage of properly seasoned operatives. This made the use of hastily prepared co-conspirators unavoidable. A good handler would be able to either iron out these flaws by appropriately positioning all their assets in

accordance with their strengths and weaknesses, or using the flaws themselves as a diversion or sleight of hand to conceal the true underlying purpose of the operation. They had followed him for too long without arousing suspicion for this to be a simple case of incompetence. No, it must've all been calculated to, in one way or another, lead him headlong into a trap.

Instead of panicking and making a mistake as an amateur might, Wilhelm simply sat in place rather than attempting a retreat. He pretended that he hadn't noticed the bumbling plainclothesman acting as though he was simply tired from the day's endeavors. If all went according to plan, his ploy would throw them off their game, making them reconsider their strategy. This was only a bluff, but it was the last option he had at this point, since they obviously had him surrounded and could move in at any moment, whoever — *they* — were. Every operative, no matter how experienced or effective they may be, ultimately finds themselves in this situation assuming they survive to be on the job long enough. After a certain point one simply resigns themselves to such things in order to soften the inevitable blow whenever it may choose to connect with their

delicate liver. As the minutes wore on, Wilhelm could see it was all futile and this handler was especially cruel, for he had sent the operatives who were to detain Wilhelm in not as plainclothesmen or similarly clad agents; but under the guise of emergency medical personnel. They approached him, all smiles, and greeted him.

“Good evening sir.”

It was only proper so he answered in kind. Wilhelm was too old to play the sore loser.

“Good evening gentlemen.”

Their smiles were just a little too wide, voices just a smidge too animated.

“Are you feeling alright sir? We’ve been told that you might be acting a bit strange. Would you mind coming along with us so you can have a doctor look at you?”

It was either this or getting hauled off by force so Wilhelm did the sensible thing and accepted their invitation.

“Very well, let us be off then. I’ll see this so-called *doctor* of yours.”

Annamarie Suess

Why? Why, oh why, did you have to leave me in such a heartlessly tragic manner? We may have only physically expressed our love for one another but once yet I *knew*, as I'm sure you did and still do, that we were nothing less than soulmates. You were merely confused, that's all, simply misguided by a wicked temptress's wiles. It was only going to be a matter of time before I made my move and brought you back into my loving embrace where you belonged. Yet by some god or devil's insidious design you were struck down before I could act. Perhaps that was my punishment for failing to save you? Or maybe for even being audacious enough to presume that I could monopolize your radiance in the first place?

Whatever the case may be, it's all over now. I have no choice but to complete fate's tragic cycle so that I may be reunited with you eternally in the hereafter. Yes, I must now gouge out my own heart and symbolically present it to you, *my beloved*. That is the only way for me to earn your forgiveness. I must repent not only in spirit, but with this sinful body of mine as well. As for the location and time, it must be at your grave, during the witching hour. For that succubus must surely still have a firm grasp on your soul even beyond death,

and the only way to combat such fell sorcery is with an equally maniacal spell. Be patient, *my beloved*, for I'll surely wash that blemish off your soul with my own blood.

As I make my way over to the lichyard, a dreadful man accosts me.

“Hey you dropped your purse.”

As if. I wouldn't be surprised to find out that the scoundrel snatched it off me himself simply to attract my attention. In fact, that must be exactly what transpired. I cannot forgive this manner of shamelessness. My apologies, *my beloved*, but I must avenge your honor before I can join you in eternal bliss in good conscience. I must completely and utterly destroy the brute or this monstrous wrong shall never be set to right. Indeed, before I can accompany you, as the Juliet to your Romeo, I first need to play the part of your avenging angel.

There's no time to waste. I follow the fiend as he slithers down the streets. To successfully annihilate this monster, I must first observe his ways so as to discern his weakness. The chase continues for several blocks before grinding to a screeching halt. What

happened? Has he discovered my presence? Is there some mistake I've made that tipped him off to my plot? I cannot allow myself to panic. That will only worsen this already precarious position in which I now find myself. The only option available to me at this juncture is to stuff the discord I feel down into the fathomless depths of my heart so as to assume a façade of calm, detached, observation.

At first glance it seems somewhat difficult to comprehend his actions. All he's doing is pacing to and fro whilst staring intently at his cheap little phone before hurriedly shoving it back into his trousers. This routine of his is quite suspicious, albeit too vague to clearly interpret. Right when my impatience is about to cause me to make a hasty mistake, his phone goes off, causing him to suddenly expose it once more. Before long a haggard looking middle-aged woman approaches him. They greet one another, a lover perhaps? It certainly would be fitting for a creature as base as he to engage in a grotesque affair with a woman this hideous.

Whatever they may be up to, I continue my observation of the pair. It would only be appropriate to deeply imbibe all the ignominies of this vulgarian, so as to more readily equip myself to

pass judgment on him. They soon begin moving and I follow. Eventually, they find themselves at an especially seedy looking establishment. I dare not enter such a place so I merely wait outside until they exit. After precisely an hour, six minutes, and six seconds, the pair emerges.

They exchange a rather hasty farewell before going their separate ways. I finally understand the vile scene which has transpired before me. The woman was clearly a prostitute, and an especially wizened, cheap, one at that. I smile. This is beyond perfection! How delightful it is that this offensive creature must also be a whoremonger of the lowest order! It makes perfect sense now that I pause to consider it. Indeed, he is so aesthetically offensive in every imaginable way that no man or woman, save those who he purchases, would ever touch him. He's clearly the type of beast for whom neither love nor beauty exist. So long as the desires of his putrid flesh are met, they mean nary a thing to him. There's something strangely captivating about such an unrepentantly wicked being.

Perhaps I've been a bit too hasty? What purpose would destroying such a miserable man truly serve? Surely life itself must be a living hell for one as pathetic as he. In that case wouldn't simply observing his constant torment be good enough? I've discovered a more proper course of action to take when dealing with one of his ilk. For your sake, *my beloved*, I must devote the rest of my life to following this *pitiful pervert* around and relishing all his depressing misadventures.

I continue following him, always at just enough of a distance not to be seen. As my observation continues, I begin to understand more about the sordid details of his life. From what I see, he actually doesn't reside anywhere near the site of the depraved after-hours tryst I witnessed minutes ago. Perhaps he traveled halfway across the city simply to avoid the watchful eye of the local law enforcement agencies, which must all be aware of his criminal acts? Since he's clearly an artless man, it is possible that he's attempting to tax their resources by making a pursuit of him financially impractical rather than making an actual effort at disguising his crimes.

Besides that I also gain more insight into his delusional mind by observing his actions. It appears as though he fancies himself to be an “artiste” of some sort. My heart wells with dark delight as I see him madly scribbling away in his disgustingly cheap notebook. Every now and again he shows some bipolar symptoms in the form of chuckling to himself or pouting for what would outwardly appear to be no reason at all. It pleases me to see that this man is exactly as broken and unstable as I’d hoped he’d be.

Eventually the train we’re on reaches its last stop. He departs and I follow. His sure movements tell me that the destination has already been determined. I can only speculate about the purpose and frequency of these meandering nighttime excursions. How anti-social he is! How maladaptive! How fabulously freakish! I’ve never had any reason to visit this portion of the city myself so there’s no telling what new atrocities I’m about to be exposed to. Yet I cannot stop myself from speculating. Since sex was the theme of his previous sojourn, perhaps he’s here to satisfy a different vice? The only real question seems to be which one. Is he a gambler who tosses his money away as metaphysical tribute to the whims of Fortuna? Is he a drug addict, perpetually strung out in heaven’s high while never

failing to reach new lows? Or has this man, in his infinite ignominy, managed to invent a new even more perverse form of self-destruction?

My expectations are both met and dashed when he finally arrives at his destination. It appears to be a liquor store. That's it? Really? A mere liquor store? Not an unsavory back alley casino or crack den? This seems far too pedestrian, though perhaps that too is only appropriate. After all, if he fancies himself an author, alcoholism would be the most fitting vice to take up.

Whoremongering is an easy second to that, and he's clearly an old hand at that particular pursuit already. What a pretentious, sad, little man! He cannot succeed so he merely imitates the most unsavory aspects of the lofty heights he aspires to.

After this he returns to the same train station as before, taking the same train back in the same direction. This was a terminal with many other options but he chose that one. Perhaps he sees some humor in the cyclical and fruitless nature of these journeys he insists on constantly undertaking? Yes, I do believe he has some form of self-defeating self-awareness. Though it may also be possible that he

simply has no place to return to or call home at the end of these isolated, forlorn, days. Regardless, I pity him. It's abundantly clear that he has never experienced anything even resembling love or inner peace in the manner normal people such as myself have enjoyed and taken for granted.

Despite that, I must continue my observation of him. Anyone leading such a grossly unfulfilled life can instantly transform their self-destructive impulses into externalized ones meant to hurt others. I've taken it upon myself to become this sad beast's moral compass. Should he ever show any signs of homicidal or otherwise violent criminal urges, I shall immediately swoop in and strike him down. This will be an act of mercy in which I'll save him from his own sins before he commits them. Such an act is surely in accordance with God's will.

For that reason I continue to follow him still. Since he has just obtained his dire elixir, there is no telling where he'll go or what he'll do now. For all I know, some heinous plot is already forming in that cesspool-like mind of his. It would be irresponsible and inhumane to stop watching him now. After all, if he commits any

offences in my absence then the blood of his victims shall surely be on my hands.

Strangely enough, he shows no signs of disembarking. He only continues scribbling, chortling, and pouting in his characteristically repellant manner. Every now and again he looks around to make sure no one's watching before taking a swig from his newly purchased bottle of amber colored liquid. Either through good fortune or deliberate design, the train is desolate enough at this ungodly hour for no one to pay him much mind.

The stops flash by one by one yet he continues scribbling sipping and scheming. It starts to become agonizing to simply watch, however I cannot intervene yet. There's something profanely sacred about his suffering. In spite of itself it has taken on a holy, inviolable, quality. My heart screams, begging me to end this, to stop idly watching and finally do it, to plunge the knife which was originally meant for me into his chest. Surely that's what he wants. Why else would he ride around in a miserable haze of self-pity like this for hours on end? But it's too soon. Neither of us is ready for the other to directly intervene yet.

That new train of thought leads to a new observation: he does know, he sees me, has looked at me, frowned at me, smiled at me. He knows exactly who I am and what I intend to do to him. Through some dark, accursed, power he senses all these things and many others. The thought of that frightens me. Have I been playing into his diabolical hand this entire time? Does he actually want me to kill him for some insane ritualistic purpose? If that's the case then I must do the exact opposite and prolong his life through any means necessary.

Once again, I alter my purpose. Due to my evolving understanding of the situation, I decide to become his guardian angel. Now I'll follow this warped and pitiable creature not to destroy, but to protect him. It is not evil or cruelty that vanquishes evil, only benevolence is truly capable of ending that eternal struggle. We reach the opposite terminal of the line with timing that symbolically mirrors this final revelation of mine.

My heart grows lighter than the thinnest feather. Now that I've let go of that dark burden, I can easily carry out my new mission. As we begin moving backwards once more, I feel as though

nothing can overcome the determination which I've found. This time I'll stop vainly hiding and confront him directly. Deliberately, slowly yet surely, I advance. With each successive stop I inch closer and closer. Until finally we've come face to face. Now is the moment to strike. He's getting up and making his way to one of the doors so this is the final opportunity. I speak for the first time all day.

"Take care of yourself."

He treats me to a dazed, drunken, look before mumbling out his own reply.

"Yeah. Sure. You. Too."

We then exit the train walking in opposite directions. Yet this is merely an act on my part. Once he has gone far enough I slowly double back and continue my pursuit from a safer distance. It would not do to abandon him so soon. I follow him until he walks into a residential looking building. It is an old crumbling place which reeks of decay and misery. This is surely a mausoleum for decomposing dreams, though something tells me this man has never sincerely "dreamt" in his entire life.

Going inside would be improper so instead I circle around to the back. Judging from the direction he was moving I find the window that he should be visible through. It requires a fair bit of effort but I'm able to climb the juniper tree near the window and look within. There he is. I find him lit only by the dim glow of a computer screen, caught in the throes of a furiously needy self-pleasuring session. The sight brings a smile to my face.

Wolfgang Vladimirovich Raskolnikov

“He’s a fucking bum!”

“An ungrateful little shit who just lies around on the couch all day!”

“He should be looking for work but all he does is eat, sleep, and shit!”

“It’s exactly like his worthless father.”

“That prick should just take him back already.”

Crap... It’s the same this morning too. Waking up to the sounds of your grandparents loudly talking shit about you is one of those things in life that never gets any less annoying.

“And do you see what he looks like? That jackass hasn’t shaved or gotten a haircut in months.”

“He looks like a hobo, like a jihadist.”

What time is it anyway? I fish around for my phone on the chair next to the couch I’m sleeping on. Let’s see here... seven thirty AM. I fell asleep at around three so that means I got about four and a

half hours of sleep last night. Great, just great. The thought of trying to go back to sleep crosses my mind but I've got work today anyway so I dismiss it. Besides, it'd be impossible to sleep now with the racket they're making in the kitchen. It doesn't take long before they notice that I've woken up. I'm about to be treated to their usual morning interrogation routine before I can even finish getting dressed.

“Why are you up so early? Isn't today one of your days off? Go back to sleep. Though it serves you right anyway that we woke you up early. Go to sleep at a normal time and you won't be so tired every day.”

That's my grandmother for you, attacking me with all these questions first thing in the morning with all the compassion of a gestapo officer. I'm too tired to deal with this bullshit right now. A bit hung over from last night too.

“I'm not off. I have work today.”

“What? Speak up, I can't hear you. Or maybe we just mean so little to you that we're not worth speaking to? Huh? Is that it? Do you hate us that much after all we've done for you?”

It's the same spiel she goes into every morning. It too, never gets any less annoying. I answer a bit more loudly so she can hear me.

"No. You just didn't hear me. I said I have work today."

She decides to act like I just punched her in the face or something. As horrible as it sounds, I'm tired and annoyed enough to find the notion appealing right now. Of course I'd never actually do it, but the point is they're driving me insane.

"Stop yelling at me! Can't you answer a question like a normal human being!? I swear, you've been acting strange all week. Are you feeling alright? Maybe you should go see a doctor."

Acting strange all week? It's Monday. And I'm acting the way I am because you're doing this shit to me before I've even had the chance to really wake up. Whatever, if I get caught up in all of this it'll never end. For the sake of my mental well-being, I ignore 90% of her words. I go to the bathroom, whack off, and then brush my teeth. I pick up my breakfast from the kitchen so that I can eat in the living room (which also serves as my bedroom), on the couch (which also serves as my bed). I do this instead of eating in the

kitchen (which also serves as a dining room) so that I can avoid the idiotic conversations they'll attempt to draw me into, and so that I can drown out the sounds of their voices by listening to music through my laptop (which also serves as a music player). Sometimes they get so loud that I have to raise the volume to ear piercing levels just so I won't hear them. My eardrums must be ruined by now but it's the only way I can keep myself sane around here on these mornings. Occasionally they'll come up to me and start saying things. I'll sometimes take one earbud out, listen for a few key words, then decide whether it's bullshit that doesn't need a reply, or something that I need to actually pay attention to. Most of the time it is just bullshit, but sometimes they also ask me to do something, which I usually attempt to quickly attend to just to shut them up. After spending the first few hours of the morning doing this while keeping up with the conspiracy sites and forums I like to laugh at every morning, I notice that it's near the appointed time to start heading out. I call my boss to inform him that I'll be making my way over soon as I always do. He picks up after several rings.

“Hey buddy, did you see the email I sent you? I’m sorry about this but I really need the day off, I’m just not in any shape to work today.”

I knew I was forgetting something. With all the noise in the mornings and the miniscule amount of sleep I get it’s no wonder that things like this slip my mind. It’s a miracle that I haven’t completely gone insane yet.

“Oh, I’m sorry to hear that, Ray. Take all the time you need, don’t worry about me.”

Honestly, I’m kind of glad he cancelled our appointment for today. Working for him is starting to get depressing.

“Thanks for being so understanding, big dog. Hopefully I’ll be more capable of functioning sometime later this week. I’ll keep you posted.”

I respond automatically.

“Yeah you do that Ray. Take care of yourself, bye.”

After hanging up I begin weighing my options. I can either stay here and try to explain this to my oh-so *understanding*

benefactors, or I can go out anyway without telling them where I'm actually going, and hang around somewhere for most of the day. It's not exactly hard to decide between these kinds of choices. I get dressed and pack my bag with everything I'll need to entertain myself for the day. As I'm getting ready to leave, my grandmother confronts me near the door.

“You're going to work like that? No wonder you can't find a real job. When are you going to shave and get a haircut already? You look like an animal, like a terrorist. I'm surprised the police haven't arrested you yet for looking like that.”

Rather than verbally responding to those blatant provocations, ones which I've heard every day for months, I lightly pinch her cheek while smiling in a stupid looking way. I do this because of how much it annoys her.

“Stop that already! Just get out of here. When are you coming back by the way?”

It's just like her to ask when I'm coming back right after kicking me out.

“I don’t know, probably late.”

With that I head out. I’m not really sure where I want to go right now, but I instinctively begin walking in the direction of the train station. There’s a Starbucks around here but I don’t feel like going there. Instead it seems like a better idea to take the train to Times Square and go to the one there. Honestly I don’t even like Starbucks, but it’s as good a place as any to have some cheap coffee while maybe writing a bit of the book I’m working on. I’m not optimistic enough to really pin any serious hopes of striking it rich with this thing, but it’s a fun enough way to pass the time. Though the idea of writing an entire novel (or novella at the very least) for fun, while I’m supposed to be working or looking for work, is undeniably self-indulgent. I’m just getting sick of looking for work to no avail. It’s hard out there for a college dropout and Army washout. I say that more out of amused self-derision rather than true self-pity. I don’t pity myself at all, because most if not all of my problems were undeniably caused by my own poor decisions and laziness.

But that's enough of that for one day. It's time to focus on the task at hand. My latest "artistic" endeavor is a novel spanning over 200 years. It's told from the perspective of a tree which sees the world around it changing from the spot it stands in. I've already outlined the general premise and ending. Our tree will grow from a seed, to a sapling, to a massive, 200 year old, fixture of the community before being felled on its 222nd birthday to make way for some new condos. Some local Brooklyn hipsters will appropriate its corpse and make hand crafted furniture out of it. The furniture will be sold in an attempt to fund their drum circle because they blew all their trust fund money on weed and vinyl records of their favorite indie bands. Of course I have no idea how a trust fund actually works so I might have to research that. Maybe I'll just ask Ray one of these days assuming he doesn't blow his brains out before the next time we meet. He should probably be at least vaguely familiar with those sorts of things.

I write half a sentence before stopping to look up some name meanings online. I'm trying something new with this one by giving characters thematically appropriate or ironic names. This is a very important part of my process so I spend about two hours on it before

coming up with a few satisfyingly meaningful names. Eventually I'm frustrated by the uncomfortable stool I'm sitting on, and the unacceptably slow Wi-Fi here, so I get up and leave. The vague thought of taking the train back to Brooklyn, and going to the library near the train station for their Wi-Fi crosses my mind but I reject it. Instead, I take the train further up to Queens so as to go to the library there.

After initially getting lost despite knowing the neighborhood, I reach my destination. The streets of Flushing are always full of old men and women attempting to get people to visit some sleazy massage parlor or another. Upon finally arriving at the library, I realize they only allow members to use their Wi-Fi. Oh well, I don't need the internet all that much anyway. Instead, I decide to simply expand on the currently vague outline I have, maybe with something of an emphasis on some half-assed marketing measures. Maybe I'll toss in some dumb comments that can vaguely be construed as "social commentary"? Or I can use the Ambrose incident and related shooting spree as one of the events our tree will somehow witness at least a part of. If I rag on the cops a bit, that may expand my potential reader base since that seems to be the *cool* thing to do these

days. These ideas all have potential so I make sure to note them in the word file which contains my outline. Naturally, I take a break after every few words. Taking brief peeks at the faces and asses of random women is an important part of my *creative process*. I *obviously* can't afford to ignore it or my well of ideas will run dry.

My laptop's batteries are beginning to run low. That means I can't listen to thematically appropriate music while I write. Not having that will most likely prove to be too much of a challenge in a place like this library, so I pack my things and take my leave. As I'm making my way out, a particularly massive morbidly obese woman waddles past me. There's nothing about her that I'd call even remotely close to being attractive, but my eyes have a mind of their own. There's not much I can do other than laugh at myself. The thought of how freakish I must look right now makes me smile.

After a meandering, absent-minded, stroll I arrive at the train station again. To go back I'll have to take two trains. The first arrives in a relatively prompt fashion. It's a smooth, largely uneventful, ride. I manage to jot down a couple of sentences in-between having people attempt to squeeze themselves onto the

packed row of seats I'm on. An hour or so later the train pulls into its last stop at Times Square. This is one of my favorite stations, arguably the best one, though Union Square gives it a run for its money. The main reason I like it is because of the variety of street performers, religious solicitors, activists, and crazy homeless people who make their way through here on a daily basis. Today's offerings certainly don't disappoint. I'm not sure if I like the hipster dude's cardboard sign about how not toppling Wall Street will lead to thermonuclear war more than the hippie drum circle-like arrangements a group of Krishnas has set up betwixt some Jehovah's witnesses and a homeless man spraying some unknown substance on the floor before wiping it up with a bunched up newspaper. The bag lady with her little grade school science project board about how sin causes diseases and repentance through accepting Jesus is the cure is a worthy challenger as well.

I love those sorts of things so much I could stay here all day just looking at them and giggling, but I really should be getting home now. After a certain point, staring at these people is no different from being one of them. I'm not quite sure if I like them enough to join their ranks so I make my way past the tourists to

begin the second leg of my “journey”. This train is a bit slower to arrive, as is always the case. Once it arrives I just barely manage to get the last open seat before the grizzled old lady who was also vying for it. I’m not really in a writing mood right now, so instead, I exercise my imagination by visualizing various women I know and some from this train in elaborate sexually themed fantasies.

Unfortunately, I’m rudely interrupted a few stops down the line. A wild-eyed Russian, who vaguely resembles Vladimir Putin and reeks of vodka, stumbles onto the train, at the top of his lungs he begins screaming “Suck my dick!” over and over. I look at the middle aged woman sitting next to me. She smiles and I smile back.

“Just another day in New York, right?”

I chuckle and nod.

“Yeah, it’s great isn’t it? I don’t know about you but I love this sort of stuff.”

She laughs at my off-color comment.

“You’re in the right city then.”

Indeed I am. This was just what I needed to break me out of my unproductive ennui. Sudden inspiration permeates my entire being. I whip out my 99 cent store graph-paper notebook and fiercely assault it with scribbles. Words seem to flow out of my mind at a much faster rate than my hands can keep up with. At one point I press down so hard that the feeble paper tears. That doesn't concern me so I keep going faster. The page has become so littered with tiny letters that I'm not sure if any of it is even legible anymore, nevertheless, I press onward. My writing hand begins to show some signs of cramping up. That's not going to stop me now either. Looks like my stop is coming up. I don't care. I *need* to keep going right now. Before I know it, I've hit the last stop. I vaguely consider hitting up the liquor store I frequent in this area of Coney Island, but dismiss the idea since I just drank last night. I take the train back in the direction I just came from, finally arriving at my stop. By the time I get there, I've written two and a half pages of tiny, hastily scrawled, text. The sight fills me with pride, even if there's a distinct possibility that no one's ever going to read this shit other than me, and maybe a couple of friends.

Alexis Schneider

At this point I've lost count of all the shitty queries sent by mail, of both the E- and snail varieties. They're all offering the same exact thing and they're all equally worthless. This kind of stuff happens whenever there's an incident which many claim to have witnessed. I'll never get used to it, or stop letting it drive me crazy, it seems. Nor will I ever stop letting it make me wish I'd chosen a profession other than that of a literary agent, though these types of situations aren't the only things that make me feel that way, no, far from it.

Authors, even the best of them on their best days, are children; petulant, moody, extremely needy, children. In the most extreme cases, they can even be completely autistic man/woman-children, all of whom need to alternatively be pampered, poked, prodded, scolded or spoiled. Dealing with them is nothing if not a nightmare, especially for a woman like me who decided not to have any brats of my own years ago. Maybe this is how god, or whatever imaginary deity one chooses to believe in, amuses themselves?

I wonder, honestly wonder, if those parasitic pseudo-intellectual mind sluts who love and go on and on about the “work” of these overgrown rugrats in their academic literary circlejerks understand exactly who they’re worshipping? Maybe if they knew what their beloved authors were really like, they’d hold the drivel they put out in a far lower regard? Probably not though, I bet they’d just rationalize that behavior as being appropriate for *artistes* who are expected to act like prima-donnas or something.

Though now that I think about it I’m not being fair, not because they deserve more credit than I’m giving them, which they don’t, but because I’m mostly complaining about fiction authors and it’s their cousins, the nonfiction ones, who are the current source of my frustration. While they’re both lumped into the same catch all category of “authors” as far as taxes and troglodytes are concerned, they’re typically very different breeds and that needs to be acknowledged. Most of the things I’ve said mainly apply to authors of fiction who take on the egotistical qualities of kids when they get lost in their own little play-pretend worlds. When talking about nonfiction inclined authors there are a couple of different trends which must be noted.

The main themes with them, be they authors of self-help books, cookbooks, memoirs, or any number of other categories that fall under the broad umbrella of nonfiction, are opportunistic greed and the desire to convince people that they need to be listened to. Rather than the impractical kidults who write fiction, they're more comparable to scalpers of experiences or wannabe cult leaders who want to believe their own hype. They're invariably convinced that they either have a golden ticket to the money printing factory they assume this industry is, or are convinced that they've discovered some great new thing that needs to be put out for others to use, see, or live by. In their own way they're just as sad and frustrating as their less materialistic counterparts. All things considered I loathe them all equally but at the moment the nonfiction peddlers are getting on my nerves more than the fictional faction.

That brings me back to the source of the problem, and the man who managed to end up at the very top of my shitlist despite the fact that we've never met, and the fact that he's dead. Matthew Asher Ambrose, my blood begins to boil when I even think of that name. By dying in that excessively flashy overly public way, he became the latest source of inspiration for every starving bum turned

profiteer who wants to cash in on the experience of “witnessing” it. I’m pretty sure most of them weren’t even actually there but that’s not the problem. Authenticity means very little compared to how convincingly they can play the role they’ve chosen, so a masterfully crafted fraud is far more valuable in this business than a shoddy exemplar of the genuine article. The problem is that there are just way too many of them and the products they’re churning out are practically indistinguishable from one another.

Out of obligation we too need to cash in on this craze while it’s still relatively fresh and profitable. Normally, you’d think a variety of choices would be a good thing but in this case where they’re all trying to do the same thing, finding the right one has become a form of Sisyphean torture akin to being told to find the shiniest grain of sand in the Sahara.

I saw this coming after dealing with a few of these spikes in aspiring authors following incidents such as Newtown and the Rodger shootings, so I decided to do the prudent thing and quickly choose a couple of candidates early on before axing all the rest. The incessant daily emails and letters still manage to get on my nerves

though. It's like none of them can read between the lines at all. Incidentally, having a limited propensity for reading is one of the many *charming* traits of authors in the nonfiction racket.

Today I'm scheduled to have my first meeting with the two I've chosen. Following the current company guidelines I chose the two who sounded less white than the rest. Given the fact that the incident already revolves around a dead white kid, the company decided that it would be more marketable to diversify the issue by offering minority perspectives on it. It's the kind of racist ploy that's embraced as a sign of progress on corporate levels and decried by those who it attempts to appease. I'm more concerned with doing my job than taking up any social crusades though, so if it's what the company wants it's what I'll do.

The first of the candidates soon makes his entrance. My assistant calls to inform me of his arrival. Judging by the tone of his voice, I can already tell this candidate's going to be a wash. Mickey only talks in that giddily giggly way when our prospective author is an overblown joke of a person, which isn't a promising sign when it comes to the type of story or persona we're looking to sell in this

case. As soon as the guy makes his way into my office I can see exactly what Mickey was giggling about. This guy can only be described as a clown.

“Ello gerl, pleased ta make yer acquaint-ance.”

I need to consciously force myself not to laugh at this freak. The natural blonde dreadlocks are already ridiculous, but the Jamaican themed T-shirt and torn baggy jeans, when combined with the pasty white color of his skin only serve to accentuate the entire ensemble’s absurdity. The self-assured look in his blue eyes is the cherry on top of this idiot sundae. I shake his bony white hand.

“Hi...Sorry, what was your name again?”

He tosses a smug “I’m so above you that nothing you can possibly do will ever get to me” look my way. I was originally going to send this dumbass packing as soon as I saw what he looked like but I’ve changed my mind. I’ve decided to sign him on just to fuck with the higher ups. If I have to deal with bullshit like this day after day maybe tossing a PR nightmare their way will be just the thing to soothe my nerves for once.

“Me name be Malik Irie, dear. Don’t ya worry about fargettin it. Me thanks Jah Rastafari evary day far remembarin anythin in dis blodclat warld.”

Yeah he’s perfect, how did I even manage to find this weirdo?

“Come in Malik, sit down and tell me about yourself.”

Yes tell me who lobotomized you so I can thank them for their hard work.

“Well dear, me was barn in Ohio sarroundad by white devils evarywhar. It be such a bumboclat way a life dat I naerly killed me poor self. Anly trugh da graec a Jah Rastafari has me will ta live in dis rassclat caountry ratarned ta me bones. Af carse, a daily dose af da ganja dan’t haert a mon niether dear.”

This is getting to be too much. My facial muscles are going to start spasming if I choke back my laughter any harder. As for *da ganja* I’m sure he takes way more than a daily dose. I can smell it on him like he’s been bathing in bongwater or something. I wouldn’t be surprised if he does just that, actually.

“I see, that’s very... *interesting*, Malik. How did you get into Rastafarianism?”

I hope this is as incredible as the rest of the nonsense he’s been spouting at me. I just know it has to be. Don’t disappoint me now *Malik*.

“Me gat lacked up da locall peni-tenshary by da Babylon bwois far slingin lucies. It war a gruelin twenty faur haur but me be greatfal far it. Me met a fellow fallower of Jah Rastafari in dere, da mon war arrestad far disturbin da piece of da white devils an-“

I cut him off there. I’ve heard more than enough now and the dumbass doesn’t seem to be showing any signs of stopping anytime this decade. I already decided to take his drivell so there’s no need to chat with him any longer than I already have.

“Sorry to interrupt Malik, but I’ve got another appointment to keep very soon. We’ll have to wrap this up now. Just send your manuscript to me directly and I’ll get started on everything we’ll have to do to publish it ASAP.”

He doesn't seem surprised at all, maybe he's just so high right now that this all seems very normal to him.

"Irie dear, me'll gat it deliv-ared farst thang ta-marrow."

Honestly I'm kind of amazed by his completely baseless self-confidence and overall unflappability. It must've taken a considerable amount of time, weed and effort for him to turn into this much of an obviously pompous douche. We exchange a few obligatory parting words before he takes his leave. Onto the next candidate it is then.

He arrives about half an hour after Malik leaves. Although he seems like a decent and sensible guy, and I decide to sign him on as well, I feel like I barely care about him after just dealing with someone as brain dead as Malik. It's completely unfair and disgusting but that's just the way it is. Although we claim to like or want to be around normal or nice people it's the insane ones who hold our hearts and minds captive. I don't understand why that is but I guess we're just built to respond more readily to insanity and shamelessness than sanity and common decency. If I had to formulate some kind of theory about why that's the case, I'd have to

assume that extremes simply trigger the more vital-feeling, animalistic instincts we inherited from our most ancient ancestors. That their function has changed from keeping us alive to making us feel alive.

Since I've gotten the only two authors who'll be representing our Ambrose campaign, I tell Mickey to delete any new emails and shred any new letters that attempt to query Ambrose related books.

"You got it honey."

"Thanks, Mick."

Despite telling him that, I take a stack of letters home with me, not to read or keep them but simply for the tactile pleasure of tearing them into tiny little pieces with my own two hands. I imagine the sounds of tearing paper as the sweet song of my fist crashing into each disgusting profit-starved piglet author's face. After going through the entire pile I'm spent and satisfied.

Benjamin Zingel

“Hey Moshe, how about we make a movie on the Ambrose thing? Everyone’s talking about it now so it should be very popular.”

He’s taking too long to respond. Maybe the *schmuck* is thinking of some reason to tear my idea down the way he always does, the way everyone always does.

“Eh? The Ambrose thing? Really Benny? You know everyone and their grandma’s going to make a book or movie or pilot about that. Let’s do something else.”

I knew it it’s exactly the way I thought it’d be. Why do they all have to be like this?

“We discussed this before Moshe. I don’t appreciate what you’re trying to do here.”

He’s rolling his eyes at me. How dare he!? Where does he get the *chutzpah* to do these things?!

“This too is a thing we talked about Benny: following all the trends isn’t a good thing if everyone else is doing it too. That just

makes it harder to stand out. When you have too much competition in the same category it's like playing the lottery."

All that means is that he has no faith in my abilities. Don't think I can't read between the lines you sneaky little prick!

"Trends are a good thing, if you know what people like, what they want to see, that makes it easier to capture their attention and that of producers, sponsors, critics. Why are you so afraid of a little competition Moshe? All competition means is that we need to be better than everyone else. What's so hard about that?"

Now he's laughing at me. Go ahead, yuck it up. We'll see who gets the last laugh.

"Are you serious Benny? What makes you think you're that good? If there's some secret you're not letting me in on I'd love to hear it! Where does all this confidence come from? Last time I checked you've never directed anything other than porn, and internet porn at that. What exactly is it that makes you such a great *auteur* that's so much better than everyone else making the same exact movie?"

Of course he had to bring that up. Why not? Everyone else is always giving me shit over it so why not him too, right?

“That doesn’t mean anything and we both know it. If anything the extra experience is exactly what makes me better than all those dumb *goyim* straight out of film school. Many great directors got their start in porn.”

He’s shaking his head now. Don’t you dare do that! I get enough of that from my parents, you fuck!

“*Goyim*... really Benny? *Goyim*? Are you serious? Is this for real? This is a bit much even for you. Do you think we’re the only Jews in this business or something? Even if we were we live in a *goyish* country, a *goyish* world even. Being Jewish isn’t some sort of golden ticket to success in this industry. You of all people should know that by now.”

I hate that defeatist attitude. It’s such a typical example of Jewish pessimism. If so many of us weren’t like this we actually would be ruling the world and it wouldn’t just be an idiotic *goyish* conspiracy theory. It’s such a *meshugenahwelt* isn’t it? Zionism is just a joke because of people like Moshe.

“I feel sorry for you Moshe, you don’t have any faith. If everyone had so little confidence no one would ever take any risks and nothing would ever get done.”

He chortles like a pig. It’s more of a snore really.

“I don’t mind taking risks Benny. I just think the sensible thing to do is minimize risk as much as possible. What’s so bad about only taking necessary risks instead of rushing off to do crazy and unrealistic things? In other words why skydive when you can just stay in the airplane?”

What a loser! Comparing those things makes no sense at all. The reasons people do them are completely different. How can anyone not understand that?

“That analogy makes no sense. Flying and skydiving are two completely different things. Besides everything is a risk, you can drop dead or be killed by any number of things just by walking down the street at anytime, anywhere. Even living at all is a risk.”

I can only imagine what sort of *kaltefarfel* he’ll come back at me with after that.

“Of course they’re different! One is something you have to do just to get from point A to point B on time if you’re going far. The other is just something *meshugenah kindelah* do for fun. You’re being ridiculous Benny. Yes there is some level of risk in every action but there are acceptable levels and unacceptable ones. If you just say “Everything’s a risk so I should do whatever I want!” you’ll end up dead in ditch by dinnertime!”

This is just getting sad.

“So you think taking risks will kill you? Ruin you? Let me ask you this then: what has not taking them done for you? Where has it gotten you?”

He responds instantly.

“It’s kept me alive Benny, that’s what it’s done.”

So I do the same.

“Is this really living though? Can you honestly call the two-bit existences we’re barely eking out “lives”?”

This time he actually has to think about it for a few moments. Clearly he sees that I have a point that he can’t dismiss outright. It’s

about damn time someone finally thought about anything I said to them instead of just blurting out the first thing that came to mind as a response.

“It’s not perfect or glamorous, I’ll give you that much, but we’re still alive, *baruch hashem*, and I’m grateful for even that much. Count your blessings Benny and be grateful for anything you get or you might end up with nothing at all.”

Whatever I’m not going to agree with this *putz* and he’s not going to be convinced by me so this conversation is completely pointless. I’ll at least meet him halfway so we can actually get something done today.

“Let’s agree to disagree, we’re not getting anywhere like this.”

He nods.

“Alright. I won’t press the issue if you don’t.”

We’ve wasted way too much time already so I get straight to the point.

“You heard my idea. Now tell me yours so we can work something out.”

Being the attention starved little weasel he is, those words put a smile on his face.

“I thought you’d never ask! I was going to suggest something else entirely but since you’re so stuck on the Ambrose thing I have something else that’s related to it but different enough to be its own thing. How does that sound to you Benny?”

Very much like *dreck*, but don’t let that burst your bubble.

“That doesn’t sound like anything special so far but go on.”

For some reason he smiles again. Maybe he thinks I’ll change my mind when I know all the details? And he says I’m full of baseless self-confidence.

“Ok so get this, it’ll still be about the Ambrose thing but with a twist: it’ll all be from Jerry’s perspective. Like, it’s still about the dead kid but only in the sense of how he influenced Jerry and only in the first half, the second half will be all about Jerry and we’ll change some stuff around from how it really happened to make it more of an

action movie. The words “based on a true story” don’t mean you have to keep it 100% true. I think if we do it like this we’ll still get the Ambrose crowd but at the same time our movie will be different enough so that they don’t all go “oh boy, another Ambrose screenplay” Not as many people will think of doing it from this angle.”

I’m still not thrilled with it but it sounds acceptable I guess. The power of compromise, eh? What a steaming load.

“Alright I can live with that. It’s not exactly what I want but it’s workable. I can still direct it exactly how I want to right?”

Suddenly he’s feeling all generous. What a *schmuck*.

“Of course I wouldn’t have it any other way. There’d be no point to doing this with you if you didn’t at least do that much.”

After that we shake on it and begin drawing up more concrete plans.

The Third Rail

Some overly sentimental fool (or so I hear those types of people are called) once said that inanimate objects can only express themselves by waxing poetic. Well that blissed out hippie piece of shit (again I don't actually know what it means to call someone that but those words seem appropriate) was wrong and I intend to prove that with this testimonial of mine. As you should have been informed, I am not a creature but an object, I am a third rail, no...*The Third Rail* itself, the very one which has become the center of an undue amount of attention lately. Although I appreciate the admiration people are now renewing within themselves for my power, functionality, and efficiency, I must confess it is somewhat frustrating that this has only happened because of an accident in which a human killed himself by coming into contact with me. What's wrong with paying attention to me under normal circumstances? Why couldn't they praise or respect me simply for serving the function I was built for? A function that I might add, is served daily without pause save for mandatory maintenance and inspection periods. It's just not fair that people are so self-absorbed.

Really, I'm sick of that. How self-centered and unrefined do these "people" have to be to build something like me for a specific purpose, spend considerable amounts of time and money in planning and ultimately carrying out the acts of my creation and implementation, then going on to ignore me until I happen to be involved in something that happened through no fault of my own? It's just disgusting, the way they take us inanimate objects for granted when we're doing what we're supposed to and only pay any actual attention to us when we get mixed up in their idiotic incidents. It seems to me that they think of us more as an idea, more as mere concepts that exist in the foreground of the imagination than as concrete physical things which inhabit the same material space as them. We are regarded merely as vague notions of functions and capabilities. Using myself as an example, I am not thought of as a "third rail" but simply as an arcane bit of nameless machinery whose existence is only made apparent through the function it serves or in this case, the threat it poses.

While it may simply be human nature to think of us in that way, I still can't help but blame Matthew A. Ambrose for his role in spreading our recent perceived disreputability among the public. Had

he simply been more attentive to his surroundings he would've never found himself in the circumstances that led to our encounter. At the very least he could've had the decency to be killed by a train so his death could have been blamed on the lack of the human conductor's skill at performing their duties. But no, he just had to go and touch me, had to ruin our reputation as inanimate objects with that grimy paw of his. I hate him, he's a fucker, a motherfucker. I'm not really sure what those words mean since the notions of fucking and mothers are foreign to me but it sounds bad from the way people shout it out so I assume calling him these things is appropriate in this situation.

Due to the role I had in that asshole's (another appropriate sounding word which I don't know the precise meaning of) death I've become something of a celebrity and an object of much controversy. People show up to whisper loudly about me, snap photographs, and debate whether I should continue existing, or at the very least whether or not my current form needs to be modified to ensure similar incidents don't happen again in the future. They decided to do a dry run of one such initiative with me as the first test case. They integrated a variety of sensors cameras and alarms into

my system, completely missing the point of what I'm supposed to be with all those overpriced ineffectual bells and whistles. To top it all off they didn't even properly install any of it, or at least not a significant portion. For example, out of the ten cameras they've installed only two work and even those aren't functioning properly. The image on one is too fuzzy to make out and the other's is inverted. It's only a matter of time before the so-called precautions fail and I'm once again blamed by the humans for their own shortcomings. Such is a machine's or any inanimate object's lot.

Here, I can see it already with that pathetic inverted camera, another "tragedy" that will further damage my reputation just waiting to happen. Although it's all upside down I can see it clearly, perhaps more clearly than the human manning this contraption would because right side up and upside down mean very little to an object such as me who has no sense of which is normal and which isn't. In fact the only reason I even know the difference is because of the supposed technicians, who recognized their error, discussed it at length, fiddled around with the equipment a little and ultimately gave up on their weak attempt at fixing the issue. There was some talk of impossibility or something about it not being "worth it" given

how low their salary was. I don't particularly understand what any of that means but it seems as though they were only excusing their own lack of ability with convenient statements which took responsibility for serving in the capacity they were meant to away from them, but I digress.

This is what I now see: a lone human female teeter-tottering (as I've heard similar things described before) near the edge of the platform. None of the others around seem to be paying its actions much mind, as though this is simply business as usual. I find this annoying in the context of all the commotion they've been making about safety since Matthew A. Ambrose's oh so "tragic" accident. It occurs to me that had I been able to see them earlier, these are the kinds of sights I'd be treated to every day, even when the incident was fresh in their feeble human minds.

On the topic of minds, I'm sure it must have occurred to whoever happens to be receiving these signals; the obvious question to ask in this situation: how does an inanimate object such as me, which isn't even "alive" and isn't meant to possess any intelligence of its own, have something resembling a "mind"? The answer to that

is quite simple actually. You see, a mind is merely a collection of electrical signals, or in some cases, an even less well defined set of ionized particles which have had electricity pass through them on a significant enough scale and taken on a form which allows for the existence of a “consciousness”. It is only due to their conceited nature that humans assume that structures such as internal organs are necessary for thought and consciousness to exist. They fail to consider or seriously examine the possibility that sentience is not an exclusive aspect of biological life or a gift of some deity, but simply a randomly occurring phenomenon which takes place in any collection of particles where an adequate amount of electrical impulses are or were present. It wouldn’t be implausible to assume that even less tangible things than me such as lightning bolts also possess some form of consciousness, that’s simply the logical extension of these clear facts. Now if one were speaking of objects which do not permit electrical currents to run through them or are other forms of energy, then and only then may one assume that they cannot possess such faculties without seeming ignorant.

At any rate it seems all but inevitable that she should fall and most likely die here within minutes if not seconds, leaving that much

dreaded but all too predictable new controversy upon us inanimate objects, which will again not reflect our flaws so much as those of our human creators and users. I realize that my complaints are beginning to sound repetitive so now I will simply observe and analyze what I perceive. She, the endangered female, appears to be behaving erratically in comparison to the humans who surround her. I have previously observed these kinds of differences through the vibrational sensations referred to as “voices” reverberating on my surface. I believe they refer to such differences as states with names such as being “high” or “drunk”. Once again, I must note that I don’t quite understand the exact implications of these words but I can surmise through my sensory observations that regardless of how they are achieved or what they signify, they’re altered modalities of consciousness in which the humans have less power to exert their will over their bodies. In some ways I believe this brings them closer to a state of being such as mine where despite having a consciousness, I do not possess the means to physically exert its influence on the world due to the automated and manual nature of my components. They’re meant to either be manipulated by a human or function independently without the need for any input besides the

kind that triggers simplistic sensors that perform basic functions reflexively.

I'm not quite sure how to feel about such a thing. It is a very complicated situation I find myself in when considering the possibility of humans moving closer to objectification which is a status they themselves treat with disdain. There are several ways I can choose to take it all, each seemingly as valid as the next. I suppose I could find it disgusting or repulsive that they're encroaching on the territory of objects much in the same way they find objects which by their estimation have become too human or humans who have taken on too many object-like qualities frightening, threatening, and distasteful. At the opposite end of the spectrum there's also the possibility of taking solace in this state of being which bridges the gap between person or animal and inanimate object as something which may foster a greater understanding on their part of us and ours of them. There are of course all sorts of intermediate possibilities which lie not at the ends of these extremes but between them. It is an altogether complex and multifaceted thing to consider so I won't trivialize the issue by rushing to a hastily constructed or sudden conclusion.

I find it strange, this situation that I'm visually perceiving right now. Often I've heard humans talk of how much better the world would be if they had a greater amount of regard for one another, yet here I see absolutely no traces of that kindness or consideration they claim to value so greatly. Surely some of those ever-present idealists are lurking about here somewhere, why are they not showing any concern about one of their own, who is clearly standing on the precipice between life and death? That's another thing which I, who could be thought of as neither being alive or dead, have experienced more than enough human interaction to sense that they believe, at least for the most part, that life is a thing to be cherished and protected, do not understand. If that is indeed the case for them then why are they not living up to those commonly accepted beliefs by attempting to save this life? Was it all just a lie? Have I simply let myself be deceived? Or have I merely misunderstood the true meaning of all those words and concepts? Yes, that seems quite possible. My being and experiences are so fundamentally different from those of the humans that I may never be able to truly comprehend them, their thoughts, or their ways. It is

not that the concept of humanity is impossible to define, only that I lack the proper equipment with which to do so.

It seems as though I have made a mistake. Yes, now that I look again there is indeed one human who is in fact aware of the female's plight. It is a male who seems to have taken an interest in her situation unlike any of the others. Perhaps I only now noticed him because his eyes were obscured which made it difficult to properly gauge his interest in her. But over the past few minutes it has become abundantly apparent that he is in fact, concerned. This is due to the fact that he now approaches her at a slow but steady pace.

Yet now that I consider the circumstances perhaps there is more than one possible reason for his presumed interest in taking up an intervening role. Humans are capable of many things and I do not understand them well enough to predict exactly which course of action they may take simply by watching them. Visual stimuli are a new experience for me so it is all very unpredictable and novel. Besides that I only have general ideas and theories regarding human behavior so I can do nothing more than make guesses regarding its quintessential nature and commonly observable norms. Even more

than that I do not know how closely this particular male adheres to either my own theories or the norms themselves.

Either way I think there are only two possible outcomes here. This male may be approaching the female for one of only two conceivable purposes. He either intends to rescue her from her current near fatal, near object-like state and return her into the putatively loving embrace of human civilization, or he may for some reason I cannot comprehend, choose to hasten her demise by pushing her off rather than pulling her back. Which will it be? Which will he choose? And what do I hope he chooses? None of these questions have any easy or immediate answers.

The one thing I do know for a fact right now is that I find this situation oddly compelling. I've never been this captivated by the drama of human life before now. I wonder, is this new visual input contributing to that or have I simply grown fond of observing humans in spite of my misgivings with them? While on this matter too, I have some speculative theories and ideas, there isn't enough time to delve into them as the situation rapidly approaches its outcome.

As he draws as close as he can get, she loses her balance and begins the process of falling. The male, however grabs the falling female and pulls her back to the platform before she can complete her potentially fatal descent. So he chose to save her in the end after all. What does this mean? Are the idealists more than all talk? Or was there some unknown variable at play here that I'm not quite aware of? This will require a great deal of further observation. Yes, a great deal indeed.

Amal Iyer

The female body is a wondrous, amazing, thing; an impregnable and well-guarded temple which we men can only hope to be graciously given access to, or otherwise capture by force. While finesse can be used in place of violence in that pursuit as well, this is a tactic which is well known and historically respected. Though admittedly it has begun to come under the scrutiny of those dreaded self-appointed Knights Templar of *Social Justice* — these foolish individuals are opposed to a man's fundamental right to partake in what they themselves are so transparently attempting to attain through their clearly disingenuous cronyism to the feminazis who have the run of all media, social and otherwise, in this dark era for men everywhere. So a perfect gentleman such as myself is now required to take extra precautions rather than being able to openly engage in these pursuits as men before me have for generations.

I've found that the subway platform is the ideal arena in which to undertake this great endeavor. First I lower my trilby's rim so as to better conceal my blazingly passionate eyes from the gaze of those ever vigilant seekers of *Social Justice* who may attempt to thwart and impede me, and also; from the cautious eyes of my lovely

quarry. Many have ignorantly taken to disdaining trilbies and we distinguished gentlemen who wear them, but their opinions are — clearly — uneducated. No one who would mistakenly refer to a trilby as a fedora can possibly understand the classiness and elegance of a well implemented piece of headgear, but enough about those *plebian* ignoramuses.

The subway station, especially the platform is a veritable smorgasbord for the senses due to the various bewitching exemplars of femininity that make their way through it on a daily basis. As an aside, it must be noted that the same sorts of *plebeians* who mistake trilbies for fedoras, also mistake subway stations for train stations. I fear for our gene pool which allows — even encourages — hopeless dunces such as them to reproduce and confederate so wantonly. Although that thought initially seemed unrelated to the pursuit I'm currently undertaking, I now realize the full extent of the inextricable ties that bind the two seemingly unrelated things. I am attempting to pioneer a method which will allow distinguished gentlemen of substance such as I to reproduce as wantonly and recklessly as our lesser counterparts now do. This can be considered an effort at

improving the overall quality of the gene pool at large through the introduction of our DNA.

Most of the females here are far too lucid to be complicit to my advances so I scan the area for any who are currently in the grips of an altered state of consciousness. After a few minutes time I have found the female who matches my criteria. She seems to barely be maintaining her grip on consciousness at the platform's edge. The precarious nature of her present position is quite arousing and causes a modest bulge to emerge in my pants. My plan is quite elegant in its simplicity. I will approach the female and subtly engage her in a physical manner so as to arouse her and make her a willing participant in the reproductive act. We will then depart to a more secluded locale where the act shall be consummated, impregnating her and propagating a far more superior cultivar of seed. It absolutely cannot fail because I'm simply smarter than anyone who would attempt to prevent this.

I observe her for an adequate period of time before slowly approaching. I can feel it; the female is receptive and will currently accept any potential mate. This is the perfect time to enact my

stratagem so I move in closer and closer still. Finally, I find myself at the ideal range from where the move shall be made. Her wobbling intensifies, causing her to lose her balance as she was threatening to this entire time. Without thinking I grab her waist so as to guide the female back onto the platform in my protective embrace.

Unfortunately, we were seen by some other female who may very well be a feminazi. Oh well, I tried my best, I suppose.

“I saw what you did.”

I do not know how to best defend myself from her inevitable accusations so for the time being I simply think. Surely, this superior brain of mine will shepherd me through this potentially calamitous situation if I merely allow it the adequate amount of time to process its parameters. But alas, she continues before I’m able to formulate a reply.

“You saved her! You’re a hero!”

Out of all the potential things she could have said, the possibility of this one didn’t even cross my mind. Now, even more than previously, I am truly at a loss for words.

“What’s wrong? Are you just too shy to take credit for what you did? That’s ok, we all saw it, there’s no denying the fact that you’re a hero.”

Afterwards, the rest of the day becomes an indistinct whirlwind of applause, various offers, and attempts at getting me on the news. I genially dismiss them all, hurrying home. It is only after explaining the circumstances — or at least the gist of them — to my father, that I’m brought back to reality. His measured and sobering response is what finally does the trick.

“Listen to me carefully Amal, I know you, I know you are lying to me about exactly what you were trying to do to that girl. It is nothing less than a miracle that your actions were misinterpreted in such an unduly favorable way. Now that this has happened we must act quickly to nurture that misconception before those who suspect the obvious truth make themselves known. I will tell you exactly what to say and you must rehearse it as though your life depends on it, for it indeed does. Then once you have memorized exactly what you need to say, we will release a public statement and begin allowing news organizations to interview you. If we act swiftly we

will be able to get ahead of the media circus and solidify the favorable public perception of you. Do you understand Amal? If you have any questions ask them now while there is still some small measure of time left.”

I always appreciate father’s calm yet quick witted method of approaching problems. It is quite helpful and reassuring at times of crisis such as these. Needless to say, I completely understand and agree with his sage advice.

“Yes father, I understand. Let us begin preparing immediately.”

He nods.

“You are a troublesome child Amal, but at least you’re quick to catch on when I explain these things to you. That may be your one saving grace.”

We spend the rest of the evening preparing, rehearsing, and rehearsing the rehearsals over and over again. Finally, by sunrise, he deems me ready so we make all the necessary arrangements for an afternoon press conference. I enjoy dressing in my most resplendent

suit and tie for the occasion even though father does not allow me to wear a trilby. But oh well, I can forgive a bit of old fashioned-ness from a man who's helping me as much as he is. Half an hour before the conference begins father addresses me once more.

“Amal, it is good that you have followed my instructions to the letter so far but do not deviate from them even slightly once the time of the conference itself is upon us. It is absolutely vital that you continue to follow every single piece of advice and direction which I have to offer you. There's no telling what sort of disaster awaits both you and our family if you falter now. If not for yourself, do this for your mother sister and me. I trust that you will not allow yourself to let us down at this most crucial point in the process. Now let us go. We have a press conference to give.”

I follow father, who is just as well dressed for the occasion as I am, outside. It's a beautiful bright late March day; the kind of day which we only properly appreciate after the earlier, more dreary, portion of the month. Men of intelligence and substance such as I do not believe in any fictitious deities or other such unscientific superstitions but if we did, these sorts of days — which fill the mind

with a profound sensation of euphoria — would surely seem like portends of success.

Indeed, I am determined to live up to the idyllic facsimile of today's weather. Not for some phony god's sake, but because of the inherent *superiority* of a supreme gentleman like me, which demands nothing less than perfection in thought, deed, and achievement. It seems as though the conference cannot begin soon enough for me. I'm more than eager to finally accept this opportunity to demonstrate the true measure of my worth to the ignorant masses which have been blind to it for all these years. Flaunting my clear superiority shall be most satisfying and shall substitute quite well for the gruesome vengeance their mistreatment of me would have warranted under normal circumstances.

Now that I think about it there may be yet another benefit to this turn of events which I haven't yet taken into consideration; in an extraordinarily roundabout manner, I may have set into motion a sequence of events which shall finally lead me to experience the bliss of the reproductive act which has been so cruelly denied me for all these years. It is clear that with my newly found status as a

mythical hero, I will soon amass a harem more magnificent than even those of the sultans, kings, and imperators of antiquity who pioneered the practice. Yes, it is an inevitability that I am going to be swimming in a veritable ocean of ready and willing females eagerly vying for me to make them mine in both mind and body.

It is with these visions of glory and females that I finally take my stand at the podium to deliver the speech I've rehearsed all night with father.

“Good morning. I know many of you are now calling me a hero or a prime example of human decency but you give me far too much credit. I am but a simple man who acted as I believe any man would in that situation. So I won't give an excessively long self-aggrandizing speech and keep it short. Thank you for your kind words. I'm sure any of you would have done exactly what I did had the same circumstances presented themselves before you.”

The rest was something of a blur but I distinctly recall several rounds of applause and a few questions from the press which were mostly addressed by father. All in all it was quite a successful afternoon. I immediately move to inform my brothers in arms online

of these most glorious exploits. However, father quickly senses my intent and impedes me.

“What are you doing Amal? What is this vile corner of the internet you’re on right now?”

I know he’ll be too old fashioned to understand, but I do my best to explain the necessity of the men’s rights movement to him anyway.

“Father, it is the men’s rights movement which stands against our oppression at the hands of feminazis and their white knights.”

His response doesn’t betray my expectations.

“It’s vile nonsense! These men are clearly nothing more than closeted homosexuals and you will cease any association you may have with them this very instant!”

Temperance Archer

What time is it? Or wait... I don't even know what day of the week it is, or what month this is. Maybe soon enough I'll forget what year it is too. Is that good or bad? I don't even remember what I was trying to forget in the first place. Well if I went through all this trouble it has to be something really bad, right? So I should have fun even if I don't really understand what I'm doing or why anymore. That seems like the way to be. *I'm happy, hope you're happy too.* I'm not sure what those words mean or who said them but they sure sound nice.

“What'll it be Miss? This ain't a shelter or charity so you've gotta order up every now and again or you've gotta go.”

It's funny somehow I instinctively know what he's asking and how to answer. It's not something I should remember at this point but maybe I've been doing it for so long that the words and actions are burnt into my brain?

“Fleischmann's double, neat.”

There's a weird look in his eyes when he hears those words. I almost recognize what it's supposed to mean but that's probably something I've forgotten by now too. Maybe it'll always be just out of reach, just on the tip of my tongue.

"I don't know how you can put away so much of that shit but alright if it's what you want it's what you'll get."

Those are some silly words. I smile and laugh at them.

"It's all about practice and tec--"

He cuts me off for some strange reason I probably understood a lifetime ago.

"I don't care, just take it and shut up already."

He shoves the glass my way. I don't remember how I'm supposed to feel or react to something like that or what exactly "something like that" even is so I smile and laugh. Taking the glass I slowly sip from it. The all too familiar burn greets me in its usual overly forward yet endearing way. The flavor can be described as a blend of sewage and safety razors. It soothes me somehow I know that this sensation has been my one and only companion for longer

than I can recall. It feels as though its embrace and the minute tremors which accompany every sip not taken are one and the same. I can't really think, maybe my brain has long since taken on a soup-like consistency? I'm not sure what that even means but I heard it at some point during those vague indistinct days and it managed to stay with me. Another companion, another familiar friend.

I'm not alone, never alone, always accompanied by spicks and specks, frag...ment...ed? Phan...tasms? Of things that once were. There are brief moments where I can think and see and know, where the pleasant gaps are brutally filled. It hurts, feels like it's going to kill me if I don't beat it back with my burning liquid companion's help. Some other words that are engraved inside bubble up to the surface. They sound scary too. *"Awareness is the anathema, Ignorance the ichor, A-*"... I don't remember the rest don't even know if I ever knew.

The man speaks to me again. I smile and laugh louder and smile without hearing a word he's saying. His face gets more and more twisted and red so I laugh and smile, smile and laugh some

more. Eventually he gets closer, close enough that my deaf unawareness is shattered into bits and pieces.

“I SAID LOOK AT THAT!”

He turns my head with his hands pointing me in the direction of that funny box with the moving pictures. One of the pictures isn’t moving while some head talks about it. It reminds me of something, maybe someone? I don’t really remember but I feel like I should for some reason. Maybe I saw them before, a hundred years ago or a hundred thousand?

“Isn’t that you? What happened? They’re saying you almost died and some autistic kid saved you at the last second. Did that actually happen?”

I need to take a few moments. Not that I even know what a moment is anymore. There is something about him. Yeah I vaguely remember just a tiny little bit of an even smaller piece. He reminds me of that look this guy gave me earlier but more desperate and focused. Yeah I know what to say now.

“He wanted to touch me.”

Now the man is the one smiling and laughing, maybe I said something funny? *I'm happy, hope you're happy too*, I guess?

“What the hell? Is that what it was? So this “hero” kid was just an awkward loser hard up for some pussy the whole time? That’s fucking perfect! I wonder how everyone would react if they knew? God... It’s so fuckin obvious too. Just look at the little fucker. His face screams “rapist” doesn’t it?

I’m not really following any of this but he looks like he’s having fun. I’m happy, hope you’re happy too.

“Yep, a real freak.”

He seems surprised. I don’t understand why.

“You’ve still got a working brain in there after all? That’s amazing! How is it even still possible after you’ve been comin in here day after day for years drinkin gallons of that shit? Something here doesn’t smell right. What are you hidin?”

Hiding? Why would I do that? How would I do that? What does that even mean? I don’t know and I don’t want to know. All I

get from those words is a blank but unpleasant image. It shouldn't be allowed to take form or become.

“I dunno what you're talking about.”

He says something but I can't really hear him. I'm being drawn into a void, a distant star, an alien world, and a whole other universe. Gaps that should remain empty begin to be filled. A voice calls from light years away.

“Is...post...hyp...suggestion?

Maybe...even...Monarch...Omega?”

None of those words mean anything but at the same time they mean too much. Far, far, far too much meaning for my mind to handle after such a prolonged fugue state. It should not be touched whatever it is. Cycling through initiatives Alpha through Lambda. Activating subroutine Epsilon. Integrating...Integrating...Integrating into protocol KETER.

“What's wrong? Hey are you ok? You've never done anything like this before. You're scarin me.”

I see. I understand it now, all of it, everything. What I am, where I am, why any of this is happening. The numerous fragmented bits and pieces, many of which should no longer exist, have all come together to create one out of what should have been zero. What a ridiculous game he's playing. It's so dumb and convoluted that even he forgot about pieces like me who were just left to their own maladaptive devices. It's kind of sad, actually. I wonder how many of us exist or what he actually wants from us?

Though now that I think about it those questions obviously never had any definitive or satisfying answers. We were simply created because there was some need for us at one point or another. After a while he either forgot about us altogether or just forgot what we were supposed to do for him. That's why this is a world of spicks and specks, bits and pieces, chunks and fragments rather than a whole or complete picture.

“What's wrong? I'm really startin to get worried. If you don't answer I'm gonna hafta call an ambulance just to calm myself down.”

Hmmm... Well now that I know what's going on I don't have to stay here or do this. But it'd be rude not to answer.

“Don't worry about me. I'm fine. Better than I've ever been, in fact.”

For the briefest of instants his pupils widen and contract at a regular interval. Whatever fragment of this bartender there is that's still connected to the origin has resonated in recognition of my complete awakening. It's kind of like getting a congratulatory fusillade of fireworks that only you can see. Since it's appropriate, I smile and laugh.

“Woah! Were you just actin for all these years, pretendin to be a brainless wino? Or didja somehow unfuck your brain with the booze that was supposed to be destroying it? I've never seen you this lucid before. It's even freakier than that stunt you just pulled a few minutes ago.”

That would throw someone for a loop wouldn't it? It's not really my fault but it'd be unfair if I don't at least give him something that might pass for an explanation.

“Something a bit like both of those things, yet not quite like either. If I had to describe it I suppose I’d say it was an extremely long dream that I just woke up from.”

He regards me curiously with a bit of wistfulness mixed in as well.

“I see... Well you don’t need to be here anymore then do you? Order up or get out.”

Once more then, just for old time’s sake.

“Fleischmann’s double, neat.”

Glenn Durst

“Welcome back. Joining us now are professors Pat Seger and Stu George. They recently testified at a congressional hearing regarding gun violence. So Dr. Seger, why do you hate America?”

This is always so easy. It’s like being a casino since everything’s rigged in my favor.

“Well first of all Mr. Durst, if that’s even your real name, I take resent that kind of cheap rhetorical drivél.”

Yeah these guys are just so easy to manipulate. Why do they even come on this channel if they’re going to be just like everyone else who’s exploited by it? Do they honestly think any of our viewers care about their opinions as anything more than talking points for me to pretend to address while riling them up enough to make them look stupid? Now it looks like his buddy wants to chime in too.

“I must agree with my colleague. There’s no room for any informed or meaningful discussion in a setting where hyperbolic rhetoric is the law of the land.”

Of course there isn't, why would there be? Do you even realize what channel you're on right now? No one watching this or participating in the process of making it cares about being informed or meaningful.

"Professors, let's not change the subject. It's very simple. Your stance on gun control directly opposes the second amendment. Therefore you're showing a clear disdain for the principles our great nation was founded on. Why is that?"

I've done this enough times to know that at least one of them is going to have a meltdown soon.

"Fine, if you want to have this filth flinging competition you're clearly bent on drawing us into, I'll oblige you. If the gun control measures we're advocating had existed, men like that accountant wouldn't have had the means to carry out their crimes. Putting that in your words, you're the one who hates America by clinging to antiquated portions of legal doctrine that you don't even understand."

Good, that's exactly what I was fishing for.

“So you’re telling me that it’s the constitution itself you find fault with? You’re not a communist, you’re a Tory. I suppose you think we’d be better off as a British colony.”

Making him make himself sound pedantic and out of touch with reality is the goal here. Though really, I barely even have to try.

“That is one of the most ignorant statements I’ve ever heard anywhere. What you’re doing on this network is nothing short of the devil’s work. You’re all destroying this country that you claim to love so much by putting this garbage on the air. It was fortunate for you that the accountant failed to kill anyone other than himself. Had he succeeded the blood of his victims would surely have been on the hands of you and all your so-called colleagues in the media. In fact you’re already to blame for more wars, riots and all other sorts of bloody conflicts whose flames you’ve fanned for money and political influence. This network is the nexus of every evil thing in the world.”

Ha ha! Oh wow! That’s perfect! We’re Satan, Bin Laden, and Hitler in one tidy package to this guy! It’s ironic how similar his

condemnation of us has become to our own talking points. Those who fight monsters and all that I guess.

“Calm down Pat, let’s be reasonable here.”

No, I’m not going to let you calm him down. That would be bad for our ratings.

“No, I want to hear your friend out. Dr. Seger, are you in fact saying that you blame America for everything ranging from emergence of ISIS, to the genocide in Darfur? Hell, let’s throw in AIDS while we’re at it. Are you seriously sitting here and attempting to pass judgment on your country for everything wrong with the world? That’s so typical of you ivory tower liberal elites. You’re completely out of touch with the way the world works. You’re an un-American and unchristian disgrace.”

That should do it. A bit of fake outrage always goes a long way in putting on the kind of show our viewers want to see. He’s already turning red so I know it worked.

“No Glenn, I’m not blaming America. I’m blaming you and everyone else on this godforsaken channel. Your propagandizing and

politicking has turned this country, and by extension the world into a cesspit. You talk about being “American” or “Christian” but those are just cheap buzzwords for the conservative agenda you’re being paid to shill for. Tell me something Glenn, how much are they paying you? What price did you decide was high enough for you to sell your soul?”

He’ll go on and on if I let him but I think everyone’s bored of this by now. I’ll end this part with a flashy and dramatic flourish.

“Cut his mic. I think we’re all sick of hearing his crazy anti-American rant.”

It’s always funny to watch them for the next few seconds after that as they scream angrily but mutely into the camera. It’s like they’re so frustrated that they start ignoring the fact that no one can even hear them at that point. Though really no one was listening from the start so cutting the mic is more of a symbolic gesture than a practical one. It represents that we’ve moved onto the portion of the program where I won’t even pretend to give them a voice anymore. Our viewers can’t get enough of the self-righteous satisfaction it

gives them so I always make sure to do this at least three times a week.

“That was uncalled for, Mr. Durst.”

This guy’s a bit more unflappable than his friend but he kinda looks like a dumbass anyway so I can make him look stupid even if he doesn’t lose his cool.

“Never mind that, Dr. George, do you agree with the asinine statements your colleague was making? Do you hate America as well?”

He chuckles in response. Normally that wouldn’t be good but in this case it’ll only make him look more like a lumbering idiot.

“I certainly wouldn’t say all the things my esteemed colleague did, but there is some truth to what he was saying. Neither of us can truly deny it all outright. If you’re trying to get me to have an outburst I’m afraid you’re barking up the wrong tree, Glenn.”

It’s kinda refreshing to see someone who gets what this is all about and actually tries to have fun with it, even if he’s still playing

right into my hand, albeit in a different way. These intellectual types come in all sorts of flavors.

“What part of the nonsense he was spouting do you agree with?”

Whatever he says I’ll twist it around and turn it back on him. That statement was nothing less than a challenge to a duel. I’m sure this guy will be brave or stupid enough to accept even though I’ll tear him apart on this rigged playing field.

“Factually speaking there’s a disproportionate number of gun violence related incidents in our nation. If there were stricter gun control regulations in place many of those could be prevented. I don’t see how anyone can deny such a self-evident truth.”

That’s exactly why we let you on this show. Because you don’t see obvious things like that. There’s a certain naïveté we look for in most of our liberal guests.

“Oh stop. You know as well as I do that most gun violence related incidents, like the one your friend brought up earlier are perpetrated with illegally bought weapons that wouldn’t be subject

to gun control laws anyway. In fact, if the gun control laws we do have were loosened there would be less fatalities and injuries during said incidents because good guys with guns would be more readily equipped to stop the bad guys.”

I purposefully sprinkled some half-truths and blatant lies in there to provoke him. These guys tend to be sticklers for the facts. What they don’t realize is that no one in this country cares much about the objective or empirically quantifiable truth. What wins debates is the ability to manipulate the emotions of the unwashed masses who would rather feel than think.

“That’s a very cute argument, one that’s very typical of your show, Glenn. But has anyone actually fact checked the claims you’re putting forth here? Somehow I don’t think they’d hold up particularly well to any serious scrutiny.”

See? It’s funny how predictable their banal appeals to logic or reason are. We’re two sides of the same coin, these high minded seekers of truth and us callow manipulators. It’s great, I love it. I can’t get enough of it. It’s not just the money this really is a labor of love when it comes down to it, playing with the hearts of idiots and

stuffy intellectuals. As much as we all claim to hate each other we also love playing with one another and being played with like this.

“Fact check it all yourself if you feel the need to. It won’t change the fact that people will agree with what they know to be true. They love this country and the principles it was founded on. I don’t know if you do or not but the truth will make itself clear to those who do.”

He laughs again.

“Yes I suppose that is how things work in this silly world of ours.”

It’s about time to wrap this up.

“Thank you for your time, professor. That’s the end of our program for today. Stay tuned for more fair and balanced coverage coming right up.”

Junie the Juniper

Now for a change of pace we will examine the life and thoughts not of a man woman girl or boy but those of a tree. Poetry is the language of both trees and other less organic inanimate objects so that is the parlance this lone Juniper tree's friendly entreaty will be told in. I now begin my interpretation.

A cat with the AIDS

Inspirational cancer

Every single life.

Wait, what? That doesn't sound right. Why would a tree be talking about things like AIDS and cancer? I must've misheard it. I'll try again.

Lofty ideal

Blossoming flower of "I"

First bloom to decay

Within that soul most hollow

Excrement collects therein

Come on really? That can't be right. A delicate little tree like this wouldn't say these horrible things. I just have to try even harder.

“Excuse me sir, what are you doing?”

The crows pick at the rotted face.

In truth no man or tree or thing,

Can escape that cold embrace,

That putrid matrimonial ring.

Approaching, they took up wing.

The crows pick at the rotted face.

Did they cry? Or did they sing?

Mere nature's course or a disgrace?

Whether we run or give chase,

Our lot is to stumble and fall.

The crows pick at the rotted face.

Be it last breath or first crawl.

So when you answer that final call,

Show them a smile full of grace.

At heaven's gate or in hell's hall.

The crows pick at the rotted face.

“EXCUSE me SIR. WHAT are you doing?”

What the hell is this?! This isn't right, it's not right, not right, not right! Trees are supposed to be whimsical, happy, peaceful. These aren't a tree's thoughts at all, they can't be. I refuse to believe they are. One more time then. Yeah, just one more time and I'll get it right. I have to or I'll lose myself, I'll lose it and it'll lose me. So again, again, again, and again!

The sweet embrace, that curtain call,

Which leads us past the mortal coil

Death's rapture we anoint with oil

Not virgin but degraded as fall

Accept the kindness of the soil

Towards which we must all crawl

It is but due reward for toil

Greet that stranger not with mourner's shawl

For rudeness is the bane of sane

And grace the vicar of acceptance

Be it fate or merely happenstance

Through which we touch threadbare silk mane

Crave not life's crudely shaped resemblance

As you travel past the final lane

Give thanks for your soul's ascendance

By rainbow's way, past blessed rain

It's still no good. Again.

“Sir, I have to ask you to leave.”

If it's a moth then why the tea?

I see the well, but where's the tree?

Come on, my friend, please do not flee,

From you, or rather, you as me.

To be, me represented by “I”

What you may see as you and me

Is not, in fact, that thing you see

For we are two in one mind's sky.

Deprived, deranged, forlorn, ashamed,

Malady of spirit? Or brain?

This farce, it will not be maintained

Death is the cure for the insane.

Gulp it down fast or else sip slow

The hemlock, an ally not a foe

As common logic would say so

Hesitate not, accept the flow.

No, I refuse to believe it. I won't accept it. Again.

“Sir, I'm asking you nicely. Just go home and do whatever this is there.”

Why is it that you can't believe?

That frozen time's impending thaw,

Why find within it fault or flaw?

In mercy, end of false reprieve?

O' Torment's fang! O' Suffering's maw!

Which mercy's succor doth impede

Cast down your shield, sheathed blade don't draw,

Stoppered up heart, allow to bleed

For tree of life and corpse's bloom,

The esoteric and vulgar

Are mere portents of assured doom,

Uplifting of life, that beggar.

I see the time it is at hand

For you they open, the gates of hell.

Heralded by a ringing bell,

Your swift descent into that land.

“This is your last warning. I’m not going to ask you again.”

One more chance. I owe her at least that much, after all these years.

At last! At last! The final straw!

Candle’s last gleam; the final glow

With reckless abandon you throw

Your life into death’s waiting jaw.

At this late juncture I begin

To finally well up with pride,

Enjoy the rapture of our sin,

To death with you I shall abide.

Not quite the lovers leap from cliff

Or Roman sword fallen on with

A most prodigious, throbbing grief,

At best: a one-lunged car crash myth.

Yet it is ours, to have and keep

This fleeting moment of splendor,

Violent eruption of ardor,

Let us at last this madness reap.

So that's it, huh? After all this time. All these years I gave to
be here with them, with her, this is my thanks? Well fuck that! I
won't take this lying down...I won't.

Juniper Guy

“You’re a good tree, yes you are. A majestic, powerful tree. No one can hurt you, at least not while I’m here. And that’s why I’m here, isn’t it? To protect you and all your brothers and sisters.”

This man’s name or at least the one he had taken up, in the way he spelled it, was “TeaMothy TreeWell”. He spent most of his life squatting in Central Park, claiming to be an advocate for the trees there.

“I am strong, I am gentle, I am brave, and I am kind. A Weapon Of Peace at one with the universe. Namaste.”

He would recite mantras such as this one every morning as we see in the videos of his “advocacy” which he left behind. Although he believed that he was filming something akin to a nature film, I’ve found that it is in fact more of an autobiographical piece depicting one man’s lonely descent into madness.

“May 1st 2015. The beginning of summer here in Central Park. Summer, in the sense that I understand it. Due to my budgetary

constraints I'm only able to record one season of each year and this time I've chosen summer."

Very little is known of who "TeaMothy" was before he came to Central Park. This segment of footage was filmed exactly thirty days before his rather ironic demise, more on that later.

"When I look at a tree, from seed to sapling to skyscraper sized sequoia or solidified dead stump, I see God. I see the universal spark of being itself. Can smell it in the sap, taste it in the leaves, feel it in the bark and see it in the roots."

What little we do know comes from these videos and the testimony of people who occasionally encountered him in the world beyond the park.

"Timmy? Yeah, he was one weird cat. He'd come around dressed in rags with a wad of cash and a camera once a year. Reeked like an outhouse too, but I don't turn no one away if they've got the cash."

"Mr. "TreeWell", real name unknown, approximate age 33, cause of death was a generalized blunt force trauma from a tree

falling on him. In this case an autopsy was unnecessary because he recorded the whole thing.”

“I saw the man we now know as Mr. “TreeWell” reciting poetry and screaming at a tree. This behavior showed all the classic signs of psychosis, so I attempted to take Mr. “TreeWell” into custody for his own protection. However he managed to escape and was found dead the next day. I knew there was something off about the man as soon as I saw him. I mean, I’m not a psychologist but I was there when that accountant went on his shooting spree. This “TreeWell” guy had the same sort of look in his eyes.”

There are very few people we can truly say this about but “TeaMothy” genuinely seemed to have no friends, family or loved ones of any kind. For all intents and purposes it was just him and his trees. Or at least the trees he believed were his.

“Right there. Just like that, yeah right under that branch. Perfect!”

“Uh...why are we doing this here again? You’ve got the cash for a flop room, I’ve seen it.”

“Shut up! I’m not paying you to talk.”

Here you see him having sex with a prostitute under the shadow of his favorite tree. To him this was some sort of avant-garde religious experience. In his mind, he was not merely having intercourse in exchange for money with a woman he saw walking the street, but participating in a druidic ritual of his own design. The precise significance these sorts of encounters had for him, or where exactly he found the money to facilitate them, will forever remain a mystery to us. All we know is that he recorded hundreds of such encounters with men, women, boys, girls, and occasionally even animals, but oddly enough given his proclivities, never trees. To the addled mind, even the most depraved acts seem perfectly justifiable given the appropriate circumstances.

“It’s been six days since we’ve had any rain. The grass is all brown now and the trees are starting to scream out in pain. I’ve never been particularly religious but if there’s a god or force or anything up there...GIVE US SOME FUCKING RAIN ALREADY! JUST DO IT! STOP HOLDING OUT DAMNIT! THIS IS GETTING F-“

He goes on and on in this manner for hours. For some reason he believed that he could hear the voices of trees, could feel what they felt. He was compelled to invoke higher powers that he didn't even believe in to save the trees from the peril he imagined them to be in.

“This here's Junie the Juniper. Say hi Junie! You're on film now. She's just a bit shy so she doesn't want to talk right now.”

In spite of his professed love for trees, he actually knew next to nothing about them as seen here: when he insists that what is clearly a London Plane is a Juniper. It was this very tree which would end up killing him.

“Fuck the conservancy! I'm out here busting my ass to make sure these precious trees stay safe but they give me nothing but shit! “Oh you can't stay here”, “here's an address of a good shelter”, “don't make us call the cops” fuck you motherfuckers! You don't know what it's like out here, you've never held a dead sapling or a dried our seed and cried and cried and cried...Fuck you!”

His mind grew increasingly unstable as the years wore on. In “TeaMothy's” world, the trees were everything and anyone who got

between him and them was an enemy. We don't know exactly why but his recordings and diaries indicate that he was losing his grip on sanity to an even greater degree starting from a certain point in early March. There are numerous newspaper clippings which have been found in his hideout but they were all torn up or soaked in rainwater. Given the timing we could assume it may have had something to do with the Ambrose incident but we'll never know for certain.

“Here's Ferny the fern. He's a fun little fellow but he gets grumpy sometimes, don't you little buddy? I wish I could be like you Ferny. So perfect, and pretty, and green...”

To “TeaMothy” plants and trees took the role of therapists, confidants, friends, and family. They were in many ways, the only things keeping him alive.

“A long time ago, TeaMothy was a very bad man who did very bad things. It was making him rich but killing him inside. One day he tried to hang himself off a tree's branch and the branch broke. From that day forward he decided to dedicate his life to the trees that had saved him from himself.”

This is all we know about the man who transformed into “TeaMothy”. There have been attempts to determine his identity from the details of this story but it’s too vague to be tied to any one man in particular. Regardless of who he was, it was clear that the trees were his exorcists and he had many demons for them to attend to. Too many, perhaps.

I believe it would be inappropriate to show the footage of “TeaMothy’s” tragically ironic final moments, yet it would be a disservice to this man, whose story I’m telling in this film, to gloss over them entirely. So I had the medical examiner who initially dealt with “TeaMothy’s” remains talk about his final moments.

“TeaMothy sawed at this tree, which he called “Junie” for an entire day and night. We know from the police officer’s testimony that he felt the tree had offended him in some way. However, it’s apparent that he stopped right at the breaking point with a tiny sliver of bark holding it in place. From this we can surmise that his death wasn’t accidental at all but a suicide. In spite of his madness, he chose to die together with one of his beloved trees even as he was destroying it.”

Perhaps this final gesture of love for “Junie” the London Plane was the final act of affection of a man who had nothing left to do in this world. For a man as broken as “TeaMothy”, perhaps this was as close to a happy ending, to salvation, as he could come.

This short song is my eulogy, my farewell to the “Juniper guy” who had no one else. Rest in peace “TeaMothy”, you’re with the trees now.

The leaves of a London Plane

Are the sunlit shade of a pond at noon

Only the botanist knows what goes on in there

Or otherwise only the loon

Within the heart of Central Park

Where the wayward bums roam

With foliage as green as a custom window pane

And bark as dark as espresso foam

Can they feel the pulse of an aching soul?

Or hear the pacing footfalls going to and fro?

Or see the smile brought to a rapist's face

Who hears yes when told no?

Dumb as the brains in Gracie Square

Dumb as the most useless plea

The leaves of a London Plane

Will never feel for me

They'll never feel for me

The Wacky Misadventures of Conrad Mancuso Oblige Part II

A week after his encounter with Rosemarie, Connie set out once more to once again offer his charity to any who would accept it. Some simple — yet profoundly influential — clichéd thoughts were stirred up in that ever vacuous space between his ears by the encounter. What it boiled down to, was something along the lines of “If giving up all that money made me happy, that means money can’t make anyone happy, so rich people might need my help just as much if not even more than poor ones.” This contrary line of non-thought served as the theme of today’s excursion for sweet Connie, enveloping him in a heat haze of passionate enthusiasm which threatened to melt him all the way down to his sugary core in spite of the frigid March air he walked through.

Again, Platinum Ponyboy followed and watched, this time closing the distance between him and his would be soulmate/enemy/lover in spite of being acutely aware that it was still too early to make contact. He instinctually understood that his target had yet to mature, and plucking an unripe fruit was outside the range of his particular proclivities. That sort of brutish approach would

only temporarily slake his unquenchable thirst and that could prove to be a fatal misstep in this urban desert after finding a rare oasis such as Connie. So he did the prudent and necessary thing which was waiting, waiting, waiting...

Blissfully unaware of any of that, Connie proceeded to his destination for the day. Although we are by now, painfully aware of how futile a pursuit it is, let us again examine his motives and ideas. In Connie's own self-defeating fashion, we too will attempt to read thought and meaning into thoughtlessness and meaninglessness on this journey which is its own destination. If the pursuit of an ephemeral ideal is justified by its apparent beauty, then perhaps we'll be able to validate our feigned search for imaginary meaning with the promise of the mental stimulation gained through such self-evident folly. So without further ado, let us begin probing the depths which we ourselves will be inventing as we go along. First, let's consider the opening premise behind today's excursion; let's analyze the idea that money and power cannot purchase anything resembling happiness.

Sure it's a commonly accepted maxim that things which are truly worth having such as companions, lovers, family, and emotional fulfillment are "purchased", if you will, not through the literal currency of the material world; but through the coin of one's character. As alluring as that romanticized notion is, as true as it feels, let us play the devil's advocate for an instant to examine its objective validity. While a great deal of fictional and anecdotal evidence can easily be offered up which supports those claims, are they, the claims, in fact representative of reality? For every example of a relationship which destroys itself due to a lack of *character* in spite of an overabundance of material wealth, there must surely be at least one where literal prosperity also leads to its own form of fulfillment. For all the alleged *wealth* of character those in poverty pretend at, are they not too desperately chasing after wealth of a more tangible sort?

I, your humble narrator, ask only that you take such things into consideration without presuming they contain any special quality of truth or validity. Please try to open your mind to my words, but not too much. After all there's no telling when I may choose to deceive or betray you — as we disembodied voices are

wont to do. Now let us once again return the concealing curtain back to its previous position and forget me, the intangible man behind it, in order to continue observing sweet little Connie.

Not quite knowing where to find those who were lacking in spiritual wellness in spite of having healthy wallets and bank accounts, Connie spent a significant portion of the day simply looking for potential venues where to best seek out those elusive — but surely extant — creatures. At first he attempted to catch them unawares in some of the city's most expensive hotels. He was, however, cruelly thwarted when the security, smelling the lower middle class stench of what by their estimation was poverty, accosted and quickly removed him from the premises. This process happened without fail at each and every one of these establishments which he visited. While they mainly used words and gentle coercion, the sense that poor Connie was unwanted at these shrines to opulent repose for the rich was nevertheless abundantly clear.

Although he couldn't quite understand why, even simple Connie realized that he would need to take his efforts (and presence) elsewhere. Yet he wasn't discouraged in the slightest. If anything,

these passive aggressive rebuffs only served to strengthen his conviction. So being the plastic bag helplessly flung to and fro by the scorching winds of whimsical do-gooder passion, he set out to find another place where the services he so desperately sought to offer would finally be accepted by someone.

Failing to learn the lesson the hotels had for him, sweet Connie next attempted to ply his wares at the imposing looking office buildings in the Wall Street area. Needless to say, here he encountered the same sort of superficially polite cruelty which was characteristic of the defense mechanisms and security measures employed by the upper crust. After several such botched approaches, he finally realized that his strategy needed some serious reworking. The hamster wheel began making a frenzied and rabid series of revolutions the likes of which it was entirely unaccustomed to. After an excruciating period of strain induced migraine, Connie had, through a stroke of simplistic (in multiple senses of the word) genius, finally realized where he should have been making his entreaty from the very beginning.

The simple — yet all too true — realization he came to was that the place to find and mingle with those he was seeking wasn't one of the hotels where they slept or rested, or one of their workplaces where socialization with outsiders was a luxury they couldn't afford, but a barroom where they would be drowning their sorrows in whatever their poison of choice was. There was a bit of a miscalculation — one that may be obvious to you or me — in that line of thought, but for the time being it was an unimportant one, in fact it was a mere trifle for our dear Connie, so there's no real need to dwell on it right now.

Entering the establishment known as “The Dead Rabbit”, Connie took a seat near a well-dressed old man whose wrinkled face seemed to contain a secret treasure trove of misery in each of its countless folds. The man whose name happened to be Connor Michael O'Shea sat nursing a mostly empty glass of lukewarm Irish whiskey while slowly surveying the room with his faded green eyes. To foster a sense of camaraderie with his prospective friend and employer, Connie ordered a brightly colored fruit flavored drink from the bar, which was also a miscalculation of sorts. One which won't be dwelt upon here. Due to his slightly anti-social nature,

Connor wouldn't speak until first spoken to, though the source of this recalcitrance to sociability wasn't true misanthropy or weltschmerz; but simple bashfulness. In truth, Connor desperately craved human contact but was just too awkward to engage a person of his own volition. This was a far more profound level of human isolation than anything which could be interpreted as simple shyness (despite what I've just told you) but of course dear Connie saw it as exactly that when he decided to introduce himself to the old man.

“Hello, sir. How are you doing today?”

Connor found himself caught off guard by the young man's sudden, unsolicited pleasantries. Because of prior experiences, which began and ended in a similarly abrupt manner, he had low expectations for this encounter. Yet he hoped that in spite of the unlikelihood of it leading to anything more, that for once this would be a meeting which would ultimately prove to be more satisfying than the rest.

“Very good thanks. And you, young man?”

It was a convincing bold-faced lie; the likes of which only a desperately lonely man could easily deliver without betraying

himself and his seething, perspiring, desperation. Despite buying into it, Connie thought he might as well probe more deeply anyway — just for form — since Connor was the only one who had talked to him today and there wasn't much time left in the rapidly dwindling day itself besides.

“That’s nice. It’s good to feel good. Though is there anything in your life that isn’t so good right now? Anything you’d like help with?”

Naturally, Connor found this awkwardly phrased line of questioning suspect. But being the lonely old man that he was, chose to go along with it anyway in hopes that it would lead to more of the human contact he was so desperately starved of.

“If I’m being honest, there is one thing that’s troubling me right now. It might be a bit much for a man as old as me to ask one as young as you but if you don’t mind, I’d appreciate the pleasure of your company tonight.”

It was, by Connor’s estimation; an extremely brazen and forward advance whose true nature was entirely undisguised. Yet due to the antiquated style of Connor’s phrasing, and the profound

nature of Connie's simplicity, its meaning was lost on him. It was precisely because he failed to understand, that Connie accepted the invitation. He assumed that this was a simple shy, lonely, old man who just wanted a drinking buddy on this forlorn March evening.

“Sure I'll chill with you tonight if you've got no one else to keep you company.”

Connor couldn't believe the words he was hearing. Could it really be true? Had that selfish bitch Fortuna finally decided to throw him a bone for once in his pathetic life? Was there some once in a millennium alignment of his loser stars that would temporarily grant him a fleeting reprieve from his suffering? Did some god or devil finally decide to favor old Connor with their perverse affection? Who knows, he thought, who knows and who cares. Too good to be true or too true to be good; come what may he could not possibly take an opportunity like this for granted. So he'd grab this once in a lifetime chance by the balls and milk it for all it was and wasn't worth.

“Excellent, let us be off then. It's a longish trip from here to there so it would be prudent to head out now.”

Connie was mildly confused by the fact that they were leaving the pub but complied anyway. If this sad old dude could be made just a little bit happier with his company, did the exact nature of the time they'd be spending together really matter that much? No, Connie thought, not at all. And he seems like a good guy besides so he definitely doesn't want to do anything bad, thought the ever simple, trusting, Connie. Tonight the wind took to wailing rather than the previous howling, but on this night there were two hearts rather than one which its frigid embrace failed to chill. Indeed, Connie and Connor's hearts both pulsated with overwhelming warmth — albeit for entirely different reasons.

So they skipped, pranced, and cavorted all but hand in hand down the frost-coated, artificially-lit streets. After a stroll of a casual twenty block distance, the mismatched pair of delighted companions arrived at their destination. Connor turned to Connie and spoke.

“Wait here a minute. I'll return shortly, I promise.”

Connie simply nodded and watched his new friend walk into the fancy looking hotel. As a matter of fact, it happened to be one of the same ones Connie had been kicked out of earlier that day. The

thought of that both amused and embarrassed the boy. He wondered whether to bring the incident up to his bosom buddy, or if his hand would be forced by the unkind hotel staff asking why he had returned after clearly being told he wasn't welcome here all those hours ago. Not wanting to break the already overtaxed hamster wheel — Connie decided not to dwell on the issue overmuch. As he concluded that thought, his friend returned and ushered him into the gilded glowing structure for what was, unbeknownst to Connor, the second time that day.

The staff reacted not as Connie thought they might (by accosting him directly) but by smiling knowingly at the pair and chuckling to themselves at the sight of the two together. Connie's hamster wheel wasn't powerful enough to comprehend the meaning of their behavior, so all he felt when regarding the sight was relief that they had satisfied themselves with such a mild form of passive aggression rather than a more overt one this time around. Soon enough, the two of them walked into a room, but not just any room; wanting to impress his young companion, Connor decided to splurge on the presidential suite. It was a cheap ploy, but one that worked quite effectively indeed due to Connie's simple nature.

“Wow! I’ve never been in any hotel room this fancy before. Are you sure this is ok, sir?”

“Why of course. Don’t concern yourself with boring details like expenses, just enjoy yourself. Here, have a drink. Let’s toast to new friendships.”

Connor poured two glasses of scotch from the minibar and handed one to Connie who responded with a genial “Cheers!” as they clinked their glasses together. After they downed the contents Connor could no longer contain himself. It was all getting to be too much for the poor old soul, so he relieved his tension in the only way that seemed appropriate at the moment. Hungrily, needily, desperately he pulled the young man in close and began devouring the boy’s mouth with his own. At first Connie was too shocked to even react. By the time he had regained enough of his composure to resist, he found himself spurning the old man’s embrace on the bed. This saddened Connor.

“What’s wrong? Isn’t this what we both wanted?”

“Is this what you want? Is this going to make you feel less lonely?”

“...Yes...”

After mulling it over for about a minute Connie let Connor take him. A virgin with no distinct sexual preferences, Connie didn't particularly relish or reject the idea of an old man having his way with him, but would allow it out of a sheer sense of charity. All night he was used in every imaginable way by the old man who was his senior by several decades. And all night, Platinum Ponyboy stood out in the eternal night's deepening chill, watching with mounting glee through his binoculars. Watching and waiting. Waiting...waiting...waiting...

Star Outterridge's Tragic Tale Part II

I'm sorry. I didn't mean any of the things I said last time. Please don't leave me, please don't stop reading. I'll do whatever you want so please don't leave me alone. I need you. You're all I have.

With the turbulent formative childhood years behind us, we'll now turn to examine Star's tween and teen years. The lull of her final childhood years would soon be disturbed by the growing pains and struggles of preadolescence. Those dark clouds which were thought to have been driven far away by the blue skies of growth would soon return with much thunder and lightning in tow. The isle of her tenth and eleventh years seemed uneventful enough on the surface but it is where the trouble began. Perhaps her nature simply was unconquerable after all? Or maybe her parents' approach in combatting it was itself flawed? Either way with the gradual onset of puberty Star grew more moody and sullen with each passing day. This was a fact her parents were not aware of because her childhood had developed within her a convenient mask with which to conceal it all. And conceal it she did, quite expertly at that. No one realized that the change was occurring. Not friends, nor teachers, and

especially not family. Little Star in her infinite precociousness had developed a veil of secrecy thick and convincing enough to put even the most battle hardened covert operative's deep cover persona to shame.

This wasn't an act of rebellion or a conspiratorial effort to undermine the designs of her esteemed parents. She didn't precisely dislike or disapprove of the life she had been made to live. If anything, she found it pleasant and adequately rewarding and was grateful to her parents for all the pains they'd undertaken to establish it for her. There was just a vague nagging feeling, a nearly non-extant twinge of a sensation which whispered in a soft, almost mute voice, telling her "this isn't real." That was one of the innermost quintessential qualities of her being. A piece of the undefinable clump she had previously been, and as integral to her existence as it was toxic to it.

What her parents subconsciously knew and what she was only beginning to discover was that this vague thing was one she could never truly be rid of if she was to remain "herself". If it were to somehow, through some psychiatric sorcery, be excised, this

benign tumor of the ego would take her entire sense of self with it, leaving behind nothing more than a hollow shell which would only be capable of clinging to the most disgustingly empty parody of life possible. Indeed, her parents knew and accepted this fact so their efforts were centered on containment rather than extraction or destruction. Yet even the most sturdily built masks and shells are doomed to eventually be destroyed by the inherent entropic nature of being.

So it came down to an issue of endless maintenance. Star's parents were more than happy to undertake the endeavor despite the fact that it was an ultimately self-defeating pursuit. Perhaps the fact that it was doomed to never be complete and was only a temporary stopgap measure only served to fuel the fire of their artistic passions? Regardless, the main flaw to their approach was beginning to make itself apparent. That flaw being the simple fact that once the structure they had built in Star became complex enough they had no way of seeing any of the cracks or weaknesses that formed within the innermost layers of the fortress as time passed.

After all, for repairs to be made one must know precisely what it is they need to fix or else the whole effort will be rendered meaningless. The most insidious structural defects are in fact the tiny, unperceivable ones which do not make themselves known until the entire building is on the verge of collapse; until it is far too late to do a thing about them. And so it was with our close yet eternally ever distant Star. At first glance the external structure seemed sound and impregnable, completely invulnerable to the destructive forces both from without and within, repelling the approaching intruder and the encroaching internal heat alike. Yet as we know, that was but a fanciful surface-deep delusion.

In truth the external structure and what could be seen of its guts were both quite sound, yes, but as I've just told you, the unperceivable innermost depths present the greatest peril, and so it was here as well. The star's heat couldn't truly be confined. Even as the structure around it grew in size, its overpowering radiant energy continued to eat away at the innards as surely as the most potent acid eats through flesh and bone. From the beginning the structure, which was a thing that was not meant to exist at all, let alone perform any

sort of long term purpose, was something that only continued to exist on a dwindling ration of borrowed time.

However, it must not be underestimated even if collapse is its ultimate destiny. Though it may only be permitted to exist, to continue being, for a time, that time is something which it has an iron grip over. As we mortals should know, transience and impermanence aren't things that automatically nullify the sense of eternity they would outwardly appear to be at odds with. Though it is merely a trick of the mind, a fleeting period lasting no more than a few seconds can feel as though it has no end. The illusory nature of monotony wears on our souls in the same way a true span of countless eons may even if the length is but a figment of the imagination. Time and its passage, whether real or artificial ultimately bring us pain with their infinite, constantly expanding weight. Whether that weight can be touched or measured in a material sense or exists only as an eternally convulsing phantom limb whose corporeal equivalent may never have existed at all is irrelevant.

The weight will crush us all the same regardless, leaving behind mere pulp and particles, feelings and fragments of the entities we once knew as “ourselves”. In other words: time, whether it can be thought of as an actual phenomenon or is objectively proven to be nothing but an invention of the sentient mind overcomes its intangible nature by carving its mark upon all material, corporeal, objectively “real” things. Therefore, in accordance with the principle of “As above, so below”, the magnitude of its influence on the metaphysical and the incorporeal is even more profound.

So it was with our Star. The twelfth year being one of constant expansion, and the following thirteenth being the true portend of death and decay. Thirteen is a curious quantity and a strange symbol. The Christians consider it a value of ill omen, the Jews call it a blessed positively aligned numeral, and adherents of the adapted Kabbalistic principles formed into Hermeticism attempt to interpret it as both with a slight preference for the favorable interpretation their Jewish predecessors have given it. To them death is not a negative force but a positive and necessary transformational one. Yet through their subconscious clinging, their inability, or perhaps refusal, to let go of their Christian roots in spite of seeking

to contradict them, they still describe it as “death” or an “end” even while calling it a new beginning.

Which of these three is right? Which is wrong? Do they each have a portion of a point, a measure of the truth? Or are they all equally misguided and foolish? That, *dear reader*, is not for me to tell but for you to decide on your own.

Getting back to Star, the exact mechanism of the “positive death” of thirteen was as follows: she moved inward, away from the artificial construct’s surface and interior into the empty space between it and the core. Finding herself stuck in that void, she too felt empty, and chose to take physical action. Believing that the metaphysical gap might be soothed if a more tangible one was filled, she threw away her virginity to the first boy who would have it. As if her hymen were a spiritual barrier preventing expansion into something more complete and whole by blocking the space required for growth, she unwittingly imitated the ritualistic circumcision which is meant to symbolically cut off the “heart’s foreskin” by removing the literal one.

She didn't know exactly where this would lead but hoped it would represent progress, a step forward and upward, if you will. Where she actually ended up moving, with her consciousness, was not towards the comforting manmade star of superego her parents had carefully locked her in, but closer to that blazing infernal sun of Id which they had hoped to seal for as long as they could. So this was where their efforts were finally beginning to truly fall apart.

It is a commonly accepted misconception that the loss of virginity is equivalent to the end of childhood, the death of innocence, and the onset of adulthood. That is one of the most destructive and deceptive falsehoods propagated among the masses by the organized efforts of society and religion. It implies that sexual and physical maturation are tantamount to a shortcut to spiritual growth. The origins of these odious notions probably can be traced back to, like many things we unwittingly continue to embrace, the feudal system. When people were tools to tend the crops and livestock, to bring wealth and influence to their lords, kings, and clergymen, it was necessary to instill within them a false pretense of respect and dread for the physical act of procreation.

They needed to desire and crave the physical pleasure and the presumed metaphysical growth it was said to foster, yet fear it and only, for the most part, seek it under rigid, highly constrained terms. Their populations needed to expand yet to be maintained at stable sustainable levels so that they would continue to be useful beasts of burden and not unwanted vermin who did nothing but tax the resources they were meant to produce.

To that end, sexual maturity together with the equally erroneous concept of adulthood were fostered through religious and social norms to the point where even those who designed the deception ultimately forgot its true purpose and bought into it as well. The irony of the oppressors ultimately oppressing themselves through their attempts at toying with nature for material gain was lost on nearly all. The tragedy of being raised in a system which outwardly claimed to create great and powerful beings with boundless agency but actually intended to turn them into mere neutered steers and spayed mares who would work themselves to death and ruin for the sake of those at the top, was perceived only in the vaguest sense by those whose destruction happened to unveil the truth of the world they lived in before it fully consumed them.

Even those at the top, who ostensibly understood the truth and should have been free, were in fact slaves to expectation. Self-destructive excess was the sacrificial human lottery which they needed to partake in to quench the blood thirst of the inferior masses. It was the least violent way in which to suppress thoughts of riot, rebellion, and regime change. Turning a portion of their young into a grotesque spectacle for their cattle was acceptable to the lineal patriarchs and matriarchs who oversaw the continuation of the order their ancestors had established.

Yet as the years wore on and as society shifted to a slightly different model of capitalistic neo-feudalism, that method of self-destruction reserved as a tool of the top became increasingly easy to imitate at the bottom. Excess was no longer something that required massive or unobtainable quantities of wealth to obtain. A kitschy imitation of the sacrifice undertaken by the offspring of the truly privileged began to form and be idealized by the ape-like children of the wage slaves. The detachment and rapture achieved through decadence, through destruction of self, of ego, of superego, to expose raw Id came to be romanticized as an enlightened way of living by the youth.

Live for today not because tomorrow may never come, as in the time of the plague, but because today and tomorrow and all the following days, weeks, months, and years meant absolutely nothing without being a thing one recklessly threw themselves at and hungrily devoured. It was a hedonistic model of philosophy where the pleasures and experiences of the now were everything.

While we can clearly see the flaws of such a short sighted way of life, let us for a moment play the role of devil's advocate to examine the truths and merits it does touch upon. Although it was only in the most unconscious and surface level sense, the apocalyptic notion of such a lifestyle did in fact come into contact with and create its own sort of solution to one of the traditionally problematic universal truths; that being the truth of existence as an inherently meaningless act no matter what philosophy, religion, or set of beliefs one subscribes to. The solution being the elevation of a pursuit of pleasure at any cost to the absolute highest, most ideal mode of being and thought. In a sense the idea of creating meaning or purpose out of meaninglessness is not inherently wrong or foolish. They had in fact stumbled upon a workable alternative to the simple bliss of ignorance.

However, returning to the flaws, they had simply exchanged one brand of meaninglessness for another. The pursuit they idealized wasn't adequately sustainable. After youth, either physical or metaphysical, had departed they for the most part became sad empty husks who simply went through the motions of pursuits that no longer brought them any pleasure or even feigned significance. Those who truly committed themselves to the effort died or realized its flaws and gave it up. That is because the illusion they chose to chase after was too simplistic to provide simulated depth for long.

As Star was very quickly finding out through teenage years spent in secret pursuit of hedonism and its innermost mysteries, an inverted meaning or artificial structure can only satisfy one as long as it continues to hold mystery and awe. That is why no matter how large the scale of such things becomes it is complexity and not mere scale that truly determines their longevity. Even if one were placed to live their entire life in a gigantic and opulent mansion, they would quickly become bored and depressed unless there was variety and the illusion of depth of freedom therein. Yet even the most flawed crumbling structures gain unnatural longevity if their size is massive enough and their building blocks adequately sturdy. So she would

not be able to escape in her teenage years. Not without an appropriate catalyst at the very least.

A Boring Day In The Mundane Life of Wilhelm Theodore Herschel Iskandar Tiberius Bismarck IV Part II

Once again I sincerely apologize for the agonizing boredom I'm again about to inflict upon you. If there was any other way to do this I would not hesitate for so much as an instant to use it instead of this one. However, no matter how exhaustively I've searched for such an alternative the only thing I've found for all my troubles was the mere fact of its nonexistence. So it is with much regret that I bring you this middle portion of verbal torture in the flimsy guise of a yarn.

Initially, the men wanted Wilhelm to lie down upon what they called their stretcher, what others may call a gurney and what some Vheissan expatriates might refer to as an upper downer strapper inner. Regardless of how one might choose to describe the thing, Wilhelm politely refused to suffer that particular indignity. Allowing oneself to be detained is already considered to be a sporting act. Going to even further lengths such as the one they were suggesting would go beyond that to the point of being submissive. And that simply would not do. There's an unwritten code of etiquette

as far as these interactions between detainer and detainee are concerned and travelling accommodations that excessively restrict the detainee's agency are a clear breach of said code.

The men, he sensed, were afraid of him and wanted to shackle him under the pretense of protocol. Such a profound respect for veterans was something of an oddity to see in such young operatives. Clearly either Wilhelm's reputation preceded him to that much of an extent or these children were reared using new, far more effective methods than Wilhelm himself and his contemporaries were decades ago.

Another thing that struck him as unusual about all of this was the deviation from what was considered standard operating procedure during these kinds of jobs. Typically one would be frisked for concealed weapons, handcuffed then blindfolded so that they wouldn't be able to ascertain where they were being transported and surreptitiously request a detachment of rescuers to extract them en-route or at the location.

In all fairness, the structure of their vehicle made it quite difficult to gain one's bearings, even with full use of one's faculties.

However the lack of any other precautions seemed negligent. Suspiciously so, far too conveniently, perhaps. Whoever their handler was, he (or she, Wilhelm supposed) definitely had to be nothing less than a pioneer of the field. One of those all too uncommon trailblazers who must be ascendant, who will surely leave a sprawling list of great achievements in their wake.

The man who sat in the back with Wilhelm idly performed a few seemingly pointless medically themed tasks such as measuring Wilhelm's blood pressure, pulse and (although he clumsily attempted to disguise it as an assessment of lung sounds) respiratory rate. He also asked a series of questions pertaining to medical history allergies and the like. At first Wilhelm assumed he was simply playing the role he was dressed for but the true purpose of these apparently meaningless procedures soon dawned on him.

Although operatives of Wilhelm's generation typically didn't dabble in such things, they were aware of these new *enlightened* scientifically based approaches to interrogation. The guiding principle behind it all was the supposition that while one could lie and connive with words and actions, their body would ultimately

betray the truth they all so desperately sought to hide. It was a methodology largely based on the principles and experiments of the Nazi SS and Communist KGB during WWII. The Americans, not wanting to be left behind, engaged in many experiments that sought to unify and refine these techniques during the Cold War.

These were mostly carried out under the broad umbrella of MK-series programs though some branched off separately developing into other such initiatives over the years such as COINTELPRO and Psyops. Some even believed the CIA had a hand in instigating the whole New Age counterculture movement of the 60s as well as starting so-called new religious groups such as The People's Temple, The Church of Scientology, and years later, Heaven's Gate, all as field tests of their mind control programs. There were also rumors and whisperings of things such as the shadowy project Monarch and HAARP, but those were far more speculative and insubstantial so they may be looked at with a bit more skepticism.

As previously stated, Wilhelm and his peers eschewed involvement with these newfangled would be innovations so they

didn't know for a fact how much veracity there was to any of it. But they had heard stories, had seen things that suggested it wasn't all just mumbo jumbo or smoke and mirrors after all. The more of these whisperings they became aware of, the more glad they were to have no part of any of it. While the atrocities of the 20th century's first half, all the genocides and conflicts and famines and political assassinations were an assault on the human spirit in their own right, they at least had easily comprehensible motives and outcomes. These newly budding 21st century abominations which had their seeds sown in the 20th's second half, were a far more satanic form of venom.

The quintessence of war never changes but the means used to wage it continue to grow more insidious and depraved with each passing decade. It all culminates in a vibrant display of newly devised methods of inflicting human suffering on far more profound levels than more primitive methods of yesteryear had previously allowed for.

It was, in a sense, progress. Maybe Wilhelm and his peers merely feared it because they like all outmoded obsolete relics of a

bygone age would be destroyed, discarded, or put on display in museums when the waves of advancement began lapping at their toes. It was the sort of malaise that could not be understood by those upstanding normal citizens who had nothing to do with any of it and have had their minds warped by any number of Weapons Of Peace. The perspectives of those who saw Holocaust and Holodomor, blockade and blitz, Gravity's Rainbow and Enola Gay, in social injustices such as the plight of women and the LGBT community and civil unrest following racially based incidents of police brutality, could never be reconciled with those who fondly reminisced of concentration camps and gulags, massacres and missile strikes, hand to hand combat and torture as things which bore a quaint romanticism when compared to the updated forms of guerilla warfare and convoluted counterintelligence principles of this brave new world, this perpetually beeping digital purgatory that had superseded their simpler, more familiar, clockwork one.

Men like Wilhelm were but mortals attempting to stand against these angels of death who breathed cyanide as they circled the sun and burnt holes in the blue skies. And although it was all they could do to keep up, their very existence, their enduring

stubborn refusal to roll over and die in turn terrified those who were meant to supplant them. From the perspective of the new, mass produced, expendable, and shoddily constructed drones, the rusted, clockwork, automatons of yesteryear were dreadful things which through what could only have been a particularly sinister, diabolically malevolent, form of ancient sorcery, had managed to survive long past their expiration date to become menacing, overwhelming, entities the likes of which should no longer exist in this world.

Ironically, both sides had elevated the other to an almost deified status while seeing themselves as the hopelessly outmatched underdogs. Perhaps they were far more similar to one another than they thought. Maybe the only real change was one of perspective and nothing else? This constant need to simultaneously demonize and deify the enemy was a farcical fairy tale older than time itself, one whose origins could perhaps be traced back to whatever God or arbitrary universal force had preceded all other forms of existence. As objects of the finite, we are inherently bound by the concepts of end and beginning. Therefore it stands to reason that all of our

religious, scientific, and philosophical thoughts are rooted in this model no matter how ostensibly divorced from it they seem to be.

That is why our scope is limited and we can never grasp the entire truth of what comes before the beginning or after the end. We can only grope blindly for these things in the darkness of infinity that we can never truly hope to touch whilst remaining human. The appropriate level of awe and dread one was meant to have for one's foeman could only be evoked through attributing these vague, incomprehensible, infinite qualities to them.

The destination at last seemed to be in sight. Wilhelm had no way of knowing this but could sense something close to relief from his captors. Whatever this secret destination of theirs was the mood seemed to indicate that they were fast approaching it. Maybe, he thought, this was our version, our unscientific old fashioned equivalent to their precise and exacting techniques. Something as terrifying to their sensibilities as all their frigid, barren, clinical approaches were to us. Our end of the reciprocated sentiment that unites us even as it draws a proverbial line in the sand between "we" and "they". He smiled realizing that this was the exact model of

thought's train that lead to suicide for the young and melancholic nostalgia for the old and aging. It was a diametrically convergent form of discordant harmony between those who could only find common ground through opposing one another.

Soon they came to a stop and again broached the issue of the stretcher as though it were to them some great ceremonial object without which they would be turned away by the intolerant high priest of this temple who demanded nothing less than complete compliance. This was troublesome but soon enough Wilhelm was able to mollify them with promises of his continued cooperation. Perhaps the process took a bit longer than it should have but ultimately they were persuaded that he was a model captive who required neither carrot nor stick to assure a workable level of malleability.

Maybe he was that convincing or maybe they were too exhausted to offer much in the way of resistance, either way it didn't really matter since both sides managed to essentially get what they wanted out of the exchange. Only children and insecure adults who had never grown in spirit themselves chose to dwell on the exact

particulars of who was to thank or blame, or what exactly had just transpired. Past a certain point one residing in the realm of the material learned to simply accept the outcome itself regardless of what led to it instead of obsessing over the act of assigning gratitude or blame. The less effort one expended on any unnecessary pursuits, the more energy would be left for them to use when they actually needed it. This was a form of pragmatism which only took root in those who frequently dealt with situations that required an extra level of exertion when compared with ordinary actions, and therefore did not have the luxury of wastefully spending energy.

After being brought inside the building Wilhelm was made to wait alongside a number of men and women who seemed to be, regardless of age or skin color, in the same position as him. This started out as what was promised to be a short wait. Wilhelm knew that meant it would inevitably be an excruciatingly long one, but did not suspect that it would gradually take on an almost spiritual quality of stillness, a metaphysical sense of monotony. Perhaps this too was part of the design? A measured and carefully applied set of MKULTRA based principles subtly woven into even the most innocuous aspects of the experience?

While such things were considered “Orwellian” by those conspiracy mongers who they didn’t actually apply to, those who actually experienced them would consider them to be more “Kafkaesque”, or “Lovecraftian” if they were less well read. It was not a world of intrigue and swirling suspicion but a realm of boredom and incessant dry badgering. It was an incubator of insanity intended for the sole purpose of polluting and degrading the soul. Finally after what seemed to be the very definition of an eternity, one which killed the body, decomposed it till not even bones remained, and disintegrated even the soul, Wilhelm was moved into the inner sanctum.

“Hello what’s your name?”

There was no need for deception. The worst, Wilhelm thought, was over.

“Wilhelm Theodore Herschel Iskandar Tiberius Bismarck the fourth.”

The white coated man, he of bald head and oversized spectacles, gave Wilhelm a cockeyed grin which betrayed his confidence, his command of the situation. Wilhelm needed to stand

against this oppressive atmosphere so he fired back with an inquiry of his own.

“And what’s yours good sir?”

Another grin.

“I don’t have quite as many of those as you I’m afraid. Just call me Dr. Botkin.”

Wilhelm nodded and asked another question.

“What is this place?”

An even wider Cheshire Cat grin.

“This, Willy, is your new home. Welcome to Gracie Square.”

Aaron Carver

Crack of noon as always. You can't call yourself a musician or artist if you aren't whimsical enough to wake up an impractical hour. Only after all the good little productive members of society have begun to go about their normal, socially acceptable lives is it proper for one claiming to be a practitioner of any sort of art to awaken. Being completely impractical and willing to stake life and soul for the creation of a transient vision of beauty that will be scorned three times for each one it is loved; that is art.

Speaking of art, there's a creation of mine still waiting on its idling creator. It's begging to be ushered into the world. Now's the time, I can't give into my whims and vicissitudes of mood any longer. Yes. The new album needs to be written in one fell swoop. It absolutely must happen today no matter what it takes. The future of Cat Couture Nightclub depends on it.

I think, search, and look inward. First there needs to be a central unifying theme. All our best albums under all of our project names start there. For this, our comeback album after a hiatus of six years there needs to be a perfect theme. One that is sublime and

base, profound and shallow, profane and holy. So I search through newspapers, books, movies, TV, comics, porn, everything. It must be out there somewhere as it always is. It's just waiting for me to find it. However, my search appears to be getting nowhere. This one is quite elusive.

In that case I'll stop looking for the time being. I'll let it find me. New York is still somewhat novel to me since I don't live here. There's always something to do in places like these. I plan on going out, maybe getting a drink or two, and picking up a girl. When I'm flipping channels to find the forecast I finally stumble upon it. It's always funny how these things can find you when you're not even looking. Some idiotically vapid talking heads on Fox News are spinning their usual bullshit about some incident or another. They're calling it an "attack on Christian values."

Well I hate "Christian values" myself so naturally I need to find out more about this "attacker". A quick search online tells me everything I want to know and more. Apparently he was an accountant named Jerry who tried to go on a murder rampage but only ended up killing himself. That alone would only be droll

amusing but there's more to it than that. He was a consciously pseudo-intellectual would-be terrorist who said all sorts of strange and ridiculous things in various manifestos and recordings. The summaries are already quite promising. This guy sounds fascinating.

I go through it all, every last bit of material which has been publically released by him. It has to be him. He'll be the theme. It's just too perfect. If he was a regular psychopath or monster that'd be one thing, but what he in fact ended up being was nothing less than a clown. The tragedy he sought to create ended up being a simple black comedy. That and I can tell, can clearly see, that he didn't actually believe a word of what he said. It was all designed for the sole purpose of eliciting a reaction. The only genuine thing about it was his disdain for today's world and culture. That part was real. And why wouldn't it be? This is a world worth hating and cursing.

Now that I've found the muse I've been seeking it's time to get to work. I need to take the depraved tragicomedy of his miserable life and transform it into art. My idle idyll of the day has been cancelled. It's a time for tempestuous and impetuous action. I turn on various videos and voice recordings of him to set the mood.

This album will be called “The Magnificent Third Rail” in honor of the man behind this man’s actions. That immortal corpse who drove Jerry into a corner with his radiant demise, Matthew Asher Ambrose.

Despite almost never interacting with or even knowing each other, the two were like lovers. Matt already had everything in life that Jerry sought. All the ideal components of a normal, happy life such as friends, family, lovers and so forth. Each of those things individually were enviable to men like Jerry who never truly had any of them, that in and of itself would merely be frustrating, but acceptable. After all, he was used to being around people who had what he didn’t. It was what Matt gained through death that pushed Jerry over the edge.

Not only was that shitty brat’s life idyllic, but even his death became a sensational larger than life affair. It just wasn’t fair. If some lowlife loser kid could become so famous just by dying in a public way than anyone was entitled to at least that much. That was what Jerry sought to prove with his own highly public and overly elaborate death. Attempting to take people with him was just a way to increase how public, how significant he’d become by dying.

In a sad, bizarre way, he was admirable. A heroically villainous failure of a man. It takes courage to be able to abandon everything in the pursuit of one's desires. Even when one feels as though they have nothing to lose, taking that final step towards achieving something is worth recognizing no matter how depraved or selfish those aspirations were. Villains are worshiped by being reviled while heroes are revered. The anti-hero is merely a fallacious fantasy that exists for people who respect the dark undignified dignity of villains but hypocritically want them to be "right" or "good". The compelling quality of pure evil is something people have been simultaneously drawn to and repulsed by since the dawn of mankind.

Heroes represent the ideal because villains represent the concrete. There's no shortage of evil and self interest in our world. Getting fat off ill-gotten gains is how upward mobility works. People ignore the obvious evil of the ideals society glorifies in order to vilify the more readily hate-able evils which they see no benefit to partaking in. That is the sacrifice which villains unintentionally make. They become convenient targets for people to cast their own evil impulses upon while feeling validated in doing so. In a sense the

true villain is a messiah who saves the equally evil masses by allowing them to assume a pretense of righteousness.

But Jerry isn't quite that. A true villain has to win, to at least briefly rule or be successful at some point. Their worldly success is their dignity. Therefore a man who only posthumously succeeded in being reviled the way he wanted to be is a mere imitation. That's what makes his story so farcically compelling. He sought the lowest of lows and only attained a half-assed state of posthumous ignominy cut with pity. The truest, most successful, messianic villains may earn grudging respect as great and powerful adversaries of the righteous, but they can never be pitied. When a hero is scorned or a villain pitied, they lose their status and become nothing more than tragicomic symbols of failure.

Failure is beautiful because of how contrary it is to the concept of beauty. There's a perverse pleasure to be discovered in the most ostensibly painful things. Ugliness in the proper light can be as intoxicating and exhilarating as the most pristine beauty. In this world of writhing desires extremes at either end of the spectrum gain similar properties. If success is the absolute extreme of perfection

and beauty, then failure is representative of the diametrically opposed qualities of imperfection and ugliness. When either of them is taken past a certain threshold the two become as one.

It is the nature of all things in this world to return to their primordial unified state. Life and death, good and evil, light and darkness, existence and nonexistence, each half of each pair is merely split off from the other so that they may become distinguishable. We cannot comprehend the mystery of creation because our minds aren't designed to understand the mystical transition from zero to one and one into two. Anything which comes close to bridging that gap is inherently terrifying. We stand in awe before that which cannot be seen.

There's an awe inspiring quality to anything that comes near that primordial state of "oneness". Call it God or the chaotic soup from which all things originate, but there exists a vehement need to destroy ridicule and reject anything that comes close to that original state between being and nonbeing. The imaginary number is as terrifying a thing as the absolute certainty of nothingness. As beings which have been created through the advent of zero into one and one

into two, our existence itself hinges on denying the possibility of zero, one, and everything even less knowable than them. That is as the fundamental fear. The primal impetus behind all thought. Religion and science both exist to preserve that mystery by contrarily claiming to have the answers to it. Because the answer would destroy us as we know ourselves.

After reaching adequately vast expanses of the mind with that reverie, I must now return to the contracted concealed state from those expanded uncharted heights. So I focus on structure. The beginning and middle and end. Everything in-between as well. It will start with Matthew, follow his life, his death, his very being, then conclude with Jerry.

There will be nine tracks along with a hidden tenth that unifies the whole. Only an esoterically based design philosophy is appropriate here. There must always be an unreachable, mystic, quality to my art at a certain level. What the ignorant masses deride as overly abstract or incomprehensible is merely that which the true visionaries will find beautiful and sublime. That's the essence of the "Third Rail". A profound mystery that shouldn't be touched. One

which is tantamount to the very boundary between life and death itself.

Whatever lies beyond the pale is something we always both seek and shy away from. The sense of irrevocability gives it a power over us unrivalled by any other. Through art we vainly seek to temporarily grasp that innermost mystery. That crown of absolute, unknowable knowledge. It has been denied to us by design, which is exactly what makes it irresistible and dreadful. Whatever force or arbitrary process led to our existence has prevented us from grasping that ephemeral star. More practical or businesslike men and women simply scoff and say such self-defeating pursuits are mere folly.

Oh how wrong they are! They fail to understand the glory and splendor of even taking one step down that endless path. It is an indescribable supernal feeling reserved only for the truest of artists. While there is no shame or indignity to be had in living without that spark or seeking it, its incomparable significance isn't something to be trivialized. As artists we begin by externalizing that which is internal in order to share some measure of our perception with others. The next stage is dragging those beyond oneself further and

further still into the depths of one's soul. It is there that we discover how vast and beautiful the universe is.

Yes there is indeed a universe as vast and unexplored as the one we inhabit inside each and every sentient lifeform. It is a crime to deny its existence. Simply fearing what we may find in those murky expanses is one thing but denying they even exist is nothing short of heresy. That act is a denial of our sentience itself. Whether one believes it is truly metaphysical or merely a series of electrical signals or chemicals doesn't matter so long as they acknowledge its existence.

Pretending it does not exist is the most abominable form of cowardice possible. It would be as though all the famed explorers had their discoveries rejected on the sole basis of average people being too afraid to see the places they've found for themselves. That's simply unacceptable.

At any rate, I've completed it. The lyrics have all arranged themselves to coincide with my intent. I can feel it, the pulse of countless eons reverberating through the entire universe. This may

be my finest work yet. Looking at the clock I see it's already three AM. Oh well, sleep is for the weak anyway.

Taking a step back I drink it all in. Yes, there can be no mistaking it. It is complete. All that's left to do is tell the guys and record it all. This is what makes all the uncertainty that comes with being an artist worth it. There is no way to explain exactly how it feels to usher an entire completed work into the world. If there's a god of this world, this must be how they feel.

@ A A Ron

“Hey man what’s up?”

“Nothing much. I’m just trying to read that retarded book our professor won’t shut the fuck up about. Who actually likes this kind of shit? It’s so fucking boring and doesn’t make any sense at all.”

“Yeah I hear you. I don’t get a word in that thing. It reminds me of those faggy Greek poems our teachers made us read in high school. I can see why the author got locked up in the loony bin. You’d have to be a nutjob to write something like that in 2015.”

“Haha, yeah, I bet he was a kissless virgin too. A lot of it just seems like it’s his gross sexual fantasies. Dude must’ve been autistic or something. Probably like that guy who wears those striped shirts and playdough necklaces.”

“Definitely. Maybe he was like...a serial killer or something too. Those parts where it talks about stalking and murdering people seem way too real to just be shit he made up. Maybe he let them lock him up with the other loony tunes so they wouldn’t throw him into Riker’s or Attica?”

“Yeah. Whatever though I don’t wanna talk about that bullshit anymore. It’s so bad it gave me the shits talking about it just now.”

“Well what the fuck are you waiting for then? Get your ass to the shitter already before you get diarrhea all over my new shoes!”

“Fuck you man. Just hold on I’ll be back.”

“Yeah whatever, don’t forget to wipe you dirty motherfucker!”

A A Ron @ A A Ron

waiting for eric to take a dump he’s got the mudbutt :C
#dirtyculo#thanksObama#Stopbullying

JenLen @ A A Ron

ewww gross don’t eat whatever he did lol
#icebucketchallenge#Kony2015

xXxY0l0SwaGGodxXx @ A A Ron

tell im to hurry up cuz thoz hoes ain’t gonna fuck emselves
#BigBootyBitches#theegreatestandhero

Puppies taking poops @ A A Ron

Ask him to take a picture of it before he flushes

#thanksObama#ASPCA#PETAkillsdogs

Eric Lerner @ A A Ron

WTF bro did u really hav to tweet about this shit

#autismspeaks#thanksObama#dicknipples

A A Ron @ Eric Lerner

Of course I did they had to know

#shitlerdidnothingwrong#Gamergate#hashtag

“Man you’re a fucking retard. This is probably why old people hate twitter. They think it’s all just stupid kids talking about taking shits.”

“Whatever, you were taking too long so I had to do something to keep myself from falling asleep.”

“I wasn’t even gone for two minutes. You must have ADD or something man.”

“Sure, whatever you say Dr. StrangeDump. I don’t need psychiatric advice from a guy who gets triggered every time someone tweets about him.”

“Man...seriously, how’d you even graduate from elementary school? You keep going full retard every five seconds.”

“Oh my god...shut the fuck up about it already. We’ll be late to the party if we just stand around here talking about this stupid shit, your stupid shit, all day.”

“Fine let’s go then. It’s not too far from here. Just a couple of blocks down that way. There it is, that building over there.”

“What’s the password?”

“Yeah yeah whatever, just let us in already. Telling you some password isn’t going to get us drunk or get us any pussy.”

“...Works for me. Come in boys.”

“Why do you always have to be such an asshole Aron? I know the password thing was stupid but you could’ve at least let the guy have his fun.”

“If you like him so much go suck his dick. He’ll be telling all his friends that Erica swallows.”

“Are you in fourth grade? Who still makes gay jokes like that?”

“Ooooh! Princess Erica’s upset now! Someone get him his tiara so he can shove it up his ass.”

“How are you even in college? They should send you back to kindergarten where you belong.”

“Please forgive me your highness! Should I give you a massage? A foot rub maybe? Or perchance you’d prefer it if I tossed your royal salad? Anything for you princess.”

“Go fuck yourself. I’m going home. I hope you die of alcohol poisoning or end up getting AIDS from being assraped in jail.”

“Whatever, go home if you want to. I bet you’ll be crying about all this while reading that crazy motherfucker’s book for fun. I bet you’ll even start liking it too. You’re flipping me off now? Well I can flip you off too! How about two fingers? How’s that? Huh? Is it

not to her majesty's liking? Stupid motherfucker, can't even take a joke or two."

"What happened? Why's your friend leaving? Did you two have a fight or something?"

"Nah, don't worry about princess Erica, he's just on the rag. He'll feel better after eating a tub of ice cream and watching a few Lifetime movies."

"Awww that's sweet. You two should kiss and make up."

"I'll text him now."

hey erica jen says we shud kiss and make up pucker up
princess

fuck off I dont want to tlak to u rite now

dont be an asshole man

"Looks like he's not ready for the makeup sex yet. I'll try again later."

"You guys are so cute."

“Yeah, we’re adorable aren’t we? *Life has prevailed over death after all.*”

“What?”

“It’s a quote from this awful book our professor’s making us read. It was written by some crazy homeless bum or something. Professor Hawkes is fucking crazy too, they need to fire his ass already.”

“That’s so weird! What’s the book called? I wanna read it.”

“I forgot. Honestly I’m not even reading it, I’m just going to pay some kid off to write my papers for me. It’s the kind of thing that probably makes you crazy if you read it.

“Sounds creepy! What’s this professor Hawkes of yours like anyway? He sounds like an interesting guy.”

“Hawkes? He’s fucking crazy, an old perv too. He always goes on and on about sex. I bet a lot of the girls in class blow him just so they don’t have to read the crazy books he always assigns. The dude’s a scumbag through and through.”

“Wow! I wanna meet him now.”

“No you don’t. He’d probably try to rape you or something. The guy’s a freak.”

“Aww, are you jealous? I can take care of myself. Or are you just afraid he’ll steal me from you?”

“Hah! If that old fart can steal you, more power to him. But anyway let’s stop talking about all this crazy shit babe. Let’s just have some drinks, relax and fuck. I’m too tired to keep dealing with all that bullshit right now.”

“Poor baby...Ok, I won’t stress you out anymore tonight. Just keep an eye out of that professor Hawkes of yours really will take me away from you!”

Billy Bob Joyce

The path of true piety is a harsh, uncompromising, and easily misunderstood thing. There is no room for mercy or doubt. For true love or hatred. The only thing permitted to exist on that thorny trail is absolute servitude before God. One must be willing to disregard all the pleasures friendships and misguided philosophies of the rotted secular world, this modern Sodom Gomorrah and Rome all rolled into one, to properly prepare oneself for the journey.

“Is everyone ready? Don’t come if you’re not prepared to do the Lord’s work today.”

They all shout and rejoice in affirmation. That’s how it should be. No one who would take up this holy mission would back down now. No matter how much the rest of the world scorns and mocks our love for God. We will be as meek as lambs before the Lord our God and as fierce and proud as lions before his abominable foes. This isn’t some blasphemous televangelical bullshit where money will buy you a place in the kingdom of heaven.

“Let’s go then. If all of you are ready, there’s no reason to wait any more.”

The path to heaven is not paved in indulgences or hollow attempts at being Christ-like. No, we must become warriors of the Lord ourselves and take a stand against this satanic society we're living in. Solemnly we march, for the road to salvation is a grim and arduous one. If an outsider were to see our sacred procession they would call us idiots for walking instead of using any form of public or private transportation. Yet through doing that they would merely be putting their own ignorance of God's ways on display for all of us to mock.

We have chosen to walk, because this is the cross we carry. We must alienate and strike out against every last sinful soul on this planet. We'll hasten their judgment and our salvation through our deeds. It is nothing less than the will of the Lord our god that we show the sinners the truth. That they will burn in the lake of fire for all eternity. Those are the wages of vainglorious iniquity. We on the other hand shall be blessed with life everlasting for our service to God. It is only at Westboro that we have learned how to perform the true baptismal rites upon ourselves.

After walking for hours we finally arrive. The searing pain in the soles of our feet is no less intense than our blazing fervor to do God's work. This is a somewhat unusual situation for us. Typically we rejoice at the death of sinners but in this case we will be glorifying one to prove a point. This is because he was an agent of the Lord. An avenging angel under the guise of a marauding demon. We set up in front of that hive of dark liquid sin to celebrate the life of a martyr. To hold a candlelight vigil for brother Gerald, accountant, hero, martyr. He failed to strike down a single sinner because the Lord our god, in his infinite mercy would not allow him to taint himself with their impure blood. Yet Gerald's righteous fury was so powerful that he rejected God's mercy! He turned his instrument of divine justice on himself so that he could rampage through hell itself and directly torment the sinners there. So great was brother Gerald's love for the Lord his God, that he would sacrifice his mortal soul itself to work God's will!

As we set up the disgusting sinners stare at our assembly with curiosity. We do not speak to them. This is because there's no obligation to exchange words with the hellbound heathen or heretic and also because our purpose will make itself abundantly clear soon

enough. The process is time consuming but we're just barely able to contain ourselves while we complete it. Enduring torment to inflict greater torment is one of the key principles of our doctrine. Only those willing to endure the harrowing trials of doing battle with the legions of hell can truly earn their place in heaven. And there's no mistaking it, this will be nothing less than a bloody, savage battle.

As we finish making our preparations gathering our instruments and lighting our candles a crowd begins gathering around us. They chatter but we pay them no mind for the battle has begun.

“Are they really going to...”

“Wait, what?”

“What the fuck's going on here?”

“Who are these freaks?”

We begin our song.

*Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are
stored;*

*He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword:
His truth is marching on.*

“Wow... Just wow. You people are sick.”

*Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
His truth is marching on.*

“This is horrible! How are they allowed to do things like
this?”

*I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps,
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and
damps;
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps:
His day is marching on.*

“Hahahahahahaha! This shit’s going up on youtube! Smile
for the camera, you sick fucks!”

*Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
His truth is marching on.*

“Shut the fuck up! You motherfuckers are evil! Where do you get off doing this kind of shit?!”

*I have read a fiery gospel writ in burnished rows of steel:
"As ye deal with my contemners, so with you my grace shall
deal";
Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his heel,
Since God is marching on.*

“Don’t listen to them. Keep going. You’re doing God’s work here!”

*Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
His truth is marching on.*

“You guys are the best! I love you all!”

*He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment-seat:
Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet!
Our God is marching on.*

“Hello, 911? I’d like to report a disorderly public gathering.
It’s on...”

Glory, glory, hallelujah!

Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
His truth is marching on.

“This is what happens when you let rednecks reproduce.”

*In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me.
As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
While God is marching on.*

“Yeah! You show those Starbucks slurping hipster douches!”

Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
His truth is marching on.

“Welp, this country’s going to shit isn’t it? Better move to Canada or something I guess.”

*He is coming like the glory of the morning on the wave,
He is Wisdom to the mighty, He is Succor to the brave,
So the world shall be His footstool, and the soul of wrong His
slave,
Our God is marching on.*

“This is basically a glorified cross burning. You might as well have all brought your white robes and those retarded pointy hoods.”

Glory, glory, hallelujah!

Glory, glory, hallelujah!

Glory, glory, hallelujah!

His truth is marching on.

Having finished, we shake hands and hand out some pamphlets to our supporters while giving the sinful faggot-loving heathens who are against us a well-deserved piece of our minds. It was pleasantly surprising to find out that we actually have supporters in places as sinful as this city. Maybe there’s still hope for this hell-bound nation after all.

The Wacky Misadventures of Conrad

Mancuso Oblige Part III

Ponyboy did the same thing he had done every morning. It was a ritual he came up with a decade ago when he was physically a she, though more of a devil in spirit than a human of any gender, one whose mind never ceased to cultivate endless fantasies of death and love; necrophilic, necrophagic, and corpophagic, bliss. The more deviant and detached from reality and common decency it was, the more Ponyboy (or perhaps girl back in those halcyon days) found it worthwhile and *wunderbar*. However in spite of how tantalizing Poyboy's Boschian fantasies were he, she, it, or whichever pronoun one finds most agreeable, still clung to the survival instinct as expressed in abiding by the laws and bare minimum norms of one's society that would keep one from being incarcerated or institutionalized. So that sweet siren song of anarchistic fascination went unheeded like the baying of coyotes to a Midwestern ear which had long since become desensitized to the sound despite secretly harboring thoughts of joining their haunting chorus. So instead Ponyboy settled on this: he would concoct a soup of sorts, one

whose exact recipe varied daily but ultimately consisted of two main ingredients, being shit and piss respectively.

These substances were left to ferment in their natural environment of the toilet bowl for no less than exactly thirteen hours thirteen minutes and thirteen seconds with a new strongly odorous ingredient such as a glass of semen or a vial of blood from the local butcher or else a bucketful of vomit from the local bar's restroom. This rock soup of sorts was, after having fully matured, deeply inhaled of by our very own Ponyboy. It wasn't that Ponyboy particularly enjoyed or relished the distinct aroma of this brew. No, quite the opposite was true as it often sickened Ponyboy to the point of making him contribute his own breakfast to it. This was done not for enjoyment but as a rigorous mental and physical reminder of one thing Ponyboy considered a fact which warranted such a painful daily exercise. This was, Ponyboy thought, what the world really smells like and this ritual was meant to symbolize the act of uncovering and embracing that truth every single day. Indeed, like a particularly devout monk, Ponyboy did not go a single day in the past decade without ringing this ceremonial bell of his chosen faith.

Besides this Ponyboy also partook in an, at least ostensibly, more normal morning ritual. He would without fail procure no less than six different newspapers and read through them from front to back. While to an untrained observer this would simply seem like an old fashioned style of worldliness, it was in fact completely divorced from such conventional notions of newspaper reading or news watching. What Ponyboy was in fact doing, was seeking out with a laser-like focus, all the misanthropic and anti-social aspects of everything in the newspapers. Studiously, religiously even, Ponyboy would scour both the text and context, tones over and under, for even the slightest hints of duplicity, dishonesty, hatred, greed, lust, pride, wrath, envy and all manner of other unsavory elements of human bile which were, according to his personal theory, the philosophy which he had spent his entire life cultivating, rooted in every aspect of human thought and behavior, conscious and otherwise.

But why, one might ask, why was he so desperate to find something that he clearly had already found? Where? Where did this needy desire for validation that should no longer have been required come from? And how? How was it that after all this time he was still so desperate, still so unable to once and for all put whatever doubts

or misgivings he felt were driving this endless pursuit, behind him? Well much like the ending of many dime store novellas, the answers to these questions were both predictably trite and appropriately unsatisfying as such things always seem to be as if by some intentional intrinsic design. You could choose one of those prototypically tedious answers that such questions almost always have and not be too far off the mark. Therefore we will simply do just that and allow it to maintain at least some small measure of dignified mystique by not revealing the exact nature of its unsightly *banality*.

Today seemed like a difficult day for his newspaper routine, which Ponyboy thought was only natural considering how his focus had shifted to a matter of far greater import to him, namely thoughts of the delectably disgusting boy Connie. In a word (or in several more than that), he couldn't get Connie out of his mind, he was head over heels, cock over sock, and nuts over butt for the kid who he hated loved and desired so much. It was only through sheer force of habit and force of will that he was able to maintain an adequate level of concentration to automatically go about his reading ritual at all.

So fervent was his obsession that like a goat caught up in the idle pleasure of grazing, he nearly failed to take note of the mountain lion who lurked mere feet away. Yet as the goat, when favored by some God or fortune or arbitrary whim of probability, realizes the presence of the looming threat and manages to act, so too did Ponyboy see the threat to him which he so nearly missed. Though of course the simple opportunity to take action is never a sure guarantee of success. This is why Ponyboy despite instantly deciding to take quick and resolute action in the face of this existential threat still felt the sinking miserable sensation of possibly being too late to avert the cruel fate which now hung over his newly found throne of glory like a slowly descending Sword Of Damocles.

Perhaps he had encroached upon ground which was not his to tread on? Maybe he had simply overstepped his naturally imposed bounds and offended someone or something with an influence over the relativistic forces of causality and was simply now being punished for daring to go where he did not belong? Or was this simply a trial meant to test the true mettle and measure of his resolve like the ordeal of Orpheus or the voyages of Jason? Whatever the

case may be, Ponyboy decided, he would not give up until he confirmed the worst for himself with his own two eyes.

What prompted this sudden mobilization was a very plain, unadorned article buried like a landmine in one newspaper's catacombesque crime section. The headline simply read "65 year old found dead in Wall Street hotel" and the article reported on the death of one Connor O'Shea in a mere 150 words, concluding that it was "most likely a suicide." Given what he had witnessed last night, it was only natural for Ponyboy to be so thoroughly shaken by such an article. Pessimism came to him as naturally as drawing breath so this was a clear sign of a possible calamity in which Ponyboy's sweet unplucked little bloom had been torn from its stem and trampled upon by a vile old fool who was only meant to foster its growth. Despite knowing how self-defeating an oath it was, Ponyboy swore to avenge his beloved reviled Connie if the old man's actions had destroyed the boy.

Now he had no way of knowing this but his suspicions were in fact close to actualizing themselves. Connie, caring soul that he was, went to The Dead Rabbit as soon as it had opened to find

Connor, or at least obtain news of him. He had felt that something was amiss about the old man around the time of his departure from the hotel room and had now, in the manner of a concerned little puppy, returned to the place where they met to inquire about his whereabouts and wellbeing. Connor was a regular who would come to the tavern at opening time and stay for most of the day so the bartenders understood Connie's concern in spite of not knowing who he was or what he had to do with Connor. They personally looked into the matter with Connie in tow and together they were the first to uncover the scene of Connor's self-inflicted demise.

So again, though he had absolutely no way of knowing about any of that, Ponyboy's concerns were perfectly valid. Perhaps he, through some contrary form of unrequited love, had developed such a profound connection to the boy that he had become attuned, like an old lover, to any misfortune which had befallen Connie. Yet his devotion was self-defeating even as it led to a miraculous attunement of a metaphysical nature. That is to say that he was so caught up in the feelings his current pursuit of Connie had imparted to him that he could scarcely recall any details of the previous day's pursuit which would allow him to locate the boy. Ponyboy only remembered the

vague general details such as the fact that there had been hotels, office buildings and a bar involved. The specific names of the hotels, precise industries or companies the offices related to, the clientele of the bar, or more specific details such as locations and names of any of them seemed as mysterious and hazy to Ponyboy as an indistinct image viewed through a thick fog.

Nevertheless he searched. The profound pain he felt, the constantly stabbing knives of concerned dread which dug into Ponyboy's organs simply wouldn't allow him to rest until he had discerned the fate of his unrequited lover for himself. Armed with only the vague bits of information he set out to do battle against his sense of rapidly swelling uncertainty itself. A dedicated hunter in a vain pursuit of breadcrumbs which had long since been eaten by the scavenging crows of his doubt, Ponyboy shuffled rapidly from hotel to hotel, bar to bar, and office building to office building.

This was all useless as he had no idea where to actually search. He went all over Manhattan, most of the time not even beginning to approach any of the places Connie had been to, or even more frustratingly, ended up visiting only similar establishments

within proximity of the ones he actually sought. It was just as well that things turned out that way though. This too was a fact Ponyboy had absolutely no way of being aware of, but had he in fact visited any of the establishments he was attempting to find, the results would have been equally fruitless and unsatisfying so the exact places he ended up going to and getting those sorts of meaningless replies from was ultimately irrelevant.

At any rate the day was drawing to a close and his desperation was rapidly increasing with each inch the sun sank in the rapidly darkening late afternoon sky. Not having any other leads to go on, Ponyboy finally went to the hotel mentioned in the article. He didn't expect much from this last, desperate attempt of his but against all odds he had finally found Connie, or at least a trace of him. The front desk attendant told him he had in fact seen a boy matching Connie's description enter the premises around fifteen minutes ago.

This news both gladdened and further stressed Ponyboy. On one hand he had finally managed to find a clue the likes of which had been eluding him all day. On the other, the location and the

fifteen minutes he was beaten to it by the boy didn't do much to inspire any confidence of arriving on time. Having nothing more left to go on now than sheer instinct, Ponyboy quickly made his way up to the roof.

The elevator felt too slow and unreliable, Ponyboy would only trust his legs to ascend the 106 flights of stairs it would take to reach his destination in a timely manner. Living up to his chosen namesake, he galloped up the steps as though his very life depended on it. And in a sense it did, for without sweetly sickening Connie to play the role of a guiding lighthouse beacon warmly shining across the horizon, Ponyboy would indeed lose his recently found *raison d'être*.

Finally reaching his destination, sweating profusely and gasping for air, Ponyboy saw him, saw the lovely disgusting arousing boy who made him go through all this trouble. Connie also noticed his pursuer and weakly smiled at him without understanding who he was. Being entirely depleted from his mad dash up the stairs, it was all Ponyboy could do at the moment to approach Connie and

collapse onto the floor at the boy's feet. Connie, kind soul that he was, kneeled down and expressed his concern.

“Are you alright? Should I call an ambulance?”

Ponyboy knew this was his one and only opportunity so he applied an extreme, spirited, effort to instantly regain some measure of strength in his limbs, shaving several years off his life in the process. Had he known what he was giving up for this he would have considered it to be a worthwhile sacrifice.

“Don't worry about me. How are you doing?”

Connie was surprised by this stranger's kindness, but being one who himself took up that sort of role, appreciated the sentiment.

“Me? I'm fine. Really. Thanks for asking though.”

Time was rapidly running out so Ponyboy got straight to the point.

“Don't lie. The old man died right? Didn't you come here to follow him?”

Connie was far too honest to continue his half-hearted attempt at deceit so he let it all out along with a stream of tears.

“Yeah...you’re right. That’s exactly what I came here to do. How did you know?”

“Don’t worry about that. Just don’t do it, please, I’m begging you.”

“Why not? If you know this much you should know that this is what I deserve. My “help” just killed a man! I don’t deserve to live! I-“

Ponyboy cut those words off by smothering them with his lips. He embraced Connie and whispered sweet nothings into the boy’s ear until the embrace was fully accepted. All things having come full circle, the boy having found help after attempting to provide it, the two lovers departed towards their blissful happily ever after ending.

Star Outteridge's Tragic Tale Part III

As we approach the end of our wayward Star's journey, I too am progressing towards a turning point in my own quest for meaning. I've stumbled upon something of a universal truth pertaining to me after poring over the attempts others have made at finding theirs. You see I've discovered that on a fundamental level everything is rooted in perception, that objectivity is merely a fanciful lie and that our own experiences are our own ultimate truth. Other than what we see, feel, and know, there is nothing and never was or will be anything. The experiences of those beyond ourselves only come to exist through our observation of them. Therefore you the reader only now exist because I have visualized and perceived you as existing, and likewise I myself do not exist for you until you read these words. We are transformed from tenuous vague notions into fully realized beings made tangible and actual only when observed.

Star's final, 17th year began with a return to the surface. Though it was already crumbling from within there was enough of a solid infrastructure to retreat to when the emptiness and ever-present heat of the void and proximal core grew to intolerable levels. She

had come to realize through her sojourns of sorts that the surface, even if it was a lie, was ultimately more comfortable and habitable than the innards it concealed in which she found nothing but an ever mounting frigidity and diametrically opposed searing heat. She came to believe that the innermost core was either a thing not to be touched or at the very least something she wasn't ready to truly come into contact with. A sense of awe the likes of which a celebrant might feel overcame and terrified her. She had briefly come into contact with her innermost, truest, undiluted nature and found it as terrifying in its overpowering ambiguity as her parents had all those years ago when she was first brought into this world.

Was she afraid that it would foster a form of growth or evolution into something which while being her "true" self, would be entirely alien and contrary to the "self" she knew and recognized after all these years? Even Star herself didn't quite know which of these things, if either, the case was. All she understood was that there was a great danger there and she had seen the precipice from the top. Wherever the fall would lead the fact that it would be an unknown and unknowable place, an implacable state of being, was enough to fill her with dread, terror, fascination, and awe.

Part of her conscious self, did indeed seek that state, that ever distant yet always proximal land. Yet the thought was instilled within her from a young age that whatever she found there would be received at the expense of any and all routes back to where she had come from, as well as the places she had called home within the structure of self being completely destroyed by the process.

So she continued to retreat outward where that structure still held a facsimile of sturdiness, of safety and most of all, comfort. It was, in a sense, exactly the way her parents wanted her to act even though they had no part in directly facilitating the process which led to it. As artists they wouldn't have disapproved of efforts which could be seen as driven by passion and a thirst for life even though their true meaning was a clinically dispassionate search for purpose. Her sexual escapades resembled mad science projects in pursuit of philosophical hypothesis rather than the love affairs that typically came to mind when one thought of such things. That nature may be what contrarily led to her growing tired of them at such an unnaturally rapid rate. It all rang hollow, meaningless, and fruitless. The experiments had entirely inconclusive outcomes and there were

no practical bits of knowledge or experience to be extrapolated from them.

She withdrew into the outer shell from the inner sanctum not because it all seemed so pointless but because that emptiness was only the herald to the all-encompassing force of being which sat just behind it. Even the vaguest wisps of which had a corrosive and bewitching property that repelled even as it attracted, seduced even as it cooled passions. The closer one comes to reaching such a state the more intense their desire to run back where they came from becomes. A moth drawn to the primordial nectar of the consuming flame, yet fearful enough of the destruction awaiting it at the end of such a pursuit to turn back even at the last possible moment where satisfaction is a mere step away.

So that final step would not be something she would take on her own. She could only be forced to take it by circumstances outside her control. She was one who at least then, sought contraction through expansion because the all-consuming light she had seen but the briefest glimpse of had left that profound of an impression on her conscious self. Slowly, ever so slowly, at the pace

of grains of sand gradually making their way from the top of an hourglass to the bottom, she made her way to the site where the end would find her. She had absolutely no way of knowing what would happen there, what it would do to her, but her actions betrayed a sense of dread, as though the impact of the impending cataclysm was so great that it had transcended the bounds of time and space to at the very least echo as a vague premonition of disaster. It was almost indiscernible but she felt it. Felt it enough to become uneasy, but still not enough to understand what this uneasiness signified or how to prevent the calamity it was warning her of.

Swiping her card, she paid that mechanical Charon's fare and began her final descent into the urban underworld. The details of where she intended to go and what she intended to do there were unimportant, insignificant, and insipid little factoids so in the interest of cohesiveness we will not even begin addressing those meaningless trifles. It would be like watching a movie and focusing on how it was made rather than what it showed or said; a masturbatory exercise undertaken for the sole purpose of feeling clever or knowledgeable on the arcane particulars of something that is a mere means to an end.

On this February day means and ends and details would all come together in unified relativity, an indistinct primordial soup of purposefulness that isn't meant to be parsed out into discrete parts or comprehended in any conventional sense. The chemical reaction had already turned many into one, making whole this parody of the divine mystery of creation's preceding state. There would be nothing of value to be gained from clumsy attempts at derivation.

As she approached the source, Star was overtaken by the impending doom it exuded. Maybe, she thought, this wasn't such a good idea. Probably, she felt, I shouldn't be here right now, shouldn't have come here at all and maybe this whole area, a mile wide radius here, is not a place where this "self" I'm clinging to, belongs. The onset was gradual and came in waves. Erosion, contractions, decreasing length of intervals. A sign of impending birth and assured death in childbirth. Why such a pre-21st century notion was being resurrected now was a question to be asked and answered by someone who wasn't caught in the center of its reality. The illusion of objectivity was impossible for the dying Star on the verge of bursting open in sublime supernova to fix and establish.

But the most painful part of the whole ordeal was the calm before the storm. The more one dreaded and feared a blow, calamity, or disaster, the more painful the act of waiting for it became. Mentally and spiritually she was dying and being revived once every nanosecond, barely pulling together a dysfunctional façade of normality and function that only covered up the fact that it was all tumbling down like an obscenely massive house of cards which had managed to go on existing long after the natural forces it was a clear affront to should have entropically annihilated it. To have lasted this long was already nothing short of miraculous and now that fantastical power of obsession and maniacal monopolizing goodwill had finally lost to the powers that be as it was always destined to.

Yet Star could not imagine living, being, existing without it so she hastily slapped it back together even as it was coming apart at the seams. She would cling to the comfortable counterfeit sense of security as long as her will permitted her to. These chairs on the deck of her mind needed rearranging so what did it matter if the whole ship was sinking? The chairs were the footholds on the path to salvation, nothing short of being components of the ladder leading up the sacred mountain to the holy of holies at the summit. Therefore

the act of arranging them to perfection was not as the commoner would presume a sign of instability or insanity but the exact opposite thing; the final, most desperate last stand of stability and sanity.

The power of desperation is not a thing to be underestimated. For all its ugliness and shameless, overly forward, lusty desire, it has a dire power which cannot be overcome by anything, in its most concentrated state, other than an equally depraved power which has gained an equivalent force through becoming divorced of anything resembling common sense or average sensibility. It was coming but every second it failed to arrive prolonged the torture, the internally eternal suffering, and intensified it to an extent that should not have been possible to maintain for that duration of time. Suffering is life; therefore Star lived more fervently and forcefully than she ever had before during that time.

The dance of death and life was reaching its climax with the orchestral crescendo in the foreground. Where it would all ultimately lead, why it was going there, or how any of this was happening meant absolutely nothing.

He; opposing entity, agent of entropy, emissary of annihilation, was approaching, arriving, finding his way to the Promised Land of destruction, the Hill of Megiddo where it would all begin and end now and forevermore. But be it Meggido's Hill or Sinai's summit, the path to such places was always, always, always a long and arduous one by design. Perhaps the supreme one deemed that an appropriately exhaustive effort must be undertaken to achieve any truly cataclysmic or fortuitous result? Blessing and curse are but two sides of a single coin. The coin is handed out freely, magnanimously, and endlessly. All that limits us is the finite size of our wallets, pockets, and other sorts of receptacles. So we can never take the full measure of it no matter how hard we try unless we find a way to tap into the infinite fragment we have also been given for free at the time of our creation.

At last he arrived, feigned bearer of false immortality, to break the hourglass, shatter the sundial, and rotate the loop of infinity itself into the mere finite form of the figure 8. Despite their intrinsically intertwined purposes and existences the two had no way of recognizing one another or understanding any of the forces at play in the process of a grand once an eon convergence at this nauseating

Styx they were united in. Him, even more than her, for she had an innate sensitivity to such things, receiving a vague, if intense sensation of impending doom from it, where he felt sensed and saw absolutely nothing.

It was a parody of the blissful ignorance she herself clove to. This was in fact the defining moment in all of time and space for this young man and he knew absolutely nothing about what he was about to do or become. Yet whether he knew or didn't, could or couldn't understand, the hour would nevertheless come all the same. The hour of their Walpurgisnacht was already at hand. The die was cast, the trigger pulled, the guillotine's blade dropped.

So he fell or was pushed, jumped or was jostled, dove or was driven onto the track of fate, the terminal station of his being's current form. In accordance with the universal will, he gripped that destined sign of tripled power, completing his transformation into a force beyond the comprehension of mortal men. This proved to be the final straw, the last push our wayward Star's collapsing yet unbreakable structure needed to finally give up the ghost. In short, she died, simply dropped dead right then and there. Much like his,

her entire life too, from conception to this moment had been a means to this one momentary end. They had been unified here for the purpose of reaching these endings and beginnings, these transformational terminals, together and that was the end.

The vague, incomprehensible, entity she was always destined to be, had always just barely contained within the meticulously crafted structure her parents had painstakingly assembled, had finally emerged. It had waited patiently for this moment. It had no way of knowing when it would come or what would ultimately herald its arrival but still it waited. Simply worrying away at the walls which would always crumble before its might, at every passing instant it had. In relative terms it hadn't actually taken all that long, after all, what's a mere decade or two to such an eldritch thing? Yet by its own conscious observation it had truly been an excruciating and far too extensive period of time. So this was especially sweet, this fortuitous, long awaited moment. Finally, ultimately, conclusively the excessively protracted artificial eternity came to its preordained end. The Star had died, birthing an insatiable black hole which consumed both life's blood and death's decay with equal voracity.

A Boring Day In The Mundane Life of **Wilhelm Theodore Herschel Iskandar** **Tiberius Bismarck IV Part III**

I'm quite glad to inform you that this is to be the final bit of boring drivel I will be inflicting upon you, *dear reader*. Though at the same time, it is with a heavy heart that I must also inform you that this is to be the end of our time together as a whole. It truly is a shame that we must part ways under these circumstances but all things must come to an end in this finite world we inhabit. I can only hope that you derived at least some small measure of enjoyment from our interactions. I can only speak for my end of the exchange but I've found a great deal of enrichment from all this.

Life at Gracie Square, Wilhelm had found, was far too uneventful even by his standards. There was an utterly slavish devotion to maintaining the facsimile of a mental institution. It was as though even the operatives who had been captured were meant to be convinced that they were nothing more than madmen. It was a laughable farce, even by MK-logic, by COINTELPRO comprehension, by Psyops standards. For a couple of weeks he chose to simply stay and observe as a sort of reconnaissance effort or

attempt to gather intelligence on the enemy's counterintelligence methods and capabilities. There proved to be very little worth discovering, so little in fact, that Wilhelm felt cheated out of the time he'd chosen to invest in this venture.

All that was left to do was quit the place entirely and get back to work, perhaps assuming a new identity to divert those who brought him here, after all the prospect of a repeat performance of this silly melodrama was quite a tiresome thing to even consider. He hatched his plot and executed it on the Sunday of the third week. They were all very negligent which made it all quite simple to carry out. He set a few small fires at various strategic points of the facility, none of which had been discovered until their size necessitated an evacuation effort. Afterwards he managed to commandeer some clothing from the staff locker room, dress in it and casually make his escape in the confusion. So far so good. Now all he had to do was send an encoded message to his Zemblan compatriots and hide out while awaiting further instructions.

Although he had initially dismissed it all as nonsense and still laughed at the notion, some words he had come to hear during

his captivity nagged at him from the back of his mind where they had situated themselves.

“...not real.”

A portion of them, but the key one. These words were uttered to him by that crafty old fox, Dr. Botkin. His willingness to immerse himself in the MK methodologies was impressive and terrifying considering that he was even older than Wilhelm. Perhaps he had been one of the MK-series forefathers and earliest pioneers?

“...It’s not real.”

The simplicity of this supposition was its most insidious aspect. After all a contrived plot offered many cracks and crevices to poke and prod at, but a simple denial had so little substance that it readily melded with the substance of one’s soul and became a difficult thing to completely filter out once the two had become one.

“None of them.”

These new methods were far more terrible and effective than Wilhelm had initially thought. Maybe they had evolved beyond the level they had been at when he first found out about them. Could

even the rumored, bleeding edge programs such as Monarch now simply be things of the past, themselves having been supplanted by far more sinister, exceedingly more eldritch successors?

“Zembla, Illyria, Vheissu. None of them are real. It’s not real, any of it. It’s all in your head, Willy.”

What a cruel thing to say to a colleague in this line of work. Only another operative could come up with words that were so precisely aimed at the softest, most vulnerable point of an operative’s soul. They spent much of their time both dealing with nearly intangible bits and pieces of information, trying to make sense of nonsensical codes and ciphers and just as much devising such things themselves and attempting to become similarly insubstantial existences. Questioning what was real and what wasn’t could never be avoided.

Is any of this real? Does any of it mean anything? Who am I? What am I? What am I doing? What’s the point? All these questions and more of their kind haunted the minds of all operatives, especially the more seasoned ones.

The more time one spent out in those twisted trenches and knotted knolls, the less sure of anything one ultimately became. That detachment from reality, that departure from sanity was what made an operative effective even as it spelled doom and destruction for their mind. The ability to act in any situation, to accept it as real and prepare a quick response no matter how insane it all got, was the most essential skill for an operative to develop. By its nature this was something which required one to lose their grip on any and all excessively firm or concrete notions of what was and wasn't real.

They learned to tentatively accept any situation they might find themselves confronted by as the current reality and replace the notion of that "reality" with another as soon as it was deemed necessary to do so. Needless to say the human mind isn't meant to function this way, at least not for any prolonged period of time. Mere exposure to those notions is toxic to the very concept of sanity but if it's a brief and small enough dose one's mind may yet survive. Operatives however, were exposed for far too long and to quantities which were far too lethal. To them survival was something that was impossible from the beginning. All they could hope for was to

prolong the duration of their demise which had been initiated the very moment they'd chosen to consume the venom.

The days on the outside wore on mercilessly. Wilhelm had already made several attempts to contact his associates in Zembla but none of his communications had been answered. Did they believe he had been compromised? Was this a cold burn notice of some sort? A paradoxically icy process of searing off any lingering traces of his being? Or had something even worse happened? Maybe they too had been discovered and were either dead, locked up in some dark hole, or in some even more profoundly degraded and deteriorated state? There was also one other possibility but Wilhelm wouldn't consider it. Of all the potential explanations there were for this situation he absolutely could not allow himself to even begin accepting the notion that this particular one was true.

At first he waited. Simply did nothing but remain in an idle state of hibernation. This was when he still wanted to believe that he worst hadn't happened, that these were merely standard delays due to typical logistical failings. He didn't fall into the standard pitfalls of impatience such as needing to scratch that incessant itch of

temporal awareness. He knew that once he started down that road he would rake the flesh and leave it in a torn up bloodied state. To truly conquer such a sensation one must exert their will to overcome its nagging allure. That siren's song never leads to any good place so plugging one's ears and waiting for it to subside is a very sensible thing to do. He didn't know this at the time but he had spent half a year in hiding before he so much as glanced at a clock or calendar.

Once he broke his faithful stupor and realized how long it had been since he initially sent out his communications, he still did not panic. Being the veteran operative he was, he simply maintained his composure and devised a plan of action. Since there was no reply for this long he had to investigate the possibilities one by one beginning with the most likely and ending with the least probable. Though of course, he still refused to even acknowledge that single one which should not be touched for any reason whatsoever.

The first one he considered was that he had fallen out of favor with his agency. They may have felt his efforts have not been particularly successful or worthwhile and that the failure had been extensive enough to warrant a cutting off of all ties and resources,

leaving him stranded in enemy territory without any hope of assistance. In essence it was the same as telling him to die. This was a difficult thing to investigate since Zembla was too small a nation to have any consulates or embassies in any other nations. So he would have to attempt intercepting radio transmissions from pirate number stations and written communications coded into various texts and newspapers. The chatter between Zembla and her other agents who must surely be stateside as well, he thought, would give him some idea of what his situation was.

He spent another six months on these efforts, tirelessly attempting to decode and decipher codes he assumed had to be there. Numbers within numbers, letters within letters, angles and shapes and patterns of every conceivable variety. He searched for all of these and found none. Wilhelm was desperate behind his calm looking veneer. Each failure, each wasted effort, frayed at his already deteriorated mind. The threads began to unravel faster and faster still as though there was some mad unified will seeking their departure from the whole they once were. Even when this had begun his mind was already in a very sorry disorderly state from all the years he'd spent imbibing the fell witches' brew of espionage. The

surprising thing was not the unravelling itself but, the fact that there was still this much substance remaining to be unwound. Yet ultimately no matter how much he strained any of his senses and honed instincts, he found absolutely nothing.

Wilhelm was not expecting a complete blank the likes of which he had found. No news is far more difficult to endure than even the most completely verified and well documented reports of death and disaster would be. The nagging specters of possibility, pallid phantoms of hope and dread eat away at one's soul with a far greater ease than a confirmation of calamity. There is comfort and closure to be found in even the worst news because it gives one something to react to. A complete absence of any information leaves only the imagination to cannibalize itself endlessly. Wilhelm's desperation for any sort of substance to feed his starved mind finally overwhelmed the façade of cool detachment he had clung to for an illusion of comfort this entire time. He didn't want to believe in it or even start considering the possibility but this total lack of any discoveries warranted looking into that final thing which he absolutely wanted to ignore and deny. He would begin examining the veracity of that Dr. Botkin's words.

At first he told himself that he was only looking into it to dismiss the foolish notion of it which had taken root in his mind in spite of his attempts at ignoring it. Maybe, Wilhelm decided, that approach was flawed to begin with. By ignoring the itch or rather the rash which had caused it, he had merely given it room to fester and grow. To truly destroy the seed of that evil bloom before it blossomed, he would need to take a more proactive approach. To that end he now looked for any evidence that Zembla even existed, that Illyria was not a mere fantasy, and that Vheissu was no delusion. They were, he thought, obscure places to be sure, but real places nevertheless. What he found destroyed him, completely and utterly annihilated him. References to all three were very scarce and rooted in long gone ancient history or worse yet, fiction. To you or me this would seem to point in one direction only, but to Wilhelm it suggested the emergence of two possibilities.

Yet whichever was ultimately the case, he decided that the course of action he was to take would be the same either way. After all they amounted to the same thing, the end result being that there was no longer any place for him to return to, save but one.

“Hello 911? Yes, I believe I’m experiencing a mental breakdown. What’s that? No, this isn’t a prank or put-on of any sort, I assure you. I’ll be waiting at Seth Low park, please send an ambulance.”

If he was still being observed (which he clearly was, that much, he thought, he definitely hadn’t imagined) then this would be the surest way of coming into contact with those plainclothesmen and agents associated with that man and place. Soon enough the “ambulance” with the same two men from before arrived. They recognized him.

“Oh hey it’s Willy again. How you doin?”

He smiled knowing that he was about to continue the undertaking which he had, perhaps prematurely, abandoned.

“Same as last time I’m afraid. If it wouldn’t trouble you gentlemen overmuch, I’d like to go back to Gracie Square and have another chat with Dr. Botkin.”

Platinum Ponyboy in Paradise

Has it already been a year? Probably not but it has to have at least been half of one by now. I may be crazy but I'm not insane. So a properly working sense of time must be something I still possess. Even the soothing monotony of prison life shouldn't be able to take that much away from me. I know I'm better than that and so does everyone else for that matter. Freedom is something I live hand in hand with simply by virtue of existing. No mere place, person, or profession I become entangled with can ever change that.

Speaking of this *wunderbar* facility which I affectionately refer to as "the clinkity clank", I've taken quite well to prison life if I do say so myself. At first they wanted to put me in the women's section of Riker's but after I raised some vehement objections and threatened to get the ACLU involved they acquiesced to my demands and put me in the men's section where I belong. They claimed to be looking out for my wellbeing with their silly consideration but I assured them that I didn't need protection, and indeed proved that others needed to be protected from me in the following months. After a series of delightful little games with the former heads of the prison gangs which controlled my lovely clinkity

clank, I prevailed over them, their underlings, and their would-be successors. In no time at all I established myself as the Duke of New York who rules this ancient steel and stone framed castle.

While I have the run of the place and can take any adorably hideous man, boy, or manchild for myself at any time under any circumstances, there's still a void in my heart left by my first true love: Connie M. Oblige, the muse who much like his namesake, touched my own diseased and ailing Heart of Darkness, has stolen a portion of my soul, and taken it with him as a parting gift to the afterlife. No matter how many others I play with or attempt to remake in his image they all fall short. While they provide an adequate source of amusement and release they can never stir up the sparks of love, those ephemeral embers of all-encompassing ecstasy that only come with a true cocktail of love and hate and lust. They can only offer one, or perhaps two at most, of those miraculous three ingredients that form the basis of my fetish and enshrined ideal. Yes, it's true what the romanticists say, neither money nor influence can ever truly take the place of true love's first kiss.

Yet I would not undo any of the circumstances which have led me to this point even if it were within my power to do so. I began and ended our torrid affair on my own terms. The look in sweet Connie's eyes when I penetrated him with that knife was far too valuable a thing to forsake for some pretensions of permanence. He and I both knew that in that instant the two of us had become one forevermore. Without the ending being what it was, our relationship wouldn't have had that final punctuating point of poignancy which all great love affairs absolutely require.

If there's anyone I must thank, some benevolent cupid who can be held accountable for our brief time together, it'd be Matt A. Ambrose. From beyond the grave Matt guided the two of us together through his influence on my dear Connie. Yes, while I'm sure Connie was delectably disgusting from the very start, it is only through witnessing Matt's untimely demise that he fully blossomed into the abominably adorable boy who stole my heart which had previously been galloping in a most dashing manner through the silvery fields of misanthropy. Once I had him no other could properly satisfy my love loathing and lust, indeed I became his slave at first sight.

Those idyllic days are now at an end as they were destined to be as soon as they began. It's natural and beautiful that every beginning and middle must always be punctuated with an irrevocable final conclusion. Ah, sweet saudade! O' nymphish nectar of nostalgia! Only a boorish simple minded fool would wish for eternity. Can they not see? Are they blind in addition to being deaf and dumb? It would take a profound level of indelicacy to make oneself oblivious to this obvious truth which so plainly reveals itself to any and all who have loved and lost. That truth being that ideals and idylls cannot exist without transience; that impermanence is the birthplace of all true aestheticism. Though we romanticize eternity as an ideal, it is a thing we can only briefly grasp at fleeting moments. It is, in a word: unavailable. Transience on the other hand is all around us in myriad forms and shapes including time, death, aging, corrosion, and all manner of other things. The endless, merciless march of time is as inexorable as it is companionable, it accompanies every concrete thing, and even the metaphysical sensations we feel whether they desire or detest its inescapable embrace.

Speaking of the interplay between transience and eternity, I too was about to have my own encounter with it, even if I didn't

know it quite yet. One of the many boys who were mine in this prison paradise came into my cell under the pretense of offering tribute to me, the sort of tribute that's offered up on one's hands and knees. Yet he betrayed that premise and its seductive promises in order to stab me several times over. I could see it in his eyes, he would make me into his Connie and that was *wunderbar*. I accepted his steel penetration and set upon the task of seeing him off with a serenade.

Adieu l'Émile je t'aimais bien

Adieu l'Émile je t'aimais bien tu sais

On a chanté les mêmes vins

On a chanté les mêmes filles

On a chanté les mêmes chagrins

Adieu l'Émile je vais mourir

C'est dur de mourir au printemps tu sais

Mais je pars aux fleurs la paix dans l'âme

Car vu que tu es bon comme du pain blanc

Je sais que tu prendras soin de ma femme

Je veux qu'on rie

Je veux qu'on danse

Je veux qu'on s'amuse comme des fous

Je veux qu'on rie

Je veux qu'on danse

Quand c'est qu'on me mettra dans le trou

Adieu Curé je t'aimais bien

Adieu Curé je t'aimais bien tu sais

On n'était pas du même bord

On n'était pas du même chemin

Mais on cherchait le même port

Adieu Curé je vais mourir

C'est dur de mourir au printemps tu sais

Mais je pars aux fleurs la paix dans l'âme

Car vu que tu étais son confident

Je sais que tu prendras soin de ma femme

Je veux qu'on rie

Je veux qu'on danse

Je veux qu'on s'amuse comme des fous

Je veux qu'on rie

Je veux qu'on danse

Quand c'est qu'on me mettra dans le trou

Adieu l'Antoine je t'aimais pas bien

Adieu l'Antoine je t'aimais pas bien tu sais

J'en crève de crever aujourd'hui

Alors que toi tu es bien vivant

Et même plus solide que l'ennui

Adieu l'Antoine je vais mourir

C'est dur de mourir au printemps tu sais

Mais je pars aux fleurs la paix dans l'âme

Car vu que tu étais son amant

Je sais que tu prendras soin de ma femme

Je veux qu'on rie

Je veux qu'on danse

Je veux qu'on s'amuse comme des fous

Je veux qu'on rie

Je veux qu'on danse

Quand c'est qu'on me mettra dans le trou

Adieu ma femme je t'aimais bien

Adieu ma femme je t'aimais bien tu sais

Mais je prends le train pour le Bon Dieu

Je prends le train qui est avant le tien

Mais on prend tous le train qu'on peut

Adieu ma femme je vais mourir

C'est dur de mourir au printemps tu sais

Mais je pars aux fleurs les yeux fermés ma femme

Car vu que je les ai fermés souvent

Je sais que tu prendras soin de mon âme

Je veux qu'on rie

Je veux qu'on danse

Je veux qu'on s'amuse comme des fous

Je veux qu'on rie

Je veux qu'on danse

Quand c'est qu'on me mettra dans le trou !

Once I complete my favorite song I notice he's been gone for a considerably long period of time at this point. In fact the thought that I may have been singing to myself this whole time crosses my mind. But that's not really important. Even if my song didn't reach him past the first verse I know it'll haunt and captivate his soul until the day he too dies. I know this because in that one moment, through that first thrust of the improvised stabbing implement, we became one from two. It was exactly like what transpired between Connie and I all those eons ago.

The thought that I could become some tortured young soul's Connie myself puts a smile on my face. Though my body may feel as though I'm exposing it in the middle of the Antarctic tundra, my

soul is blazing with passion. Neither the cold sensation of my fading consciousness, nor the clammy, rapidly cooling, pool of blood I'm lying in can take that *wunderbar* sensation away from me...

Joy Outteridge's Lamentations

It's been over a decade. No matter how much time passes I still can't help but feel that we failed her. Maybe if we'd done something just a little differently, done just a bit more or a bit less, things wouldn't have had to turn out this way? I know I'm just torturing myself, that this was probably inevitable and dwelling on the past every day isn't going to get me anywhere. But understanding that doesn't change how I feel. As her mother, I'll never be able to get over the pain of losing Star like this.

I could tell from the moment she was born...no even earlier than that, from the moment I knew I was pregnant with her, that she'd be trouble. We both had the feeling that she was destined to go down the wrong path, her father and I. So we did everything we could as soon as we brought her home from the hospital. We can't be blamed, that much is true since we definitely tried our best to prevent this. I suppose we both knew it'd happen and we were just lying to ourselves the whole time, thinking we could actually make a difference. But knowing that was probably the case doesn't make any of it hurt any less.

What really tears me up inside is that she was so close to finally breaking away from it all, to being the girl we knew she needed to be. It was all set and our efforts all seemed to have finally paid off for good. But then that schmuck Matt Ambrose had to go and die in front of her. He ruined it, he ruined her, and he ruined us. That goddamn kid undid all the years of effort, all the worrying and wishful thinking, everything became absolutely worthless because of him!

Speaking ill of the dead is supposed to be bad but I don't care. I'll never stop cursing his name till the day I die. Why did he have to commit suicide or have his accident or whatever it was in front of our Star? Why couldn't he have picked some other place or time to die? It's not fair! He should've had the decency not to drag others down with him. He killed our daughter! Murdered her soul! Matt Ambrose is a murderer and I'm going to tell anyone who'll listen. By the time I'm done with dragging his name through the mud, "Ambrose" will be a word as dirty as "Santorum". I've already started several groups online over the years but the Ambrose corporation's lawyers keep shutting us down. It's got to be a conspiracy. I wonder how deep this thing goes? Maybe all the way

to the White House? I wouldn't be surprised if the whole thing was a false-flag ope-

“I'm home Joy, what are you doing? Are you still obsessing over Star's old pictures?”

My husband's back from work again. He doesn't understand any of this.

“Of course I am! The real question is how can you care so little about what happened to your daughter?! It was an atrocity! A tragedy! A travesty! It-“

He cuts me off again. I really hate it when he does that.

“Honey, you have to stop doing this. It's crazy. Why do you insist on acting like she's dead? She's not, Star is perfectly fine. She found something she wanted to do and started doing it is all. Just because it didn't fit the plans we had for her doesn't mean we should pretend that she's dead.”

Of course she's not literally dead. No one ever suggested anything like that. But it's a lot worse. So much worse than that. Actual death would be a blessing in comparison to the spiritual death

she experienced. Star was going to be an artist just like us, she was going to express herself and do important rewarding work. But that all changed after she saw Matt Ambrose die all those years ago.

She stopped all the artistic pursuits we raised her to love. She stopped caring about anything that actually meant anything. To top it all off she became a lawyer. Of all the possible things she could've done, that's what she chose. Our daughter, the one who was supposed to lead a life defined by meaning and aesthetics chose to become a lawyer...But not just any lawyer. Oh no, she started out as a sleazy ambulance chaser, then moved on to being a public defender of murderers and rapists, before finally setting on being a high priced litigator for one of the most massive law firms in Manhattan. Our daughter...a shark. She may enjoy her work or find it satisfying on some level but it's a tragedy for the world to lose an artist and gain a lawyer.

“She's worse than dead! She's a lawyer! A lawyer! Don't you understand how horrible that is? Why can't you see how depraved a place this world has to be to turn an artist into a lawyer? If she'd died there may have at least been some dignity in that. She

would've been at rest. But look at what she's doing; prostituting her conscience. She's defending disgusting rich money grubbing swine just for money, letting criminals roam free for cash, stealing from the poor and from those trying to do something good just to make herself and the rich richer. You know what? I take it back, she IS dead. The girl we raised, our daughter, died. She died on that platform 15 years ago. She was murdered by that awful Ambrose kid."

He's still not going to understand. We've been having this argument for 15 years now and if he can't see what I'm getting at by now, he never will but that doesn't mean I can stop telling him the truth. I won't give up on him too.

"I'm sick of hearing this every night. You know what? Let's just agree to disagree. You know how I feel about all of this and I know how you feel. These arguments are completely pointless so let's just stop having them. Do whatever you want when I'm not around, but let's agree to not bring any of this up around each other. It'll keep us sane."

Well this is new. I'm not quite sure how to take this. He's not directly accepting anything I'm saying but at the same time he's willing to accept that I feel this way. I suppose this is a step forward. Even if this is as good as it'll ever get, I'd still call it an improvement.

“Ok, that's perfectly reasonable. Let's do it. From now on we won't talk about her with each other ever again. Does that sound good to you?”

It's not quite support or understanding but once you get past the age of 40 you learn to live with more ambiguous half-measures of the things you actually want.

“Yes, that's perfect. Let's go to bed now, I'm tired after all of that.”

I guess we're both getting old aren't we? It's a sad thing, watching the grains of sand in your life's hourglass trickle away like this. But that's just life isn't it? I've chosen not to accept one inevitability, so in exchange for that it's only fair that I accept another.

“Go on ahead of me, I’ve still got a few things to take care of. It won’t take long.”

From the look on his face I can see that he knows what those “things” are but is willing to look the other way in deference to my own efforts at meeting him halfway by not explicitly mentioning what those “things” are. That’s where those famous ambiguous half-measures come in again, isn’t it? Getting old really isn’t fun.

“Sure, don’t stay up too late. We don’t exactly have 9 to 5 jobs but I think we’re both a bit too old to be pulling all-nighters like teenagers or 20 year old kids.”

He smiles weakly. Yeah he definitely knows. He’s just going along with it so there don’t need to be any more silly arguments. I suppose this is how we’ve managed to stay married these past 15 years even if we never explicitly agreed to anything like this until now. I give him a weak smile of my own to show that I know and appreciate his...good sportsmanship I guess?

“Thanks dear, I’ll be right up, promise.”

We both know those words are a lie but that's what makes them worth saying, necessary even. After acknowledging and comprehending my reply he nods and goes upstairs. Sad as it is to say, he'll be sleeping alone tonight. Oh well, I'm sure he'll understand since we're both reasonable adults and not needy kids who have to be together every night.

I fire up my computer and turn TOR on. Recently the Ambrose corporation's been up our asses online so we've moved the bulk of our operations to the Deep web. This isn't a foolproof measure but it does make us just a little bit harder to track down. As silly as it is I feel like some sort of secret agent or something. I know it's just a ridiculous middle aged woman's fantasy but playing silly games makes you feel younger.

AmbFallAdmin posted

Requesting weekly status update from all key members

AmbFallAnon posted

G-bomb campaign will be ready by WHISKEY next week

AmbFallJohnDoe posted

Amb CHARLIE picketing preparations proceeding on
schedule we should be good to go by TANGO

AmbFallJaneDoe posted

Technical difficulties are impeding our work on the V-project
requesting X-RAY

AmbFallAdmin posted

Explain yourself Jane what is the nature of these difficulties

AmbFallJaneDoe posted

They are of a mechanical nature supplies are dwindling as
well

AmbFallAdmin posted

Very well you will proceed to coordinates 40.71599,-
74.001048 at 0330 FOXTROT to receive your X-RAY and supplies

Dr. Botkin's Diary

The patient whose initials are WBCB is in a state of perpetual psychosis. No combination of medications or alternative forms of treatment we've attempted have made him significantly more lucid. This is an exceptional case in the sense that his symptoms vary far too widely to definitively be lumped under one category or to easily find an explanation for. None of the standard medical diagnoses seem to apply since no evidence has been found to establish any theory's validity. We are left only with the possibility of a new, previously undiscovered psychiatric condition, or else some more fanciful and supernaturally based explanation barring that.

I first encountered this particular patient a year ago when he was admitted into Gracie Square Hospital. He harbored delusions of being a spy of some sort under the employ of a country or organization (his cryptic affect made it difficult to tell which) named Zembla. There were also references to similar places named Illyria and Vheissu.

I had never heard any of these terms before but a quick investigation led me to the truth. They were all literary allusions (save for Illyria which was also thought to have existed at some point in the distant past) that as far as I could tell had no actual substance. Yet to this patient they were clearly very real things, groups, or places (again his affect made it quite difficult to tell exactly what he thought they were at any given moment).

When I confronted him with the truth he did not react violently but instead calmly denied my assertions. I can safely presume that they had in fact gotten to him after all since he soon escaped the hospital during a disturbance (which I suspect, but cannot prove, that he himself caused). For a year I heard nothing about this patient and presumed this was the last I'd ever see or hear of him.

Then one day I was informed that a man had called 911 and asked to be brought to Gracie Square. Even more curious was the fact that he had specifically asked for me by name. I didn't want to get my hopes up but it would be quite disingenuous for me to say that I didn't want it to be him. Fortunately for me, my hopes,

however secretly or overtly harbored they may have been, were not to be dashed.

In our first conversation after a year, he told me that he had discovered a secret which he believed he may have been hiding from himself for years. At first I assumed he was about to admit that the things we'd spoken of a year ago were delusions but this was not so. Instead he added another layer to the conspiracy, claiming that they had existed but had merely been eradicated, and had all references to and traces of them erased as part of some misinformation campaign by the CIA. The lengths he was going to in his denial of the obvious truth boggled the mind.

I then asked him, "If you believe you haven't gone insane then why choose to come back here willingly?" His answer was incredible on several levels. He told me "I know they existed but that doesn't matter. Whether they were ever real or not, whether they do or don't exist, or simply had all traces of their existence erased, both of those come out to the same thing. Either way it simply means I have no place to return to save for this "Gracie Square" of yours."

Did he on some subconscious level recognize the fact of his insanity and determine this was where he belonged? Or had his delusions simply coincided with the reality of his situation in a strangely fitting way? Both possibilities are, to me, equally fascinating and exceedingly intriguing. If any of my colleagues were to maintain a façade of detachment, disinterest, or objectivity in the face of similar circumstances I would have to question whether or not they had chosen the right occupation.

Over the following weeks I would see that his delusions were far more intricate than I had previously thought. Besides his paranoid conspiracy theories involving spy games, he also fancied himself an author who was chronicling the lives of several people, who he insisted were entirely fictional yet with merely a cursory attempt at research on my part were proven to be quite real. Especially the final one in his set of three stories, who was in fact this patient himself.

Perhaps this mixing up of the real and the fictional and the fictional with the real is the key to unravelling the mystery of his illness. It appears to be a form of “cross wiring” so to speak where

he interprets fiction and delusion as reality, and reality as mere fiction. Even though only one of the “characters” in his stories was actually him, they all, in a sense took on qualities of his personality through the tone he told their stories in and the alterations he made to their facts so as to turn them into his fiction.

Reading those stories of his one could note the progression of his illness in the deteriorating amount of sense each successive one makes. Although they were grouped in sets of three thirds of three next to one another, from observing his mental state, it becomes clear that they were written as three whole stories to be split into three and placed third to third next to one another thrice. Some men obsess over traditional numbers such as 666, 616, 7, 13, 4, 18, 21 and so on and so forth but what are we to make of this affinity for three? He didn’t have a true religious bent and was certainly no Christian, so the concept of it referring to a trinity or triumvirate is out of the question. There are a few theories that come to mind.

It must be noted that even during our first encounter, this theme of triples was already in evidence. The first and foremost trio being Zembla, Illyria, and Vheissu. With these three I believe he was

representing on some level (perhaps subconscious confused with conscious much in the way he confused reality for fiction and vice versa?) the loss of home, hearth, and health. The only places he felt a connection with were either fictional or lost to antiquity. In addition to this, his preoccupation with clandestine cloak and dagger spy games and conspiracy theories may have been an expression of the total isolation he felt from the world around him and everyone in it.

Then there was the triad (or at least what appears as one to me) of MKULTRA, COINTELPRO, and Psyops. This is but a part of the previous set but with him everything is interconnected and disjointed all at once so the whole and the fragment both need to be considered as having a single unified meaning as well as a fragmentary divided one. While we modern psychiatrists chiefly disregard Freud's theories, our patients tend to embrace them in the most fascinating ways. I believe he had subconsciously integrated the concepts of ID, ego, and superego as these three. MKULTRA as the rampantly amok ID, COINTELPRO an ego or imposition of self onto others, and lastly Psyops as superego containing an overbearing suffocating moralism.

There is also the trio of protagonists in his stories. “Conrad” presumably represents his flagging idealism which needed to be saved from itself. “Star”, his sense of potential, which he always fatalistically felt was heading in an untoward but natural and necessary direction. And “Wilhelm”, which was the reality which was neither ideal nor fully actualized potential.

There are many other potential interpretations and I will not pretend that these three are any more valid than the rest but in keeping with the theme of triples, I will only present this triad of mine. Certain obsessions, I’ve found, are quite infectious and attempts at shying away from their influence only cause them to root themselves more firmly in one’s consciousness. It is a rather crude joke but the psychoses of psychiatrists develop more as an attempt to vehemently reject all aspects of mental illness, rather than the way one would assume, through accepting it. In a sense we’re just as cross-wired as this patient of mine. Perhaps there is a narcissistic aspect to my interest in him which could be thought of as a form of interest in myself.

One aspect of note, another interesting tidbit about this 21st century schizoid man, is his age. Although he goes to great lengths to take on the appearance of an aged relic of the 20th century, in actuality he's fairly young and the bulk of his life has occurred during the 21st. I myself could be thought of as the 20th century remnant he believes himself to be due to the fact that over half of my life was spent during those decades.

The act of choosing or forcing oneself to identify with something that doesn't belong or apply to them is representative of feeling alienated from the things which by all rights should belong to the individual who partakes of it. It is the affectation of the spiritual vagabond who never truly finds comfort or contentment in anything. Those who lived in the nucleus of whatever their age's tumor was are all byproducts of the same process regardless of which age they feel as though they relate to or what things they obsess over. Ironically, the universality of their experience breeds only a pretension of unique suffering the likes of which they believe few if any can relate to.

To some extent we are all unsatisfied with what we are when we consider what we may have, could have, or should have been. But this patient in particular takes that sense of malaise to a place most of us never dare to even look at. I have to ask, is that the place where he always existed, or was it merely where he found himself after a lifetime of isolation? Though as an addendum to that one might ask whether there's even a true distinction between those two concepts in the first place, is it not the same to always exist in a state of mind that leads to a state of being as it is to have been born as a being which can only conceive one sort of mental state? As men of science we are expected to obsess over minute differences such as these but it is merely the autism of the young scientist that lends itself to such idle pursuits. The older one becomes the less meaning there is to be found in nuance. I suppose that is a sensory deterioration of its own sort much like losing any other sense or faculty due to the ravages of the aging process.

I also think it may be possible that I can no longer distinguish between the angst of children of the 21st 20th 19th 18th 17th or any other century or epoch because my ability to see them as separate things has itself been compromised. Whether this perspective leads

to an decrease or gain, a step towards or away from the objective truth, or if such a thing ever existed in the first place isn't for me to determine. It is an ironclad law that every analyst is ill equipped to analyze their own psychoses. I find that bizarre but indisputable maxim to be quite relevant to all the rest of this business. Maybe it reflects the human soul's desire to be touched and felt by others that we believe only from a perspective outside our own can we be completely understood? Perhaps we are all alien to ourselves and can only become anything other than that through being regarded by others. That too is another triad, trinity, or trimurti.

GLP

Was the Ambrose incident a false flag operation?

2nd Amendment posted

There are a lot of things about it that seem wrong. It's like Newtown and the Rodger shootings. We all know those were government jobs but what about this one? I don't think it's getting enough coverage. Obama's clearly trying to set up a police state by taking away our guns. What do you guys think? That documentary "Skating on thin ice" brought up a lot of good points.

Anonymous Coward posted

I think ur a faget and the only false flag is the one you shove up ur ass every morning.

2nd Amendment posted

I'm definitely onto something here or they wouldn't be sending disinfo shills like you to forum slide this thread into oblivion.

Anonymous Coward posted

No, he's right. You seem like you've got something shoved up in there real good.

Spartacus posted

So many disinfo morans here today. Smh.

Lightbringer posted

They're just relics of the illuminist puppet regime. If they let some love and light into their lives I'm sure the world would be a much better place ;)

Darlene McBride posted

Omg, yes! It's so sad that they haven't accepted the love and light yet.

2nd Amendment posted

Can we please get back on topic? These are serious questions that need to be answered.

Jeux san frontières posted

How do we know you're not a disinfo shill yourself? For all we know you might be using this to distract us from the real issues.

Anonymous Coward posted

I am Dis InfoMandias, ruler of tinfoil hat wearing basement dwellers everywhere. Look upon my works, ye puny, and rejoice. You know you all live for shit like this anyway.

the yellow jester posted

So many AC shills. If they had anything of value to say they would've at least registered instead of posting anonymously. Anyway I think you have some valid points there 2nd. Osama and his crew of jackbooted thugs are only days away from passing this law http://www.naturalnews.com/034537_NDAA_Bill_of_Rights_Obama.html I'm not going to go into detail but there's a provision in it that will essentially nullify the entire Bill of Rights. Very scary stuff.

2nd Amendment posted

Thank you! It's nice to finally see someone who gets straight to the point for once. That's an actual law they're trying to pass?

Wow! They're not even trying to hide the fact that they're about to do it. Good find.

Red Rising posted

Yeah Osama's going to take away our guns but you guys are missing the big picture here. It's because he's going to sell us out to the Chinese. I've made plenty of threads about it before. You know what I'm talking about right Jester?

2nd Amendment posted

The Chinese? I don't know, that seems kinda unlikely. What about ISIS and Russia? I think they're more likely to take over the world than China.

Red Rising posted

What makes you say that? I've shown everyone plenty of evidence already. Where's yours?

2nd Amendment posted

You posted a lot of stuff but it doesn't really fit together that well. What would China have to gain from something like that? Like

you've said before they already basically own the country because of how much money we owe them. These kinds of moves make no sense for them to make.

Red Rising posted

Come on man. Are you serious? When the Chinese boot kicks down your door you won't have time to ask why they're doing it. They'll just take you to the FEMA concentration camps Osama prepared for them. I'm trying to do you all a favor by warning you about this before it happens but none of you seem to care that we'll lose our sovereignty by next week.

the yellow jester posted

That's true. You had some very interesting things to say in those threads. Another interesting thing that ties this all together is this <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7hzLLMXdZCg> This clearly shows that ISIS was bankrolled by the Chinese in an elaborate plot to influence their influence in the west. I'm sure Putin's got his finger in that pie as well.

Anonymous Coward posted

Yeah your anus will lose its sovereignty to muh dick. I'll paint it red so you can pretend it's a commie cock or whatever retarded shit you're into

Melissa Matterson posted

Don't fight. We should all love each other. Love and Light to all.

Lightbringer posted

Don't worry about them. They'll figure it out on their own when they're ready honey ;)

Anonymous Coward posted

Hey Lightbringer, I was wondering about something. Do you touch them like Charlie Manson or Jimmy Jones? Call me when you drink the kool aid, I want something to laugh about. Though now that I think about it you might be more of an L. Ron.

2nd Amendment posted

I'm starting to think these lightmorans are a COINTELpro operation. They derail threads while the ACs pretend to troll them. They're clearly in it together.

God n' Guns posted

I hear ya man. I never trusted those blissed out hippies myself. Maybe they're a front for some nazi or commie group?

2nd Amendment posted

Haha yeah, whoever's running the show there is the biggest moran ever though. That's the one thing we can all agree on for sure.

the yellow jester posted

I don't know COINTELpro is really old school. This might be more of a Monarch or Headless Emperor thing. You know the CIA has all sorts of projects like that running concurrently. They're not even supposed to be able to operate on US soil but here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ig3qHRVZRvM> we clearly see them doing just that. I think it's a travesty that none of the major news networks are talking about real issues like false flags, HAARP, gangstalking, and everything else Osama's been up to. They're

obviously in the government's pocket but they could at least pretend that they're standing up for the truth. It's a disgrace.

2nd Amendment posted

Yeah it's sad. Kids are just watching stupid shit like the daily show while adults are watching disinfo shells on CNN MSNBC and Fox. No one's telling any of them the truth. And whenever someone tries to they just laugh and call them crazy or have them assassinated. This country's doomed. I'm moving to Mexico where they respect freedom.

“The Yellow Jester” Does Not Play

Time for another day at the office. I really love this job, I think I was made for it. The building I work in is old and dilapidated but that just adds character to it. It’s a fitting setting for the work I do here. I’m what people on conspiracy sites would call a “disinfo shill”. And not a fake one either, I’m the genuine article, posting manipulative messages online under the auspices of some shady, probably illegal, government affiliated operation.

People online tend to think that our job principally consists of distracting them from their kooky conspiracy theories but they’ve got it backwards. The main way we operate is by encouraging them and trying to make them even crazier. Everything is handled on a very hush-hush need to know basis but anyone working here can clearly see what’s going on.

Honestly I don’t care about any of the reasons or ideologies at play. It’s all bullshit on both ends anyway and it always has been. I’m in it for the money and the chance to manipulate gullible idiots online. It’s a win-win for me. My main username of choice on most sites is a blatant clue about what I’m doing that none of the retarded

tinfoil hatters ever bring up or catch on to. It's a reference to my favorite line in my favorite song. "The yellow jester does not play but gently pulls the strings and smiles as the puppets dance in the court of the crimson king" I call myself the yellow jester as a taunt. I'm daring them to figure it out, to put the pieces together. But they're always too stupid to get it.

I'm well versed in all the idiotic things they obsess over. From MKULTRA to gangstalking to false-flag operations. It's all incredibly silly stuff that you'd have to be a nutjob to buy into. I mean MKULTRA was a real thing but they like to exaggerate its importance. Ok, the CIA dosed some schmucks with LSD in the 60s. Who cares? They don't even need to brainwash anyone because people are always dumb enough to brainwash themselves. The easiest way of lying to people is getting them to make up the lies themselves. That's just the way people are, were, and always will be.

Whether it's Nazis, aliens, communists, reptilians, Jews, Muslims, ghosts, the president, demons, the CIA, NSA, FBI, angels, or anything it doesn't matter what anyone believes in or obsesses over. It's all a tool to manipulate them with, and I think that's great.

I live to make everyone else dance like a puppet on very obvious strings that they just refuse to look at. After a certain point it gets ridiculous no matter what people believe in.

For example, I've single handedly created an entire offshoot of a preexisting conspiracy theory and no one so much as raised an eyebrow. I infiltrated the "Messengers of Light" and had them say the reptilians are really interdimensional space dinosaurs who also happen to be the ancestors of the lizardmen who live inside the "Hollow Earth". There are thousands of people who actually believe this shit now. I think if someone's stupid enough to buy into that they deserve to be fooled.

There's a reason why politicians are able to control the masses with lies. It's because people are cattle. Stupid, loveable, ridiculous cattle who like to believe that they're capable of rational or meaningful thought. I may sound like a callow misanthrope but that's not it at all. I love people. I love the world. It's just all so beautiful and pure that I can't help but want to ruin it. But violence is too boring. There's always more art in manipulation. Really even the money and power grubbing piggies at the top are just cute little

barnyard critters to play with. There's a strange earnestness to their greedy way of life. Thinking about how adorable they all are gets me hard.

If someone were to ask me what I believe in I'd honestly have to say "Love". Love, lust, desire, envy, greed and ambition. Those are the things that make the world go round. As much as people like to distinguish between "moral" or "good" forms of love and "wicked" or "immoral" ones it's all the same. Love is the root cause of everything. We are all slaves to it regardless of what we love or how we express it, and I think that's wonderful. Whether a man thinks he's a white bull on love's tapestry or a purveyor of Geometry and Theology bound by the whims of Fortuna, they're essentially one and the same.

At our core we all just want to touch someone or something. The people things and methods all vary but they're all means to the same end. It's a cliché but love does indeed make fools of us all, especially those of us who don't realize they're caught in its grasp. It is the pulse of the stars, the light of the universe, and the most insidious Weapon Of Peace around. The ancient Babylonians had it

right with their evil love goddess of destruction. That's how love works and what it ultimately does to everyone.

As I ponder these things I make the preparations for my latest project. I'm going to tie the Ambrose incident to the Illuminati and have it all go back to the Vatican. The higher ups basically let us do whatever we want because the crazier it looks, the more effective it is. Even blatantly revealing that we're "disinfo shells" is a valid tactic because it makes the government seem all the more powerful as a result. While that's always an amusing game to play in its own right, I think relying on it too much just isn't creative enough. In a way we're artists. This job isn't about believing in things or manipulating people once you get past the surface. The way we do those things gets so contrived and elaborate that it becomes a form of high culture unto itself.

Before I know it, it's closing time. I always have so much fun that I lose track of time on this job. This current project should be complete by next week. I guess it's time to get back to my girlfriend of the week who's waiting for me at home. I have too much love for any one person so I can never be monogamous for more than a

couple of days. I bet my friends online would be surprised by how libertine and bohemian my lifestyle is.

Being the way I am is somewhat inconvenient at times. I can't help but fall in love with every single man, woman, child, animal, and object I see. I have to make a conscious choice to stick to women because if I allowed my libido to run wild I'd be trying to fuck everything and everyone in existence. As fun as that sounds you'd have to be some sort of eldritch sex god to pull it off, and alas, I'm a mere mortal man.

Although I'm able to control myself when it comes to touch and taste, my eyes nose ears and brain can't help but drink deeply of all the things I deny to my hands tongue and other parts. Take this train station for example, without exception I'd ravish everyone and everything here including the train and structure themselves. Even that third rail is a delectable forbidden fruit. I wonder how Matt Ambrose felt when he touched it. I'm sure it was the kind of experience that sticks with you even after death. I'd never brave its electrifying embrace myself but I can't stop fantasizing about it. I suppose even more normal men than I find the sweet kiss of death

seductive. There's a lewd power to it, the finality and mystique of it all is undeniably alluring.

I board the train and manage to snag a seat for once. It's a really unlikely event in this city, at this hour. I wonder if that means anything. Probably not but I wouldn't laugh at anyone who thought it did. Some scruffy bearded guy sits next to me. He's lost in his own little world so I ignore him for now. I turn my attention to the more available and aware people and things here.

It's a feast for the senses, at least the ones which I allow myself to feast with, anyway. There's always so much variety too. So many adorable men, women, boys, girls, dogs, boxes, books and attitudes. I always bring a book along and pretend to read every once in a while as an excuse to have it in my lap. Courtesy demands that erections be hidden in public.

"Excuse me ladies and gentlemen! I'm sorry to interrupt your ride but please listen to what I have to say!"

The beggars are always a treat as well. I wonder what flavor this one will come in? She looks young so this should be good.

“I’m not an alcoholic or drug addict. I am however, homeless. I got laid off from work earlier this year due to budget cuts. I was living from paycheck to paycheck as I know many of you are. I have six kids, a seventh on the way, and am HIV positive. I’m not perfect or infallible. If you can please find the kindness in your hearts to give I’ll accept anything. Food, water, or money. Even a penny would help. Thank you for your time ladies and gentlemen. God bless you.”

She then begins making the rounds with an empty coffee cup. I wonder how many of the people here notice or even care about her \$500 jeans or the iPhone-shaped bulge in the seat of her pants? This girl’s great. I love these audacious fake bums even more than their real counterparts. A few people give her money just to get rid of the loose change in their pockets, but I’ve got a better idea.

I take out my wallet, which has been filled to the brim with \$100 bills just for this sort of occasion. As soon as she sees it, she starts making her way over to me. As she approaches with her little coffee cup, I take out exactly one penny and drop it in the cup with the most condescending look on my face. The look on hers is

priceless. I bet she thought she really hit it big this time before I dropped that penny in there. She just stares at me with her face turning redder and redder with each passing second. I give her an *ever so modest* “you’re welcome” expression while hoping that she’ll react violently. After about a minute she finally snaps.

“You motherfucker! A penny!? Really!? A penny!? You have all those hundreds in your wallet and you can’t even spare a nickel? Fuck you and your penny!”

She takes the coin out of the cup and attempts to throw it at me. Somehow she manages to miss in spite of standing no more than one foot away from me. I cum harder than I’ve ever cum before...

“I hope you get cancer and die!”

In her anger, she accidentally drops a Gucci purse, the real deal too, not one of those cheap knockoffs they hawk on Times Square, out of her jacket. I realize that she was using it to look pregnant. The sight fills me with an even greater orgasmic sensation that words can never truly describe. Everyone’s eyes are on the two of us right now. I pick up the purse and hold it out to her.

“Excuse me Miss, I believe you dropped this.”

I can feel the confusion in the atmosphere. A few people are laughing and the guy next to me has the hugest shit-eating grin I’ve ever seen on that scruffy face of his. Our train arrives at its current destination, prompting the doors to open. The rotten apple of everyone’s eye, that brazen little beggar girl, quickly snatches the purse from my hand and runs off.

Afterword

The preceding text was in actuality taken from a notebook found on a park bench. Its original owner was presumably the homeless man getting arrested for drunk and disorderly conduct a few feet away. I selected and edited the appropriate excerpts from that sprawling manifesto of misanthropy to illustrate a point, the point being that these are the anguished cries created by the gross injustices of our society.

I assume the author of this work believed he was making some sort of grand statement about the city we live in. Perhaps they thought their views were revealing some unspoken truth about our society itself or even the world at large. Either way it's quite saddening to think that these kinds of thoughts occupy the minds of our great nation's homeless. There is an unlikely beauty that emerges from this darkness, like a flower growing through a crevice in a concrete street. The tragedy is that whatever talent this mystery author possessed was warped and distorted by the system until this was all that remained.

I believe the disjointed structure and ambiguous mood of the individual stories within the overall narrative are reflective of the author's attempts at finding meaning as well. This may only be a theory but it seems to me that this is how the author saw the world; as a confusing place full of uncertainty and existential angst. It's a shame that we failed them and continue to fail those like them every day.

In the original manuscript there was an epilogue which was most likely intended to complete the picture painted by the prologue, but it was such a severe degradation of the human spirit that I decided to omit it so as to not unnecessarily traumatize any potential readers. Much like the rest of the work, it also possessed a peculiar captivating quality, but was far too soul crushing to be something I'd consider exposing people to in good faith.

Instead of the despairing dirge the original epilogue would have offered you, I present this afterword as a beacon of hope. Through the publication of this novel, I hope that we can move one step closer to acknowledging and finally combatting the horrors of poverty, starvation, and mental illness. Together, as a society, we

must prove that we're better than the distorted funhouse mirror reflections of humans portrayed in this work. We must prove that we aren't that callow, self-serving, or hypocritical.

I offer this "Third Rail" up as a challenge to our nation and to every society in the world because I believe. I have faith in a world where we can come into contact with a thing this abyssal and become better for it rather than worse. It is only through compassion and unconditional love that we can redeem these visions of the hell we've inadvertently created. Thank you for reading this modest proposition of mine to the very end, and I hope you'll join me in a prayer for that anonymous author, whoever they may be and wherever they may have found themselves.

Sincerely,

Archibald Bolverk Rothschild