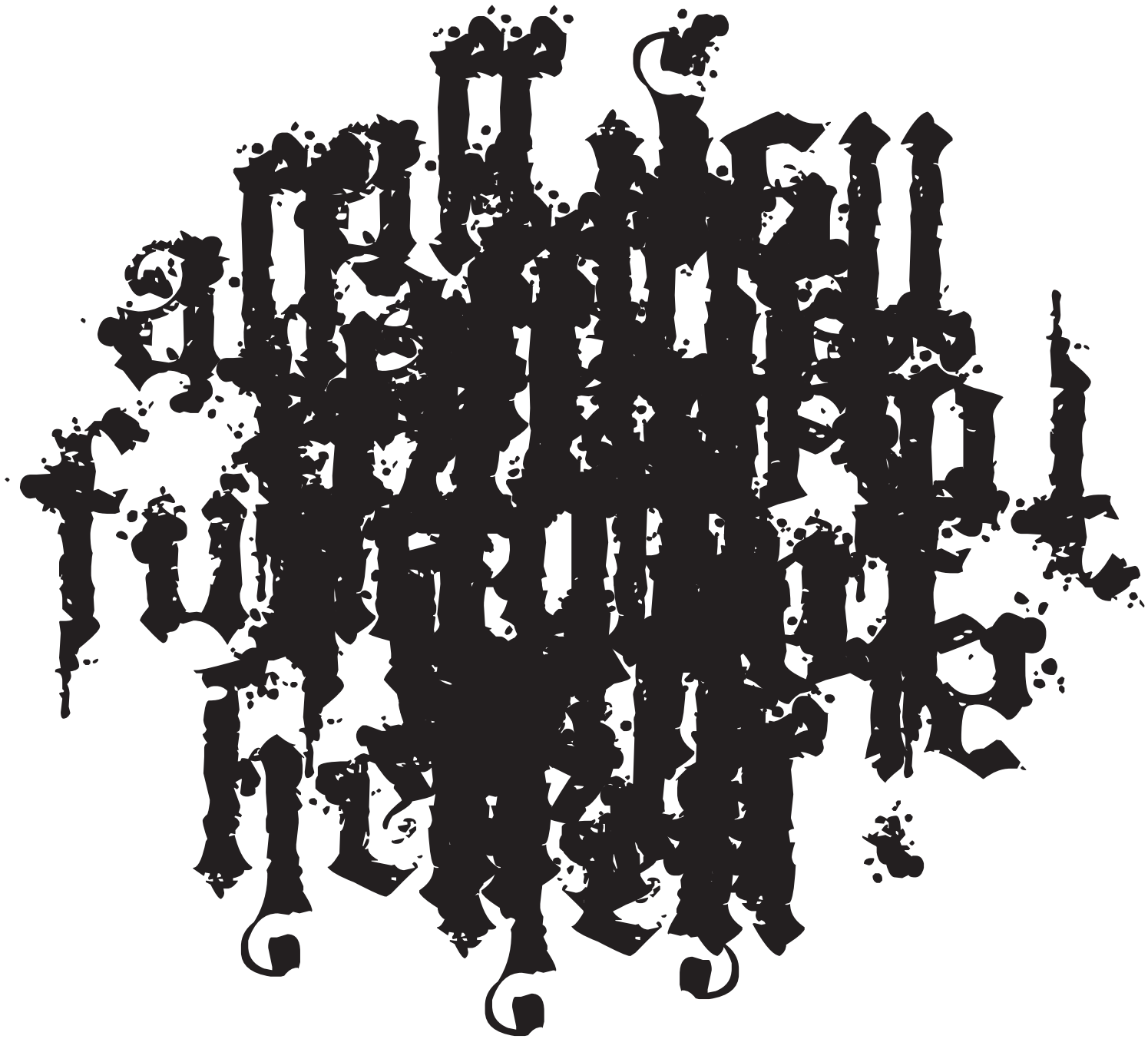
Hide thou
Jerusalem in
impalpable
boldness,
not to be
touched by
the hand nor
seen with the
eye.





A Panegyric *for* William Blake

Mount Abraxas
Bucharest, MMXVII



ALL IS FULL OF HELL

A Panegyric for William Blake

An Anthology Edited by Damian MURPHY & Dan T. GHETU

With Art by DENIS FORKAS KOSTROMITIN

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BUCHAREST



LET US BEGIN,
IN WHISPERD HYMNS
AND MUMBLING PRAYERS.

Is Nicodemus still in vigil weeping?

Blow Your Trumpet GABRIEL!
FOR ALBION IS ROTTEN TO THE CORE.
Blow Your Trumpet ZACHARIEL!
FOR JERUSALEM HAS FALLEN.
Blow Your Trumpet MICHAEL!
FOR WE ARE ALL SICK WITH LOVE.
Blow Your Trumpet RAPHAEL!
FOR THERE ARE VIPERS IN OUR DREAMS.
Blow Your Trumpet SELAPHIEL!
FOR ALL IS FULL OF HELL.

THIS IS FOR WILLIAM BLAKE,
WHOSE FEET WE ARE NOT
FIT TO LICK.

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Sinful is the Soul of Perdition

Sebastian Montesi

"ASCEND in the flame of the pyre, O my soul! Thy God is like the cold emptiness of the utmost heaven, into which thou radiatest thy little light."

Crowley, LIBER LIBERI VEL LAPIDIS LAZULI



SATAN, decompose the adipose and oppose the verbose verb oath. Tenets curtail in chambers foetid; salamandrine host deluge from the amphora. Urn vericose, take flight on Icarian currents; in anabasis plummet to charnel leagues. It is Helios' time to devour Iscariot in the basalt of Styx; cerbereposed. What will it take to flood the Hells? How many years must pass before the levees widen? Before the Leviathan swidens? Long hours will be lost to the floodplains of consciousness- and hours innumerable remain yet. What have ye to say for all your brittle whims? When wanton wants wither and wane, will you wallow in the womb? With wounds be ye wracked... Drink the shit from the cancerous bowels of Corinth's patron, for Lucifer in policeverso doth pressure your hyoid; the same as plucked from that honeycombed hive. Pregnant and famished- peons to the claw of Cancer, and sigilium therein. An ovulating and obeisant child of Mercury milks feces from a tumorous and flaccid penis. Mark my words, Siddim! I alone speak the truth; None before me have, And none who come after will. The solecorporeal and providential phosphene, for but a moment- viscerally triangulated. Janus gapes the edifice to the temple of Yeshua- and the waters rush in. Janus gapes the edifice to the chambers of Satan- and the waters rush in. Omnascient- ever-birth the weight of white waters. To the inescapable tide's predation submit, and plummet in to the Taurus mouth. Ophiotaurus on throne of disjoined bones, arms aloft to be as Sa'ul.

O, LORD! I am your son! Manasseh! Hear my voice! Amon! I bow to thee! O! Father Cain! Bless and accept this work!

From septenary diminish the non-finite in formulae. Within the athenor of Taurus Fading, toxins of uterine dispel creation so total. Serifalanx! Even imperishable vanguard

concede as the waters rush in. Lexiconsume! The thorn genesis most finite in terminus as the waters rush in. I know now your name, and I call you by it as the rivers deluge in to the furnace. Break me on the rocks. Amphora to athenor.

I now know your name, Moloch.

Concerning the Concealed Interstice by which he lays Portent upon the Twice Octonary Event

He strikes the tower with crippling force; he topples the Godhead. He sends nations of accusers and usurpers to assail the edifice; he brings the fire of perdition with him. He impales children and woman on weapons heretical; he castrates their fathers with obsidian knives, serpentine in shape.

Concerning the Aparent Dilemma directly antecedent to the aforementioned Event

He lashes them in tandem at the thorax, but alas the lash is one of leather. The leather is of that carved in resplendence from the carcass of every great bovine God. Theirs is Moloch, and he has granted them honour with this marriage. A triunity reformed.

Concerning the Great Discipline

So can he too then not be as Abraxas? He is seated upon the axis of Abir, and flagellates the necks of the betrothed. Does he not wear a mask with great protrusions from the cranium? Verily, he does. And the servitors may stay, and they may drink of mercurial semen each hour, or they may go as Azazel, and bring water a nameless desert. In corde meo abscondi eloquium tuum ut non peccem tibi...

HE
WREATHES
THE CROSS!

Concerning the Martyrdom of Finality

Man in himself is a fine cross- and one worthy of a Christ impaled. To pray in fever dream for a man from Talpiyot to step forth from the scarlet night is the fate of the katabat. Sainthood awaits.

Know this- this which I proclaim past truth!

That which is ordained as holy law even up through the corridors of Hell; even the lowest hall of Elysium. There is not one hand which may scribe a codex for the Devil, And there is not one mind with the knowledge of Satan's doctrine; and there is not one tongue that may hiss the true name of that abomination! For there are no ears that have heard it, and yet there is not one which has not! Crane'd pillar prostrates its nacre upon necrolith; eager ecstasy flung alabaster vitality to the foot of the famished tomb. Woman of many phosphenes; eyes not unlike altar-stelles. Mouths like myriad alembics; multitude of mirrors to mask master's countenance. Lost in the murk of flotsam created when ye Devill's name was uttered in Syriac, the neophyte's soul's exclaims "All Hail Death".

BERITH COME FORTH!

White hands calmly caress beneath the mandibles, and the pearls are scattered. Wight hands clammily carest occipitals, and Venus is shattered. Show them, O Grande Marquis, where the heir hath erred in the airt! Tell them, Leopold, of the archer's acumen! Frothing at pregnant maw; a jovian child splayed in droll supplication. It is he who sayeth, lunting gayly the gold and merrily the myrh of the manger,

-Patiently, darling, in the reverential presence of the torrent of revenants!

-Quietly, my dear, in this time of no angels!

Behold! Death will temper the vanities!

Frayed tapestries flutter and pustules burst in adoration. Sojourn the cloister's naos unct in hyssop. The sage, bound so, may never be set aflame. All paths have lead here.

BEHOLD!

Ye victim of order imposed, Neither dilligence, Nor sanctified verbum, May kiss even the foot of my master, Nor the ring of his papacy.



The Kings of Oakwych and Dandelion

Colin Insole

"COME, the sacrifice of night is ablaze above our heads. Between me and you ancient suffering will make itself understood by ancient suffering."

O.V. DE MILOSZ, 'ARS MAGNA: LUMEN'



THE MONSTROSITY had been sent to Lord Whimbrel to coincide with a bilious breakfast at noon. His memories of the night's adventures were hazy but he had the uncomfortable feeling that he had lost heavily at cards. And there had been disturbing dreams of fire and suffocation. The bed was wet with sweat and he had rushed in panic to open the windows.

The package had been sent by the landowner whose pastures adjoined his estate in Staffordshire. An absentee landlord, with many parcels of property throughout the British Isles, Lord Whimbrel affected to ignore any complaints. But this particular exhibit was a stillborn lamb - preserved in pickle. It floated in the mixture with a vigour that made his nausea return. It was the latest in a menagerie of freaks and derangements that were delivered by the stagecoach from the Midlands. The creature had three heads, eight feet and various appendages upon which he dared not speculate.

Five years ago, he had been approached by a coterie of scientists and projectors, who convinced him that soil, mineral and water samples from his land indicated the potential for undiscovered chemical elements, that might generate perpetual motion. They had beguiled him with a schoolboy conjuring trick involving phosphorus fizzing and sparking in water. He was persuaded into investing a large sum of money to mine his land. The tenants, who inhabited the hamlet of Shackerstone Magna, were summarily evicted.

The land was tunnelled, excavated and pumped with chemicals, dyes and acids. Miners delved deeper, exposing caves and underground chasms, into which the scientists piped their cocktail of sludge. For a while the landscape absorbed it all. And

then came rumblings and groanings, as from a vast bloated stomach. Steam and gas leaked into the air from the mine shafts, filling the sky with multicoloured fumes. These emissions had the fickleness of volcanos, catching the workmen unawares. Showered with a lava, that stuck to their skin and burned, they became infected with lesions and tumours.

The river and its surrounding lakes and ponds acquired a strange artificial beauty. By day, they glinted ultramarine and sapphire. At night, under the moon, they had an oily lilac luminescence. At first, the quarrymen and miners, hired in droves for the excavations, bathed and frolicked in the waters. But in the darkness, drunk on strong cider and gin, their strokes floundered and some convulsed. Several perished, drowning in the blue tide as their limbs cramped. The stronger swimmers returned shivering to their billets to dream of crawling blind and howling, through the tunnels they had fashioned.

And weather spread the contagion to surrounding towns and hamlets. Rain soaked the land, activating congealed poisons that leaked into drains and ditches. Mist and fog absorbed the chemicals, like a sponge picking up moisture, and dabbed them on walls miles away. Villagers woke and grew accustomed to their cottages being stained blue and pink. On those nights, their children sickened and died, like canaries in their cages.

At first, the houses of the evicted tenants were allocated as lodgings for the itinerant workmen and navvies. But as the death toll rose and the site was abandoned, they became grottoes of the bizarre - caves painted by a nature that had turned in upon itself, to wound and make itself sick. Once dun-coloured and dingy - wretched hovels for casual agricultural labourers, they now glowed and twinkled in the dark, with malignant candyfloss crystals. By day, their rooms seemed like the centres of iced cakes, with wavy layers of strawberry, banana and blackcurrant filling.

A tiny church had been built in the hamlet of Shackerstone Magna, by a penitent duke, during the reign of Queen Mary. Dedicated to Saint Firmin, Bishop of Amiens, its main window had long attracted the attention of antiquaries. Since the date and circumstances of Saint Firmin's martyrdom were disputed, several artists had competed, throughout the centuries, in depicting the manner of his death; each one outdoing his predecessor in violence and gore. Known as the 'Slaughterhouse Window', the colours

of blood, bone and sinew, that depicted the agonized contortions of Saint Firmin, acquired new horrors, with the veneer of chemicals, smeared on by the wind and the rain.

In the congested churchyard, where the dead were hurried into the ground, it was discovered that the corpses were so riddled with poisons and contaminants, that they exhaled noxious gases into the air from their tombs, that illuminated the site. On the blackest starless night, columns of colours glowed and spiralled - like monstrous confections in a sweet shop - barley sugars, peppermint humbugs and lollipops of red and yellow. A modern forensic scientist might have viewed the sickly emanation and deduced the exact chemical compound responsible for each cadaver.

The affected site of Shackerstone Magna was abandoned and consigned to the status of wilderness. But on those parts of his estate that appeared immune from the contagion, Lord Whimbrel maintained the formalities and rigours of his status. Man traps, carefully concealed in his woods, deterred poachers. And on the fringes of the coverts, where partridge and pheasant were raised for slaughter, was a vast gamekeeper's gibbet, hung thick, like a butcher's shop at Christmas. Its colours caught the sunlight or seemed to tremble in the equivocation of muted shades at dusk and dawn. Texture and tint seemed accentuated by death. Fur and feather were not mired by mud or the lapse of time. They seemed to pulse and breathe to a communal beat from the heart of the gibbet. A traveller, coming unexpectedly to the desolation, viewed the blackness of crows, rooks and ravens, and stumbled giddy, overwhelmed by their latent power. To be enfolded in such wings, would cause a sleep of perpetual darkness. They would dream of giant feathers smothering and drowning, of being blinded in soft down.

The quickness and litheness of the creatures were heightened. The eyes of polecats, stoats and weasels remained bright, days after they had been snared and killed. The colour of their fur seemed to imitate the shades of surrounding earth and trees and give intensity to the landscape. Touches of brightness - the blue of a jay's wing or the mottled red of a sparrowhawk, shone and sparkled like gold gleaming from a dank and steaming midden. And the bodies of individual creatures seemed to combine, to form an animate sentient mass of living fur, feather and bone, that might grip and wrap around an unsuspecting prey or take wing and blot out the pale sun.

Layers of coloured wash from rains tainted with the chemicals gave the cottages the sleazy glow of fairground waggons, lashed together against storm. And to the most lurid of these huts, that smelled of strawberries and potted shrimps, where the puddles on the floor fizzed like sherbet and the pink drip of liquid could burn through metal, came two bone grubbers and rag gatherers. Their tongues lolled and they dribbled on their shirts, like pantaloons dropping soup onto their bibs. They were simple-minded souls or perhaps their wits had been stolen by the poisons in the air. But they were drawn to this place, by some fault, contagion or inspiration of their blood.

The previous resident, several months dead, of racking fevers and convulsions, had occupied himself, in his last troubled days, with carving faces in wood. These miniatures now stared down from mantel shelf and window ledges - hideous representations of the miners, their masters and mistresses. Each one had been captured at the moment of personal tragedy and despair. Eyes rolled, teeth were bared and clenched, and mouths gaped. Their febrile rage offered testimony to the years of corrupt industry. And it seemed that they whispered and conspired - both in waking thought and in dream, to work their revenge. All had been stained and corroded with the caustic chemicals that permeated the room. But instead of dulling their expressions, the toxins enhanced them - giving extra zest and stimulus to their malignity. As the bone grubbers entered, they seemed to confer, nudging each other and peeping into the belongings of the two men.

Each carried a sack that contained a multitude of crudely fashioned men and women. Their frames had been constructed from twigs, sticks or old roots. Their heads and clothes were loosely attached flowers, buds, squashed cobwebs and other filth. Some were even adorned with flattened insects and coloured with their blood. Their unpacking caused a host of casualties, with heads falling and limbs dangling, as if a cannon ball had wrought its damage amongst them. But the two men gamely patched and mended. And finally, the contents of the two sacks were arranged opposite each other, as two straggling armies or nations. Dice were produced, earnestly shaken and rolled. The two men clambered over the floor - their field of battle, blowing, flicking and caressing the little figures, according to the fall of the dice. Their creations fell, twitching and lurching, with bits broken, half-attached or comically twisted, whilst the

gamesters howled with merriment. The footing of the little people was so precarious that it seemed they acted independently of the two men - sometimes gripping each other and toppling over a whole line, of their own side, like a stack of deformed dominoes. When they turned upon each other and a row of puffball or dandelion heads dropped, the two could barely contain their glee.

And in the stalls and galleries, the audience of wooden heads seemed to crane forward to join the fun or to roar their approval, demanding encore upon encore. The two instigators of the mayhem played out their game, not as competitors, but as scientists conducting an experiment - intrigued and delighted by its outcome. They hurrahed and cheered the carnage - smiling in particular at how supposed friends and allies had sabotaged and destroyed each other.

The floor was strewn with the wreckage of twigs, dandelion heads, insect bodies and cobwebs. A handful of figures remained upright - Pyrrhic victors, who had slain friend and foe alike.

The two bone grubbers swept the litter together and heaped it in the fireplace. For tinder, they gathered up the wooden heads, whose faces yawned and gurned at the injustice. Warming their hands around the blazing grate, the men piled on furniture and rags. As the room heated, the crystals and sticky chemicals melted and dribbled their way to join the inferno. And the flimsy dreams of the stick and gossamer people were swiftly consumed; mixing and coagulating with the poisons.

The modest little chimney, after years of indolence, roared out the fumes. It could be seen for miles, like a giant firework - a Roman candle, heralding revolt and conspiracy. Its glow caught the colours on the plumage and bodies of the creatures on the gamekeeper's gibbet. The sky became a turmoil of fire, smoke and flashes of ultramarine and crimson, as the spirit of that shape took wing. The sleekness of the polecats and stoats and the fierceness of their teeth and sinuous strength rippled across the firmament. Birds of prey, which could plummet like an arrow or hover, still as a giant moth, shadowed the land with their dark wings. Steam, rain, fire and smoke curled together to form a turbulent alchemy. The vast cloud, tipped with white flames, like sharp teeth and clawed like a giant bird, rolled across the English sky.

Near Leicester, in the village of Anstey, its darkness fed the anger of young Ned Ludd, who took hammers to the looms and knitting machines and smashed them to

splinters. The cloud drew up into itself his spirit and power, growing more potent with the mutual exchange. For months, it fomented and grew, unseen, as drops a small pebble, whose echo resounds across the hills, until other stones fall, and the mountain cascades boulders, rocks and scree, hurling its rage upon town and village.

It took shape again in London, in 1780. A respectable protest, led by Sir George Gordon, progressed through the city. But a fire in the sky sent its contagion into the streets to infect them all. The minor vexations and worries of each marcher merged and amplified together to form the London Mob. For days, the conflagration raged, almost overthrowing the city, as Boudicca's anger against the Romans had razed every building to the ground, leaving a layer of red cinders in London's dust.

And before the cloud had drawn up its power again from the city's violence, edged across the English Channel, to bide its time and burn again with even greater heat, it settled on a particular house.

A young artist, on his way to the shop of his former master, James Basire, was in the vanguard of the crowd, as they pressed forward with torches and pikes. The building sparked at once and Lord Whimbrel, befuddled with drink and dreams, stumbled in the fug and smoke. And it seemed to him that figures, made from twigs and decorated with cobwebs, horsehair and dandelion heads, danced and cavorted in the flames, gripping him tightly and pulling him down.

Heart of Fire

Alcebiades Diniz
Miguel

"WHEN you are in bed and you hear the howling of the dogs in the fields,
hide yourself beneath your blankets, don't make a jest of what they are
doing: they have the insatiable thirst for the infinite, like you, like me,
like the rest of us human beings with our long pale faces."

Lautremont, MALDOROR



"A great sheet of heavy dark cloud, with a reefed or puckered make, drew off the west in the course of the pageant: the edge of this and the smaller pellets of cloud that filed across the bright field of the sundown caught a livid green. At 5 the red in the west was fainter, at 5.20 it became notably rosier and livelier; but it was never of a pure rose. A faint dusky blush was left as late as 5.30, or later. While these changes were going on in the sky, the landscape of Ribblesdale glowed with a frowning brown."

(Gerard Manley Hopkins letter to the *Nature*, 3 January 1884)

The first noticeable fact of that day – an apparently ordinary day in the port area, which itself was a vital element in the complex conurbation called Lagos, Nigeria – was the spiraling black abyss of smoke that could not be undone even by the wind which was blowing insistently from the sea. The smoke concealed the scenery of the harbor from the port dwellers and the workers, a view that was dominated by a sickly-green ocean that brought to mind images of moss and dirt, as well as its numerous boats, small and large. There were freighters, oil tankers, schooners, sailing ships, motorized vessels crowded with people or goods, and jolly-boats driven by oars or by many hands. The dark veil concealed these and other undeniable fruits of the progress of the modern world on the seas, just as it made the high-rise buildings that peppered the horizon of Lagos and Ikoyi Island much more obscure. The toxic smoke appeared in torrents that poured from three or four petroleum tanks located next to the port, which were controlled by a multinational consortium. The fire burned with a fierce intensity, and its heat was felt by the dockworkers who hunted blindly through the smoke as their bodies were wracked with fits of coughing. It flamed like a dark sun whose overwhelming glow could pluck the air from the lungs and scorch the skin. The workers engaged in various tasks, such as moving cargo from containers to warehouses and back again, prostituting their frail bodies, and begging in the torrid streets. Some, whose means of sustenance had been disrupted by catastrophe, devoted their time to reflections of an abstract, aesthetic, or metaphysical nature. They imagined that the scorching fire drew everything that passed before it into the vortex of its smoking nucleus. It seemed much less a sun than a black hole, a center of attraction and destruction from which nothing might escape. Discussion and rumors abounded regarding the origin of the explosions and the corporation that owned the tanks and their va-

luable content. There was talk of sabotage, terrorism, human failure, nitroglycerin, the use of explosions to contain the fire, as well as counterfires, and the possibility of other nearby tanks exploding. It was speculated that the entire region might disintegrate after yet another enormous burst. The fire would last for several days and make the lives of the survivors unbearable. In addition to the heat and the permanent smoke, the lack of jobs and the decrease in the circulation of money, the Lagos police, perhaps pressured by the recent decrease in bribes, initiated numerous searches and arrests. The cops suppressed minor acts of thievery and smuggling in the zone with extreme violence. Meanwhile, the fire persisted in its vehement blaze without a single moment's rest.

Young John, who frequently walked the labyrinthine alleys before the city's docks, was far from being a carefree citizen. He was not unaware of the endless discussion, reflection, debate, and involvement that took place among the dock workers, though he also believed that engaging in this kind of cackle would be a waste of time. He was a realistic boy, making every effort to remain as rational as possible, though he feared the night ghosts, evil omens, and sorceries of the orishas. He had not finished elementary school. Years of hard labor taught him to survive on the streets. He deliberately suppressed his surname until it was extinguished from his memory. Only his common name remained, which he shared with so many others in Lagos. John carried with him, everywhere he went, a box filled with the tools employed by shoeshine boys, though he was anything but a shoeshine boy. The box was a disguise, a small part of his cunning plan. He and a companion of about the same age generally proceeded in the following manner: they chose a member of the crew of one of the many ships that docked daily in the port and they followed his or her footsteps. They focused on the drunks, as well as the slowest and least intelligent among the broad variety of sailors, crewmen, and travelers in search of cheap prostitutes, male or female. Once the target was located, they would wait until their mark stepped into an empty street or dark alley. John would then approach the victim, offering services that were never to be delivered. When the dreamy sailor or traveller least expected it, they would receive a blow to the nape of the neck and lose consciousness. Shortly afterwards, the supposed shoeshine boy and his companion would relieve him of his possessions. This sort of business made a lot of money for John, but his livelihood was threatened by the fire and the smoke, which obstructed the harbor and brought in a small army of firemen and police officers. This, in turn, caused a sharp decline in the number of sailors wishing to engage in the pursuit of illicit pleasures, thus making it impossible for the pair to continue their crooked activities. To make matters worse, John was somewhat of a celebrity. He was highly sought after by several of his former victims and by the police. He had to take care to travel the lesser known roads, and to stay away from the central areas of the port if he wanted to avoid trouble, at least until the fire was finally

cleared, which would probably not happen anytime soon. Even these careful measures were often not enough to avoid persecution. In one particularly harrowing instance, he was harassed by two motorcycle policemen, who he eventually managed to mislead, though only at great cost. To do so, he was forced to venture into an unknown neighborhood somewhere in the environs of the port region. He scrambled over walls and passed through countless abandoned sheds, leaving the ruined metal containers behind him. In the distance, the small strip of land darkened the seawater, marking the emergence of an embankment. These particular policemen were more persistent than so many of the others. They gave him no respite or time to rest. Overwhelmed with despair, he searched the perimeter of a building, seeking for some unlocked gate so that he could hide himself inside. Finding an entry at last, he slipped between two decrepit sheets of metal. The front courtyard of the building was unobstructed by walls, so he was able to cross the from one end to the other in a matter of seconds. Still, his sharp eyes quickly identified certain curious details; the stunted trees, the thick weed, a metal plate on which appeared the word CHVRCH in bright red spray paint. It took him a moment to ascertain that the makeshift sign did indeed read "church", though the spelling was rather strange. He searched quickly for more details of the temple that he'd invaded, the rest of the name for instance – "church" of what? For whom? – but to no avail. He briefly observed the facade of the structure: it was imposing, but without exaggeration, presenting an elongated form that was not unusual in Christian churches. The material used in the construction of the building, however, was most definitely unusual. When erecting a temple, men typically employ the finest materials available, from the foundations to the highest towers: stones, bricks, wood, cement, concrete, metal, steel. This church was made of corrugated metal plates and incongruous fragments taken from boats, cars, and other vehicles, utilizing everything from plastic bottles to the cheap tiles found in public toilets. The mix was extremely heterogeneous, yet the usual church features – the tower, the transept, the sacristy in the back – remained the same as in the churches that John had visited throughout the brief span of his life.

Inside of the building, which smelled acrid from the mixture of dirt floor and metal walls, the fake shoeshine boy forgot all about the policemen that were chasing him. Impressions within the temple were confusing and contradictory. It was difficult, for example, to decide whether this was a Catholic or a Protestant church, although the immense cross in the background confirmed that it was dedicated to Christian worship. The altar seemed naked and empty, as per the Protestants' preference, yet some statues of saints at a large side table suggested that the place was Catholic, for the saints were held dear to Roman Catholics. The statues were little more than small ceramic figures, crude but colorful and efficiently dramatic. John, however, could not identify these saints in their curious scenes of martyrdom and torture. He

searched his mind for his meager hagiographical references, obtained in the few catechism classes he'd been obliged to attend (this at the insistence of his mother, since he had never met his father). The first of the sculpted scenes represented a saint, recognizable by the burning halo on his head, beaten to death with his own mechanical leg by a soldier overtaken with demonic and sadistic wickedness. Another unknown saint had his eyes drawn out by a small team of doctors, each with a face at once hideous and curious, and wracked with cruel expressions. The third statuette was ridden by a terribly devilish woman who resembled a predatory animal, with bulging eyes and a bristling rictus of a mouth. The woman flayed the saint's face with a strange instrument endowed with tweezers. The torturers who tormented the pious and altruistic saints had curious characteristics: their garments and the instruments which they employed with such diligence were remarkably extemporaneous. It was impossible to determine whether they represented actions taken in the present or in some distant past. The young man searched his mind for the saints that he knew, going over the narratives of martyrdoms and miracles that he'd been taught, trying to connect the actions displayed in the scenes before him with those in the stories. He remembered the decapitated Saint John the Baptist, Saint Sebastian pierced by arrows, Saint Peter crucified upside down - none of which bore the slightest similarity to the torments depicted in the sculptures. Still stunned by these miniatures, he noticed another sculptured image in a niche a little further away. This time it was the representation of Our Lady contemplating the corpse of her son, our Savior Jesus Christ. The Saint was on her knees, her head hung low with regret, which was typical with this kind of representation. But the saint's son did not appear in the usual way: his body was twisted, as if torn by a machine much more brutal than the cross. His face seemed, in a terribly realistic way, to be that of a dead man who had perished in the most extreme of agonies, without a trace of a kind of beatific expression found, for instance, in Michelangelo's *Pietá*, in which the fulfillment of duty compensated for the suffering of the savior. The confusion of John's thoughts within the strange temple, however, did not numb his quick thieving instincts. A sharp rustling heard outside immediately brought him back to the urgent needs of the present: the persecution that he himself suffered. He knew that this strange church was not completely safe, and that the cracks in the walls composed of oddly welded pieces, some of which were merely leaning against one another, would allow an outside observer to catch glimpses of the activities taking place inside the building. He decided to hide under the table that supported the majority of the statues and wait for dawn. Indeed, it was already night. John was voraciously hungry, as the impossibility of exercising his trade made it impossible to buy even the smallest of meals. It was thus, consumed by hunger and fearing imprisonment, that the young man believed he would spend the night in the corrugated steel cathedral.

The darkness of the night was rendered even more opaque by the dense smoke that covered the region. Only the streetlight, filtered through the holes in the walls and the central window, saved the place from plunging into absolute darkness. Hunger was not unfamiliar for John, so he braced himself for the night. He wondered what he would do the next day when he had to move his base of operations to another neighborhood. He took refuge in rational thought, and in the formulation of a plan for the days to come, shielding himself from the deeper layers of his mind, which he wished to keep obscure. On occasion, certain irrational fears threatened to break through to the surface and dominate his attention. He knew that he must avoid losing control and exposing himself to the police, avoid feeding old fears and anxieties about being alone in the darkness, avoid becoming alarmed at the inexplicable sounds of the night, by his solitude, and by the strange saints that resided with him in the temple. It was at this moment that he perceived, from his hiding place, a change in what little illumination penetrated the building. The nature of this light underwent a subtle metamorphosis, being no longer a cluster of small points streaming through gaps and holes in the walls. In its place was a diluted atmosphere of luminous particles. These particles, in turn, began to move at a slower rate, indicating a sort of *transmutation*. Gradually, a vision emerged before the boy's glazed eyes that was at first disturbing but which, after the initial shock had worn off, became an object of fascination. In his vision, the altar was occupied by obscure figures performing coordinated movements as in a strange, yet well-rehearsed, dance. An imposing man with a red beard sat in the center of these shadowy activities. His presence presided over the meeting as if it were the magnetic axis around which the other figures revolved. Around him several men and women carried in their hands the bloody spoils of a quartered black goat. They were astonishingly decrepit and very young, naked or wearing only a single black robe. John could not remember at what point the animal appeared in his vision or how it was killed. A vague religious reminiscence made him think about Isaac and Abraham, along with the sacrificial game played out by these two characters in the biblical story. The celebrants spun in a wide concentric circle around the red-bearded man, spreading the blood from the chunks of dead animal flesh they held in their hands. The man in the center looked upon it all with an expression of annoyance mixed with sadness. It was only then that the observer noticed the magnificent horns that the man supported. But John's extraordinary vision did not end there. Soon, he noticed the approach of shadows from various parts of the church, constituting a new configuration of ghostly beings. They took their places within the eccentric arrangement of wooden benches and chairs. One of the shadows, particularly obscure, made its way to the center of the altar. This shadow intermingled with the form of the magnetic persona who sat on the central throne. As their bodies interpenetrated one another's, the shadow revealed itself to be a

priest. Both he and the man with the red beard and horns began to speak in unison. The language used by both of them, being foreign, should have been incomprehensible to John's ears, yet he understood with perfect clarity. They spoke of sacrifice, faith, divinity, omnipotence, and death. The two intertwined rituals continued through the night, the witness having lost all sense of the passing of time. The spectacle finally ended with the first rays of the dawn.

John remained ecstatic, paralyzed in the now silent church. His exhausted mind no longer cared about the rigors of existence – the fight against hunger, the need to escape from the police, the vague prospect of the future. His thoughts, however, did turn to the fire in the oil tanks, the black smoke and seemingly eternal flames that dominated the harbor. He hoped, with the ardent will of faith discovered, that this fire might spread quickly in the land and on the sea, sowing its baleful fumes all over the city of Lagos in an aerial plague that would come to dominate Nigeria, the entire African continent, and finally the world.

The Ghost of a Flea

Rhys Hughes

"I DO NOT sing this world and the other stars
I sing all the possibilities of myself beyond this world and the stars
I sing the joy of wandering and the pleasure of dying of it."

Guillaume Apollinaire, THE MUSICIAN OF SAINT-MERRI



THE LIVES OF ALL FLEAS seem to be identical, but differences of circumstance and environment can influence their characters just the same as with men. Thus we find individuals in the flea world with remarkable histories, but only when they become ghosts will we learn from them directly, for until that time they are unable to communicate with us. Ghosts have a common language and it is one of the blessings of Limbo that all species may share vocally the experiences they enjoyed, and the ordeals they endured, when they were stuck on that imperfect planet called Earth. I interviewed three dead fleas for my amusement and they were pleased to tell me their tales, which I now further transmit to you, the curious reader who is still alive.

The flea circus is a place of cruelty. No one has sympathy for us. Fleas are regarded as pests and evil bloodsuckers and thus our sufferings are disregarded. Yet we are creatures who follow our nature, exactly the same as every other being in the cosmos. It is surely unfair to hold to personal account one who has no choice about the way he must act. To drag a lion before a court of law for eating a gazelle and to sentence him to hard labour would be absurd, yet fleas are punished in a similar way merely for the fact that blood is our food. It is not always human blood and in my case the blood of men would

We spread the plague and devastated the world with it, but what choice did we have? It is easy to curse us and pray for the extinction of our species, but the fact is that all our movements were involuntary. The rats took us with them and we had to go along. I had no desire to leave the Orient, but I was hardly in any position to argue with the rodent upon whose back I rode. What would I have said anyway? "Dear Rat, it is a fine life here in China and your scurrying around the docks is exactly the best you can ever hope for. So there's no need to seek an even greater happiness in another location." That would

My own tale is the most peculiar that a flea can tell and I won't be surprised if you disbelieve it. But we are in Limbo and I have nothing else to do, so I will tell it. I was a flea who lived on Christ while he was alive. I thus drank the most holy blood that ever has surged through veins, the same blood that saves the souls of men. I knew I was privileged and I appreciated the fact and was grateful that the Messiah was my host. Few fleas could say as much. We were the elite among our species. Every day we drank the blood of the Son of God, and there is no food or drink more healthy and excellent than that. For human

poison me. Yet men condemn us. It is with a deep sigh of futile self-pity that I recall in detail the awful circumstances of my capture and enslavement at the hands of the owner of the circus. He plucked me with tweezers from the fur of his cat, where I was living a happy life, and put me down on the surface of his workbench, which was cold and unyielding. I was scared out of my wits and believed my end had come. But he had no wish to kill me. He had other plans concerning my fate; and had I known what was about to happen next, I would have prayed for death. He shone a bright light upon me that dazzled my two tiny eyes and then he studied me through a powerful magnifying glass fixed to the table. With tweezers that were even more delicate than those he had already used, he began to wrap a thin gold wire around my neck. I writhed but nothing helped me to escape his scheme. He was too accomplished at this task; for him it was no more than the chore of one minute. He tightened the wire and thus was I harnessed for the rest of my life, a life that have been a useless approach. A rat no more listens to a flea than a tree listens to an angel. Plus I had no inkling that we would leave our home town until it happened, so I was never in a position to give advice. He ran across an extended gangplank one morning and neither of us appreciated the possible outcome of this simple action until it was too late. Well, a gangplank is just a length of wood. That is how we ended up in the hold of a ship and the vessel suddenly pulled up its anchor and sailed for Europe without warning. I was sick for the duration of the long voyage because I already had the germ inside me and it was doing awful things there. We are called parasites but the plague bacillus can teach fleas how to take that lifestyle to a higher level. I am not being sarcastic. It is incredible how such a tiny thing can replicate itself so prolifically that a tightly packed mass of germs soon clogged the back of my throat and made it unfeasible for even one drop of the blood I swallowed to pass into my gut and nourish me. Thus I began to starve to death. I beings in churches on Sundays, they must rely on magic formulae to turn wine into this blood, but we had it fresh from source. As a result we were stronger than other fleas and assured of eternal life when we died. But it seems that it was divinely fated for the Messiah to be executed, for him to die for the sins of mankind. I am not able to understand the intricacies of theology. I'm just a flea. Why Christ had to be scourged and then nailed to a cross is still a mystery to me. But this is what happened. His agonies on the cross were horrible and as his body writhed, the sky grew dark, thick clouds massing and covering the sun. It's no exaggeration to say that day had turned into night and that the whole of Nature was in mourning for the outrage that had been perpetrated on this remarkable man. The fleas that were on him clung on more tightly as his muscles convulsed but we have strong claws suited to the purpose. They can grip the roots of hairs with almost unshakeable force. I felt no dismay at this stage. My host was still alive and his blood was delicious;

involved pulling a little cart around an enclosure to amuse the human fools who paid to applaud my antics. This was bad enough, but there was much worse in store during festival time when people came from far and near to drink and dance and be distracted by the wonders and marvels of showmen who provided games and diversions. The flea circus was only one of many attractions; and the owner knew he was in competition with a range of incredible amusements that included semi-naked exotic girls, fake freaks of all kinds (some even real), booths in which a bolt fired from a crossbow into a target could win a prize, and similar frivolities. The paying of hard-earned cash for a chance to watch fleas pulling model carts around a small arena seemed a poor exchange to the labourers who flocked to the festival; and the circus owner knew it. He had to arrange something more spectacular to titillate the masses. And he had an idea that he considered the most ingenious that an owner of a flea circus ever had. It involved hiring five musicians and hiding them behind a

frantically bit my host all over his body and he squeaked his protests, but I still couldn't assuage my hunger. In my frantic desperation for food I was willing to try the blood of any other mammal; and it seemed to my disordered way of thinking that the rat was at fault. Perhaps he had changed the quality of his blood without telling me. I prepared myself to hop off his back onto a new host. But there were no alternative hosts down in the hold, only other rats infested with their own famished fleas. And then one day the ship finally arrived at its destination and a sailor came down into the hold to help unload the cargo that was stored there. At once I saw my chance and I leapt onto him and bit him on his exposed ankle; but this action made no difference. I remained just as hungry as before and the fellow barely even noticed that I was there. He was used to discomfort and had no time for a little itch on his skin. He went back on deck and I jumped onto another sailor, but he was no more nourishing than the first; and I jumped onto a third, who unwittingly carried me

why should I have fretted like the humans who gathered at the foot of the cross and shouted out lamentations? He might be the Messiah for them but what use were his teachings to fleas? Of course we know that from time to time we must leave our host and seek a new home on some other body. This is something a flea understands well. Our host dies and we look for an alternative. It is the same for you when your house burns down or is tumbled into rubble and dust in an earthquake. You look for a new place to live. Christ died eventually on the cross and his body was taken to a tomb that was a cave. His holy flesh cooled slowly and I prepared to leave and begin the task of looking for a new body to call home, but the other fleas called to me: "This is Christ, the Son of God, the Messiah whose coming was foretold by the ancient prophets. How can you even think about leaving him now?" I laughed at this and my answer was that he was a dead body, just the same as any other; that I needed fresh blood as food; that it would be foolish for a flea to

screen in a tent erected at the festival. They would play a piece of elegant music, one of Reicha's wind quintets for flute, oboe, clarinet, horn and bassoon, while five selected fleas would have their feet glued to a miniature stage and be given tiny replicas of those instruments. Beneath the stage was a coil of wire that could be heated by the current from a battery. As the stage became painfully hot the fleas would seek to escape but would find themselves unable to; their struggles would make it seem they were playing on their instruments the music that could be heard. We were heated to death but the show was a failure. Only one man entered the tent to watch, an old professorial character who peered at us critically for several minutes and then announced in a pompous voice that two of the fleas were playing with flair, two had no ability at all, and one was 'average'. He left the tent and that was that. The five fleas died, boiled in our own internal juices, which to be candid were mostly borrowed. As for the owner of the flea circus, he was upset that his

off the ship and onto the quayside and hence into the labyrinthine streets of the city. Death was coming for me; I felt it in every nerve of my body, and there was nothing I could do about it, because I wasn't able to absorb and digest my food. I was unaware at the time that I was spreading the plague to my hosts. They too would spread it to their neighbours and soon the city would be a nightmare of putrefying bodies. But let me tell you about the men I infected. There were twelve in total and six were bad people and six were good. Do you see the irony of this? Had I been the agent of destruction for only the wicked ones, I could argue that I was the agent of divine justice, that I was a flea working for God; and thus I would earn a place in Heaven among the blessed hosts. On the other hand, had I bitten and infected only the good ones, then the Devil would have regarded me kindly and given me one of the more comfortable places in Hell. But six were good and six were bad. When I expired from hunger, it was found that the sum of my virtues and sins

remain on a corpse for sentimental reasons. They continued to remonstrate with me but I didn't listen to them. I hopped off and found a gap between the wall of the cave and the huge rock that had been rolled over the entrance, and that's how I left the most luxurious home a flea has ever known since the beginning of time. I was the only flea who went and I regarded the others as superstitious fools. They had chosen hunger over good sense; but that was no longer my business and I kept hopping across the ground until I found a Roman soldier who I was able to hitch a ride with. His blood was sour and weak in comparison with Christ's but it was better than nothing. Alas for me! How was I supposed to know that the Messiah would rise three days later; that he would return from the dead, that the fleas who had chosen to remain with him were the wise ones after all? I had made a gross error, surely the most idiotic mistake in flea history, for the Christ who had come back to life soon ascended to Heaven; and his fleas went with him, all except me,

idea had met such a poor reception, but the loss of five fleas meant little to him. It turned out that I was the 'average' flea, and my failure to be either good or bad resulted in my soul ending up in Limbo.

exactly cancelled each other out. Thus was I sent to this totally tedious Limbo, the final destination of all non-aligned entities, where I feel neither the pangs of hunger nor the delights of satiation and never shall.

who had to stay behind on this world. I lived on the soldier for the rest of my life. I died and I came here. I had tasted Christ's blood but had rejected him. The glory of the first minus the sin of the second equals zero.

Through the halls and passages of Limbo we wander forever, hoping against hope that eternity might come to an end one day; and our only solace is to pause on occasion and talk to other lost souls. We suffer not the torments reserved for the wicked, yet we are denied bliss. Our crimes are those of neglect rather than intent. We were neutrals in a universe in which neutrality is not respected, where both sides in the divine struggle regard it with suspicion and derision. After death its advocates are subjected to the ultimate neutrality, a perfect vacuum in the soul. Choose a side, dear reader, for there is no profit in playing safe. As one of these unfortunates, I yearn only to pass this message to the world of the living.



Shadow of Honor Risen in Eternity

Stephan Friedman

"FOR we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

EPHESIANS 6:12



IT IS A CHILLY, autumn morning. There is rime on the grass, a sign of soon approaching frosts. The sky is overcast, and there are drizzle drops on the window. I am sitting on the floor in the attic of our holiday cottage. We are getting rid of this old house in favour of a new one, and I am rather sad about this. I've spent all my long childhood summers here. This cottage is a mystical place, which holds my dreams. Here the fairy tales were told and became flesh. I love the dark wood panels, the squeaky floors, the withered wallpaper, and the thick smell of old things mixed with the scents of the forest, which this house is saturated with. It is a perfect place for daydreaming and reminiscing. Just sitting here like this makes me forget the cares of the mundane world and sends my mind wandering. In my thoughts, I climb down the wooden stairs, run out of the front door and into the forest. Crossing the sunlit meadow, I reach the lake. Shedding my clothes, I rush into the cool, clear water and dive deep to the soft, silty bottom. As I rise and dive again, baptising myself in the lake of my dreams, I become smaller and smaller, until I am a child again, careless and free.

Yes, I am melancholy and heartbroken to see this house go, distressed by the ruthless progress, which charges ahead and forces us to keep up. So, I decide to check the attic one last time, just to see if I can salvage some heirlooms before this monument of nostalgia is demolished. I browse through the piles of old magazines with quirky illustrations, well-worn books, and boxes of odd objects to get to a large, antique wooden chest, at the bottom of which, underneath the layers of yellowed papers and tattered photographs, I discover an outworn leather dispatch case. Inside it, a parcel wrapped in green cardboard paper and bound with a pack thread. Undoing the wrapping reveals

a bunch of discoloured papers resembling pages from a diary, which must have belonged to my grandfather, since the dispatch case looks like a trophy from the Great War. They are heaped together in no particular order. On some, the writing is degraded after prolonged exposure to humidity and mildew. I am trying to put them together chronologically and study their contents.

My grandfather was a well-known and respected builder and surveyor. He held a high-ranking position in the largest construction company in the country and was involved in various committees. In his spare time, among the less sceptical folk, he was renowned as a dowser. By employing a simple twig from a tree, or a copper wire as a rod, he could tell exactly how big of an object and how deep it is concealed underground or inside a wall. I remember stories about him discovering various hidden artefacts. On one occasion, granddad helped a famous numismatist to find his treasured collection, which he buried in his basement and could not retrieve ten years later. He tried using an echo sounder to no avail, and was suggested to engage my grandfather's services by one of his friends. Grandpa checked with his "magic wand" and told the bewildered fellow exactly where and how deep to dig. He was rewarded with a rare and valuable silver coin.

What I did not know, and what I am discovering from these papers is that my grandfather occupied himself with occult research and was a member of the Spiritualist Society, which was conducting extreme and dangerous experiments that finally contributed to his unfortunate demise. It was in the middle of winter, he was 78 years old, when coming out of the bank building a young woman bumped into him, making him fall down the stairs and fracture his pelvis. He was rushed to the hospital and after spending a week there bedridden, he passed away. Everyone thought it was an accident, but my grandfather was convinced that it was planned, and the woman was a messenger of some kind. At the time, I did not pay much attention to this, but browsing through these pages I realise that there was much sense to what my grandpa was saying. He lived his life between two worlds, always saw the "other side" of events, attuned to higher frequencies. Nothing was a coincidence, everything had meaning and explanation. And when this meaning was hidden from regular means of understanding, he employed supernatural methods to penetrate beyond the veil and grasp what the common people could not even imagine.

One of the pages looks like a dedication addressed to my father:

> Dear son,
> If you happen to find these pages, do not be dismayed. Know first and foremost that I love you dearly. There is no greater love, no higher purpose in my life than my family, you and your mother. Everything I've done, I've done for you. However, the mistakes I made were kindled by my own vanity and folly. I hope you can forgive me for them. Please do not follow in my footsteps. Let the things you read here be a warning to you. Never dabble in the occult. Do not provoke the unseen forces. Lead a quiet and peaceful life, stay true to your family, and you will be blessed and happy. I wish you only the best!
> Your loving father

From the looks of it, my dad never found this diary, so I am its sole discoverer and proprietor. I carry on reading the rest of it.

20 June 1934, Dies Veneris
☉ 26° 43' ♋, ☽ 0° 56' ♏, First Quarter
09:00, Hour of Saturn
Angel: Cassiel, Intelligence: Agiel, Spirit: Zazel

When I was only a year and a half old, I suffered a serious injury. I fell a flight of stairs and hit my head on hard stone floor. I was rushed to the hospital where my life was saved and I spent half a year recuperating. Although I was only a baby, I can remember this accident very vividly, as though it happened only a few years ago. Recollecting it today, 30 years to the day it happened, I can see my body lying on the sofa, a quaint coral toy by my side, my family fussing around me. I am watching this as if from above. I have a strange buzzing sensation in my head, I guess my body is blocking out the pain and interpreting the shock in the only way it can. Then the doctor arrives.

What I think happened to my mind after this trauma, is that this is when the "veil was pierced". Since then, I could see the other side of things, strange visions, which I

could not explain at the time and which became clear to me later, as I progressed in the occult sciences.

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1 August 1934, Dies Mercurii
☉ 8° 11' ♌, ☽ 24° 30' ♈, Last Quarter
09:00, Hour of Jupiter
Angel: Sachiel, Intelligence: Jophiel, Spirit: Hismael

When I was four, one night I was woken by the strangest thing. In a big window, across from the bed there was an enormous, black, shaggy head moving and uttering sounds with a low, rumbling growl. Its long, bushy hair was swaying like seaweed in the waves. I was fear-stricken and spellbound at the same time. I just sat there on the bed watching the otherworldly apparition. I could not understand what it was saying, but I could feel that its message was ominous, predicting impending doom. I wondered how did it appear there in the middle of the night, in front of my window, since we lived on the fourth floor of the building, which must have been at least forty feet high. I do not remember for how long did it continue, or when did I finally fall asleep, but this vision stays in my memory till this day. As a four-year-old William Blake saw God put His head to the window, so did I see this black god, a dark and sinister entity from the depth of night.

Recently, a member of the Spiritualist Society showed me a picture of an entity called LAM in a book by a famous English occultist Aleister Crowley. Its exaggerated head reminded me of the thing I saw that night in the window. Although, what I saw was bigger, blacker, hairier, and more hostile.

Sometimes objects would come alive in most disconcerting ways and leave me baffled and perturbed. I remember one unsettling incident when I was playing with a hand carved wooden nutcracker. It was constructed from two pieces of wood and painted over. With black horns, bulging eyes and red mouth, it looked like a deranged devil. Pulling the handles would open and close its jaws to crack the nuts. I do not remember what was the nature of my game, but little by little the nutcracker started

moving on its own. It used its handles as legs to stand up, swirled in circles, and started moving across the floor towards me, clacking its jaws. The room around me started buzzing as if electrified. I screamed and ran to my mother. Surely, when she came to check what happened, the blasted thing seized to move.

♋

11 September 1934, Dies Martis
☉ 17° 45' ♍, ☽ 12° 34' ♎, New Moon
10:00, Hour of Moon
Angel: Gabriel, Intelligence: Shelachiel, Spirit: Chasmodai

When I was six years old, my mother took me to a theatre to see a play. It was a holiday, apparently May Day celebration, and the theatre was packed. Children with their parents gathered from all parts of the city. The play was based on the bizarre and fantastic Azeri fairy tales. There was a beautiful, dark-haired princess and a poor, fearless young hero who won her love. Wild beasts danced on the sands and the grasses, exotic birds sang on the branches of gigantic trees. Ragged robbers and hairy Divs roamed the wondrous realm. The princess was stolen by a monster called Bava. It was a huge and horrible bogeyman with red burning eyes. Besides the brilliant costume, elaborate makeup and impressive special effects, there was something otherworldly and devilish in this monster. I was truly frightened and could not stop thinking about it for several days.

A few days later, walking home with my mother, in the dark, in the distance, we heard a spine-chilling scream, like a howl of a wild, anguished animal. Next, a pair of bright red eyes lit up and we could discern a black silhouette of a tall figure. It was moving towards us. Fear gripped my heart. I clutched my mother's hand and started crying. She tried to calm me, although I could feel the uneasiness of the situation was creeping its way inside her mind too. She turned away from the path and took us by a different street towards our house. We moved quickly and soon entered the foyer. The danger passed, but for a long time after this occurrence I was tormented by nightmares and menacing thoughts.

What was this frightful apparition? How could it be that several days after I'd seen the monster in the play, it appears before me in the street? How could somebody have known about it to play this cruel joke on us?

The house we lived in then was a weird place on its own. Revisiting it many years later, I still felt uneasy just by being next to its entrance. I went in and stood in the foyer, but I was too scared to go up to the floor where our apartment was. In this house, I kept seeing things all the time, odd shapes and frightening characters appearing before me. Of course, I had plenty of nightmares, which did not help, as many a time I was not sure where the dream ended and reality began. Often, as evening fell, I would start feeling uneasy, sensing the approaching distress. Then the horrors would appear, and I would rush out of the flat, crying in the stairwell, waiting for my parents to return from work. Many times, they would scold me after finding me like this, locked out of the apartment. I tried to explain my fears, but who would believe an easily impressionable young boy with a history of brain trauma.

Now, when I learned about anomalous zones and ley lines, I detected that there is a crossing of energy lines passing through the place on which the house stands. It is like a constantly open gate, through which entities go in and out.

One evening, when the foreboding descended, two figures appeared, as if coming from the window. They were dressed in peculiar, amber suits and had a golden glow about them. They were approaching me, speaking in a language I could not understand with an eerie, cracking sound. I got extremely scared. Seeing them coming closer, I ran out of the apartment. I did not close the door fully, I thought that maybe my imagination was playing tricks on me. As I cracked the door open to check inside, the glowing amber figure was right in front of me making weird, crackling noises. It emitted a powerful, mephitic odour of burning sulphur. I shut the door tightly this time. Crying, I rang the neighbours' bell for several minutes, but no one answered. So, I stayed in the stairwell whimpering as I waited for my parents to arrive.

25 February 1935, Dies Lunae
☉ 5° 42’ ♓, ☽ 21° 27’ ♏, Last Quarter
10:00, Hour of Mars
Angel: Zamael, Intelligence: Graphiel, Spirit: Bartzabel

My adolescent years were largely uneventful. I was too busy studying and enjoying time with my friends to entertain any thoughts of the supernatural. However, in my mid-twenties I started being drawn to the unknown again. I began recollecting my childhood experiences and tried to purchase any book I could find on mystical subjects. At first, these were mostly books on mythology and ghost stories, but then I could also find some occult fiction and instructional literature. I read everything I could find by Éliphas Lévi, Joséphin Péladan, Stanislas de Guaita, Papus, and H.P. Blavatsky. It is around this time when I performed my first séance. With a group of friends, employing a Ouija board, we tried to communicate with our ancestors. The effect was remarkable. I felt electrified. I had a curious tingling in my hands and I felt the energy flowing through me. The planchette moved across the board and all communication made sense. Actually, it made too much sense, all too real for our young minds. So, when objects started to make noise and move across the room, we decided to call it a day. My friends left and I stayed in my room unsure how to spend the night in it, or to continue living there at all.

During this period, I began inducing trance states by using breathing techniques I learned from several books on meditation and yoga. I was trying to bring myself at will to the hypnagogic state of split reality when I could see both worlds at the same time. I also experienced glossolalia, which came on spontaneously after a few visits to Pentecostal gatherings, to which I was invited by some acquaintances.

Little by little I progressed in my occult skills. I learned about the banishing and cleansing techniques. I experimented more and became a lot less agitated and scared of various manifestations. Finally, I decided I had to find some like-minded people that I could feel comfortable discussing these subjects with and perform some work together. This is how I discovered the Spiritualist Society.

1 April 1936, Dies Mercurii
☉ 11° 16’ ♈, ☽ 8° 0’ ♌, First Quarter
10:00, Hour of Mars
Angel: Zamael, Intelligence: Graphiel, Spirit: Bartzabel

I’ve been a bookworm all my life, learning early that books are a boundless source of knowledge and entertainment. After joining the Society and gaining access to its extensive library, I could immerse myself in continuous study of many remarkable and rare volumes. John Dee guided me on haunting journeys of the Enochian realms. Swedenborg laid a firm foundation for my understanding of this world beyond the veil that pervaded my life at a tender age. A.J. Davis mesmerised me with his Stellar Key to the Summer Land. C.W. Leadbeater, Camille Flammarion, and Allan Kardec broadened my knowledge of various aspects of the supernatural even further. P.B. Randolph inspired and instructed me by his Dealings with the Dead and sublime White Magick of Love. Finally, William Blake overwhelmed all of us at the Society with his revolutionary approach to poetry and art, and his unique insights into the intricate structure of the spiritual realms. We competed about who would be the most proficient Blake expert, and prided ourselves each time we discovered a new revelation in “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell”, or “The Book of Urizen”, or “Vala”. This was the happiest time of my life. Every idea was novel and stimulating. In every book, in every experience, I unveiled new worlds of thought and imagination. I revelled and devoured them. I was a neophyte of the Mysteries!

Our leader, Arthur, is a writer. I guess, he gets the ideas for his novels from our research. He is a well-meaning, if a bit of an haughty man. He declares himself a descendant of chivalrous European Knights with the blood of Templars coursing in his veins. I wonder how much of it is actually true. His wife, Helena, is a medium. She is a pretty lady of extremely thin and pale complexion, as if she is always fasting. She teaches literature at school. It is, apparently, quite an experience to attend her class, since she is always in a near trance state, wavering on the brink of prophecy, gazing into the unknown. Martin, the eternal student, is very meticulous. He takes care of all the

Society's publications and financial dealings. He is a quiet and reserved person, extremely kind and polite. Lady Lydia, a woman in her forties, appears strong-willed and highly opinionated, which puts off many feeble-minded customers. But once you get to know her, you realise how knowledgeable and astute she is. There is Vlad, a Russian immigrant, always red eyed either from crying, or from lack of sleep, or both. He desperately desires to communicate with his family in any possible way. They all perished from famine and scurvy. A young couple, Samuel and Marie, I always wonder what brought them to the Society. hey seem to be constantly bickering about mundane matters. I think they desperately want a child and, for some strange reason, they decided that Spiritualism is their last resort. My closest friend, Jan, is about my age. He works at the printing press. We're always sharing thoughts and ideas. He's sceptical and honest and has proven himself an altogether virtuous fellow after many a night of drinking and debating. I trust him completely. This company constitutes the core of the Society. There are plenty of visitors, of course. Some of them stick around for quite a while.

But what a sorry bunch we are! Not at all like these so-called gentlemen's clubs I know, with their pompous regalia and secret congregations. Mindless debauchers, vile and depraved, pursuing all forms of pleasure and mutual benefaction. In their youth, they play the pranksters and rascals. When they age, they degrade into boundless avarice and vulgarity. While calling themselves the patrons of humanity, they in fact never spare a dime on anything philanthropical or altruistic. Pompously spewing some patriotic drivel, they are growing obese, gorging on wealth and profit. They do not give a damn about anything except their instant gratification. These shameless hypocrites dare to dictate the moral standards for society, propagating religious, military, and political values, while they themselves have no standards whatsoever. All their riches are ill-gotten, made from the blood, sweat and tears of the poor. We are not poor per say, and thankfully we are not exploiting anyone, but I feel like we are searching for something that would apparently make us even more miserable than we already are.

There was, however, a matter which brought us moments of extreme pleasure and rapturous titillation. Greatly inspired by the progressive attitudes and liberating revelations of Swedenborg, P.B. Randolph and Blake on the subject of sacred sexuality, we embarked on our own sex magick experiments, each on their own terms. Once we

achieved a desired result, we would share it with the group. Although my wife was not a part of the Society, I explained to her in precise details the fundamental stages that had to be implemented for the success of the ritual. She was generally sceptical of the supernatural side of the matter, but extremely aroused by the sensuality of it. The temple was in darkness but for one candle casting shadows on her naked figure, standing magnificent, radiant, like an ancient goddess incarnate, perfumed and adorned with jewellery. She aroused me with one touch, my body tingling and throbbing with energy. I could hardly concentrate on the words of the invocation. When we conjoined in blissful passion, I exploded. Even if most of the time we did not achieve the grand goals we posed for our love rites, we surely experienced what Randolph described as 'God power' and Blake called the 'Birthplace of the Lamb of God'.

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4 June 1936, Dies Jovis
☉ 13° 18' ♊, ☽ 0° 38' ♐, Full Moon
10:00, Hour of Mercury
Angel: Raphael, Intelligence: Tiriel, Spirit: Taphthartharath

It begins with a buzz, a prurience, a premonition of the otherworldly. Helena is in a complete trance, her eyes closed, she is drifting in ether. We hear a clap and then a white substance starts gradually issuing from Helena's mouth. It looks like a lumpy, cloudy liquid, like milk gone sour, though it does not drop to the floor but floats in the air.

"Ectoplasm!" Jan whispers into my ear.

A chair slides across the floor and slams against the wall. The room fills with rapping and banging. My mind starts swaying, as I lose my grip on reality and start envisioning shapes materialising around the room. Suddenly all the noise and movements seize. Helena opens her eyes and starts to speak.

There are times when her words pierce my whole being as a burning letter of God – profound, unfathomable truth. On other occasions, they sound like complete poppycock.

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This is just one of many accounts of séances and experiments I am discovering in my grandfather's papers. Most of them, however, are illegible, the ink is washed out, perhaps intentionally.

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15 March 1938, Dies Martis
☉ 23° 58' ♓, ☽ 11° 12' ♍, Full Moon
11:00, Hour of Moon
Angel: Gabriel, Intelligence: Shelachiel, Spirit: Chasmodai

Our communications with the spirits and occult experiments continue regularly. Unfortunately, they are taking a darker turn. On several occasions now, the ectoplasm emerging from Helena's mouth appears black. The room fills with crackling noises and the smell of burning sulphur. When Helena opens her eyes, they are glowing with utmost hatred and fury. She speaks in a low, coarse voice. It sounds ancient, but not in any tongue we know. It is something primordial and alien at the same time, as if coming from the Aeons beyond.

Slowly, we are starting to perceive their message. The first thing we grasped are their names, according to the words they kept saying after we repeatedly inquired of their identity.

Sorath, Bartzabel, Taphthartharath

The messages we are receiving are filled with images of enmity, torment, destruction, and death. We are delving into dark shadows. What we mistook for benevolent spirits trying to communicate some valid information concerning our lives, are in fact malignant forces, ugly devils pursuing their wicked agenda. There must be some transcendental evil permeating the air, the demons roaming the atmospheric realms, filling the minds with violence and spreading hatred. No doubt that we have tapped into something monumental, akin to the angelic hosts that Dee and Kelly invoked in the obsidian mirror, or the spirits which invaded Swedenborg's visions, or the celestial

beings Blake conversed with daily. I am convinced, however, that these are not the forces of good. Only the naïve and ignorant believe in the goodness of the higher powers. The ancient gods were selfish and hostile. Even the high and exalted God of monotheistic faiths appears arrogant and vengeful, once you scrape away the façade of righteousness. The Universe is permeated with the terror of the principalities, the evil powers, the rulers of darkness. There is wickedness in high places. The hellish, black sap of iniquity trickles down from the dark thrones onto the corrupt authorities, the rotten rulers of this world, and the evil spreads. Where can we find our Prometheus, who brings fire and rebellion to burn these idols off their wretched thrones?

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11 May 1943, Dies Martis
☉ 19° 35' ♉, ☽ 5° 46' ♌, First Quarter
15:00, Hour of Mars
Angel: Zamael, Intelligence: Graphiel, Spirit: Bartzabel

The war is raging, claiming thousands of lives and leaving countries in ruins. The Nazis banned all the mystical societies in Europe. We have to hide and keep our identities secret. Some of my friends have fled to America. There are rumours that the wretched Nazis themselves are using occult powers to advance their conquest. I've heard about bunkers filled with black witches and warlocks performing nightly rituals. May they burn in hell for all eternity! The accursed Himmler is making sacrifices in his dark castle. The Nazi elite is possessed by the hellish forces, driving them on a deranged roller coaster of death. Hitler himself is completely consumed by a mighty, demonic sovereign, turning him into a powerful tyrant. He was prepped in black rites by the toad-like hunchback, Ernst Pretzsche, and later was opened to the powers of Darkness through the murderous, sacrificial rituals performed by the nefarious Master Adept of the Thule Group, Dietrich Eckart. The principalities are pulling the strings and dictating their history. Nothing else can explain the absolute success and sheer power with which the Germans are advancing, or the multitudes of people in insane, hypnotic frenzy bent on slaughtering each other ruthlessly and deliberately. Why is there nothing we can do? An ultimate spell for good to prevail? No, the occult is not a science yet, it

is not a technology. We know too little. It is still an art, whimsical and intuitive. Crowley writes about will being the guiding force of magick, but even he, I think, realises that in the end, after he pressed the fairy under the glass and pinned her wings, there is still a volatile aspect that escapes. Whether our experiments or other occult groups' activities have drawn the attention of these entities closer and initiated their merciless onslaught is unclear. What certain is, we've made our bed, now we have to lie in it.

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13 October 1954, Dies Mercurii
☉ 19° 20' ♎, ☽ 3° 37' ♉, First Quarter
09:00, Hour of Saturn
Angel: Cassiel, Intelligence: Agiel, Spirit: Zazel

The war is long over and the world is still recovering from its destructive stride. I guess, there was some goodness left somewhere in the universe, which gathered its last resources and defeated the evil. Even though for quite a while the situation was looking rather grim and hopeless. My own war, however, is nowhere near the end. I am under attack. I keep having thoughts which are not my own. Vile ideas of violence and murder. They burst out of the blue and take over. Meditation time becomes a battle. My mental life is a constant struggle and it is wearing me down. Besides the oppression in my mental health, there is coercion from the power elite. Although I am a prominent member of the city council, and one of the directors in the largest construction firm, which has been involved in the majority of building projects, I never did what they wanted me to do, if you know what I mean. They were always playing it like the old royalty with bizarre gatherings and shady affairs in abandoned mansions. I was never a part of that. I guess, they always wanted to recruit me for their purposes, but now they realized it is too late and they want to do away with me.

I can smell the sulphurous stench of the dark Demon Urizen raising his leprous head in dismal woe. I can hear his roar, as he coils brooding as a Dragon wrapped in thunderous clouds. The perverse, viridian angel Ill conjured by the abominable Edward Kelley utters his blasphemous condemnations and sends them exploding in my brain. The accursed Apollyon, the destroyer, dispatches his stinging locusts to wrack my

thoughts and torment my mind. The impudent Ashmeday, king of the shedim, who deceived Solomon and drove him mad, is pushing me over the edge. The Gods of Ulro dark have launched a monstrous assault on my soul from the Synagogues of Satan with all their regiments and divisions. I don't know how long can I hold the line.

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21 December 1981, Dies Lunae
☉ 29° 20' ♐, ☽ 3° 39' ♏, Last Quarter
11:00, Hour of Sun
Angel: Michael, Intelligence: Nakhiel, Spirit: Sorath

I am in a hospital. Helena is writing this entry upon my request. Alas, I feel that this is the end. They finally got me. I saw the same hatred and disdain in that girl's eyes when she pushed me down the stairs, as I've seen a long time ago when Helena opened her eyes during those damned séances. I do not have much time left. Oh, what a fool I was. I only hope that my son will escape my fate and lead a better life.

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The sun came out, making the dust particles dance around the room in golden sparkles. Among the withered books piled on the attic floor I noticed a volume of William Blake's poetry and spent a couple of hours soaking in the elaborate words of this extraordinary man, controversial prophet and radical genius. I can now grasp, if just a little, the intricate realms my grandfather traversed. I have a strange feeling as if I myself am between two worlds, on the brink of something mystical happening, some apparition waiting to come out of the woodwork. I must contact Helena. I saw her at my grandpa's funeral, so, I presume, she still might be around. I have to ask her everything about my grandfather, the experiments, and the forces which caused his death.

One thing my grandfather was wrong about is his advice to my dad to lead an uninvolved lifestyle. Maybe it worked for my father in a certain way, even if he did not find grandpa's diary in the end, subconsciously my grandfather managed to instil this idea in him, and dad spent his live devoid of any struggle. But I differ and disagree. The new wars are stirring, new Hitlers are on the rise, possessed by Urizen and his

legions. They will sow peril and destruction, they will feed on the blood and misery of the common people. We cannot sit quietly. We must confront them. In these modern times, I am sure the occult sciences have been updated with new and advanced techniques. We are smarter today. We must take action. We must prevail!



Honnox

Andrew Condous

"Oh! Let every soul be free with its perihelion.
Let it be joyous when it loses Earth."

Alexandru Macedonski, Perihelie, 1886



THE WORLD has expelled me from itself into the dark flesh of another. I can no longer be left to my darkness as human beast settled in earthly pain and wound. Ensnared within this grotto with its fabric of darkness infused with a suffering light, I have become the sun that seeks its black rays; I have become the night sky that seeks its crumbling stars. I wait patiently, with my skeleton of mist enwrapped with reality and illusion for the image of silence. My body remains static as my haemal currents have settled into the bloodstream of sculpture. Inside me there is a contaminant of hollow bleakness that spreads and emulates the anatomy of the abyss, the apparatus of emptiness. Entangled in this ancient web, where ignorance fails to make an appearance, I also await the subterranean dawn.

I, Horacio, alone in my image, find myself entrapped, in a familiar hell, whose dark paths I had traversed and escaped from many times before. Hell's piceous gate, the gateway to the sombre columbarium of evil, is now sealed. There is no escape. I have been abandoned and find myself inside this scorched gate, tightly wrapped within a transitory cave, a cradle of gloom, directly above the pit of latent agony with its black cliff of silence and crags of inexpressible violence. I have gained an insectesque perspective within an arachnid snare. I am within an intolerable quarantine of senses before the conference with death.

Darkness falls upon darkness, light is lost within light. Light and darkness have crossed and formed a new crucifix. I am not a phantom waiting to receive its currencies of dark and light. There will be no saviours, no liberating thrust of angelic wings, no deliverance with a swell of beatific hymns and no crucified or golden haloed agents of salvation. There will be no dragons of holy light to devour the beast's darkness and no spill of holy waters from silver aspersoriums to extinguish the evil that glows beneath the ancient ashes. No nourishment from God will arise, no fervid heavenly flow of God's song of light, for I do not pray. We remain within two parallel solitudes; separated by all the spectrums of infinity, separated by the same incalculable time it took God to release the universe. There will be no access to the congested galleries of souls in the abyss of excessive light. I will not be entering that luminous trap ablaze with souls picked clean by dry light and that hold no shadow.

I retain silence within this infernal cocoon, for my voice here is costumed by the acoustics of hollows, conferring upon it an echoic, sinister quality of another unfathomable being. Here within this sheathing chthonian vesicle, everything that I have brought with me has not dissolved but remains

with me until the stealthy beast, the dispiteous devil calmly lurking in the depths of the pit with endless patience, exposes its thionic presence and breathes its hellfire with iniquity, unleashing the thermic tempest that will consume my soul.

Horacio was my birth name. My surname has fallen off from the steep precipice found at the edges of memory as have other severely constructed old stones of the past. My master, immediately upon accepting me into service with a carnivorous smile, a smile I returned with my own neuralgic version, dispensed with my name and imposed the new name of Horrox. To him, "Horacio" contained an inappropriate phonetic smoothness and a distracting lyrical quality, whereas "Horrox" was a name that to him was almost an epithet, a reflection of my features and circumstances. It was a name that he apparently constantly recycled, not without some pleasure. Although I retained my original name for my own inner journeys, I did not rebel against this imposition since my new name had an appropriate roughness that bound well to the external world and conferred a befitting status. Effortlessly, I had descended into the spiral of my new name and discovered all its toxic dimensions including the looped dimension of its history. Now, in this first station of death, I will inhume both names and immerse myself into the notion of myself and smoulder in my own essences.

Here in this hell trap, my last encounter with man returns to me again and again. A resurfacing memory, not too distant in time from when those visualised presences fell into my nets and spawned its duplicated creation, preserving this freshly dead passage of time. It was close in time to when I had entered through those black doors and crossed that final threshold into this infernal region of no escape. It is a memory that remains clear but its figures increasingly tremble with each recollection without distorting their features. This encounter occurred whilst walking through an alley to my daily horrors accompanied by my morning coughs that forced a reminder of my last meal, the accustomed soup of bitter plants. The deadly mantle of winter was weighing heavy and my direction was against a cold wind, unusually dry for this damp city. It was ceaseless and marbleized by dust of all shades of grey, giving me a distinct sense of being enclosed within it, reminiscent of a liquid experience.

I was passing the familiar swarms of animate and inanimate decay. Curious gaunt dogs were actively searching, testing living matter's scent of remaining time. The largest one momentarily froze and stared at me with the clear eyes of instinctive intelligence that concealed through its clarity a rising tide of menace and expectation. There was a singular, humiliated equine, of indeterminate breed, who had become one with its carriage forcing the impression of a deformed or abandoned mythical creature that had been released from its ceremonious and emblematic inexistence. It had its languid head hanging, weighed down by its breath, with its moist eyes focused on the exhausted dusty ground. It was envying its own black shadow, wishing to either become it or to slowly

and gently inhabit its soft caves. A couple of funereal birds, messengers of despair with mangled song, were indolently scratching the dust at the bottom of this dry well of existence, foraging for an overlooked crumb or unlikely lost worm, and only finding glimpses of the edges of emptiness. An isolated rat, captive of its shadow, with teeth of yellow stone and fattened only by its flocculent winter coat, was exposed and enervated by the grains of early sun. It was tuning its nocturnal instincts towards comprehension of the light. Its convulsing head indicated that it wished to quickly withdraw or lend its enlarged shadow and hide itself within the light with its paralysis.

The human mortals bound with their hoary rags, some with the boundless gesture of immobility, were almost indistinguishable from the few misshapen trees that had sprouted from the barren soil and were self-nourished by their own decay and ceaselessly stung and twisted by the discharges of waste and black poisons. The passing faces, when looked upon, had a dilatory impact on time, almost a momentary freeze, a temporary cessation of movement within my view. The forced appreciation with precision of a living portrait was imposed. Each and every one of these faces had either the contortion of the court jester or the distortion caused by the rack. To me, as always, there was a dense silence from the collective beings, not because none spoke, for agitated jaws and vacillating light could be seen, but by reason that each of their voices had formed an eclipse of one another, an abyss of voices.

This alley with its crumbling road where my blackened feet had traversed with a tightrope action was sided by the asperous and angular walls of grey architectures. Unornamented polyhedrons stamped only with black crucified windows and splinter haired doors. These were densely packed structures that may have been attached to other unsuspected structures, each having almost indistinguishable concentrations of rot and disrepair. Some were exhaling a monstrous effluvium blemishing both the morning air and the slumbrous traffic of collected moistures with a griseous stain and acidulous savor. Inescapable impressions immediately formed of grey destruction smouldering. Some of the structures were bleeding a congealing liquid saffron light from unseen wounds, the last vestiges of the ferruginous dawn. Each structure produced the illusion of being a reflection of another across the alley, with me holed within some unknown or unfinished dimension or abstract void, between fixture and mirror, between reflection and the reflected.

This alley was a diseased passageway of the city, a clogged artery that was one among many suffocating locations within this rapacious capital of an empire that did not seek to hide or remedy its inflictions. It was a location where neither memory nor forgetting had a place or function and only error and corrosion exist, a location whose inhabitants were oblivious in themselves, to themselves and of themselves. Denizens who collectively formed a silential chorus of weathered statues wholly immersed in still music and black light.

As I was closing in on my destination, a horizontal sprout of bruised light suddenly appeared next to my own black flower. A shadow that came from behind, swelling, enlarging with a slow geometry, eventually dwarfing mine, before transforming into the shape of flesh and blood. He was not tall yet still massive in his stature, aristocratic in his posture and expelled a distinct vibrancy that contrasted immeasurably to the surrounding bleakness and grey. It was a contrast that afforded him an unnatural luminance, forcing a resemblance to a deity in an animal frame.

As he walked past he looked down upon me with his wide eyes, each eye having an independent, separate look, a duality of perception. The first eye was glaring at me cryptically, suctioning my presence and assessing me through his labyrinth of reason, dissecting me with an analytical incisiveness. An eye that also extracted my image and seemed to immerse it into another logic, a neglected or alternate working of the mind. Although this first eye's power lay in what it absorbed and measured, the second eye's lay in what it projected, transmitted and instilled. It held a blazing gaze, a complex web of enamelled fire and ice, a marvel of opposites, which filled me with a strange empyreal exaltation, a sensation alien to my being or existence. It emitted a strange force, another radiating substance that mimicked light. A different fire, one that I imagined was ignited within the chameleon space of his mind, cultivated by its journey through an invisible, dimensionless maze, forged by preternatural capacities and flared at the visualisation of my presence. There was silence between us, for both of us hunted for our tongues to no avail. The fixtures of language and vocabulary with their bound perimeters could not in any case replicate the fiery blossoms that were forming. Still, I desired him to speak, to capture the music of his voice and decipher the secrets of its melodic contours and to also consume the purity of the useless words.

These observations and effects from his eyes quickly vanished when I noticed the book he was carrying (or was it the book that noticed me?). It was an achromatic book with a faux transparency that gave the immediate impression of being a living object, a beast that is at once living flesh and dead parchment. A book that appeared solid and corporeal in one light, yet apparitional in another. It seemed clenched within itself with the delitescent power of a closed claw advancing in on its prey or the intact power of yet to explode lightning. It was a book waiting with impatience to spill its miasmic images, ready to attack with art from the abyss of imagination, to release the images from the breathless space of page. It was a book eager to flay off its illegible words of unimaginable intensity, to disengage them from their cramped hovels of black ink; not neologisms, but a visionary language that contained iron nets cast by unknowable scribes. Art and language that I had apperceived sought to depict tangible beings from intangible, unimaginable creations, creations that could only exist in abstract dimensions, creations that thrive beyond the shadows of imagination.

The book's close proximity haunted me with a contrariant mix of fear and exaltation. A numinous terror took hold of me. This book was a predator, a forbidden fruit with full seed that I did not reach out for but had offered itself to me. A strange sensation had soon taken hold of me. I had felt a gathering presence inside my own, an inner texture of darkness, subtle at first, which became increasingly tremulous as it coalesced, as if it desired to leap outside of my body and escape. It felt as if no form could properly contain it and no current could possibly convey it. It excreted an aberrant force that sparked an oscillation of my perceptions. I found myself within a tapestry of time whose frames enmixed in a duality of both extension and reversibility. The two sides of time became indistinguishable. Distances and images converged and embraced until eventually everything surrounding me seemed to fuse into a miraculous fire, a tempest of miraculous fire that began to also blow and burn inside me, both silently and strong.

When the sensation disappeared, I had the distinct feeling that, irrespective of the experience of this strange phenomenon, I had appeared, externally, both expressionless and peaceful. I had pondered on this book's effects. Did the book induce the weapons of illusion and hallucination? Did it open a fissure that led me to an alternative and parallel space that was only open to me; an unknown fissure between time and time? Did it conain the powers of premonition, whereas that dark mass within me that the book had awakened and stirred was me, a future self, attempting the impossible escape, attempting to make time equal? Now within this cave of final resolution, there is little doubt in my mind which of these questions can be answered in the affirmative.

When I looked for him again, he was far down the alley, still detached from the decay, a shimmering distant mirage in this grey desert of stone and dust. A greyness that to me always seemed as if it was the residue or ash of an apocalypse of colour, that remained inherently volatile, that merely represented a rehearsal for black. When he had reached the edges of this infected wound of the city, a wound whose accident was lost, his legs, followed by his torso, slowly and incrementally melted into the ground as he moved down an unseen slope towards his shadow. He hesitated and then his decapitated head turned sharply around and searched for me, my body framed by the low cramped sun with its mane of scarlet lion. He launched a final lance with his glare that turned vermillion by the sun and angle before vanishing and leaving a lasting rupture across my inner horizons, adjusting my inner frontiers, an adjustment analogous in effect to a tempestuous night on a landscape frontier.

This is the only memory of the outside world that I now probe and reflect on, attempting to understand this otherness, the otherness of this man and his book that had confronted and commoved me. There is nothing else from the smoke of my past life that I regather here with the nets of consciousness. I do not look back and seek the

bloodied and blackened tracks left upon the luminous cleft between the two dark abysses, between the pre-natal configuration and the post-mortem expectation. I have always attempted to push time into the unconscious, letting it sleep there, hoping it eventually dissolves into nothingness, for nothingness is as it could not have been. Not all burning moments have found a grave, for my mind remains a whirlwind strewn with wreckage and debris.

The soporific lull of the wait in this hell cage is leading me into a temporary oblivion and fog of sleep, an oblivion that will be ruptured by dreams. My dreams are the lightning strikes that divide the interior night. A light exploding from within the tangled folds of darkness imprisoned within my skull's cavern, an exclamation of the darkness within. It is a light that forces open the infinite and that which has been erased. My conscious thoughts are now set to flee like vipers and rats before a conflagration. I am drifting away.

Darkness shivers into light and I have entered into an innovative existence within the unknown side of time. I am in a state of vertiginous unstableness. An unsolvable multi-sensory puzzle is before me. There is a drunken storm of shadow perception. There is an eruptive release of the neglected and suppressed areas of imagination that my unconscious struggles to steer. My dream sight cannot settle, cannot grasp and hold onto anything. Images are constantly spilling from my given eye, below me, and into the air, spilled images that are morphing into other senses, dissolving into noise, decomposing into smells, deliquescing into liquid heat, crumbling into other senses alien to the external world that could only be realised in this limitless oneiric space. Light and stone are indistinguishable, rocks of light crash into each other, blocks of transparency rise. Inexplicable shades and mixes of colours representing past emotions are being excavated from the fossil strata of my unconscious, a polychromatic frenzy of emotions. Fluctuations in temperature are disassociating images, rearranging them elsewhere in isolation or in clusters and in different forms, images with the imprecision of carvings made by crude knives.

Stability makes an appearance. My dream eyes settle into their orbit.

He was awakened from the deep sleep of history, and has come through a door of black space into the reservoirs of memory and imagination, purloining the deepest and darkest conflations of supplies born of the unconscious. He has entered into my theatres of dream. My begetter, the sole owner of my first years, is chained in a cell within a dungeon. The dungeon is a howling auditorium of suffering that is filled with the voices and echoes of many tongues. Seismic lamentations, coursing through the cell, each with no terminal relief, each seemed lost and eternally trapped within this mouldy stone labyrinth, many having outlived their originator. Cries, solemn and shrill are being absorbed by the stone, joining the fossilised screams and cracks of brutal echoes. Steams of moans exhaled from the underground are collecting into black murals on the ceiling. An abysmal

rumbling momentarily surfaces before withdrawing back to its deep hollows. There is a shaggy, uneven mix of various depths of darkness and shades of light, with different volumes; not governed by any identifiable source; for there are no windows, no candles nor torches. It is an incoherent re-assembly, a reanimation, of the two great myths within dreams, of night and day. A fluctuating current of air, that could only be self-propelled, graces my dream skin. Not of fluctuating velocity for this is uniform and consistent, but of temperature. A flow of increasingly cold air that at intervals is unexpectedly replaced with a seething burst of inflamed air vented from a cauldron hidden within the folds of dream space.

Drenched in agony, poised over a darkening eddy of shadow, he has hairless flaking skin and craters of old wounds tightly enwrapped around his skull. His face is the same with the exception of a complex system of dry tributaries governed by the unnatural dense fluviology of an alien world, a delirium of facial geography. There are wrinkles and cracks that are eating down, extending from his face to his desiccated neck and serpentining across his shoulders. Wrinkles and cracks that are transmitting their own language of despair and suffering, a strange hieroglyphic language plagiarised from the annals of hell.

A voice, his voice, is detached from space, from the depths of the blackened pits of memory. It stirs a commotion in the air, does not know its place, gets lost, and reappears. Broken phrases, whispers suddenly convert into vociferations and back again: something about childhood and its savage and savaged innocence; allusions to a forgotten ancient evil still carried involuntarily as heritage; something about visits to the merchant of shadows and purveyor of illusions, purchases of failed secrets, purchases of falsidical faith, treasuries of accumulated dust and ash; insistence of breathing the masked dead air of the holy chambers with their crackling gold and silver and silent crucified man - visitations to the ineffective scarecrow churches that overlook this exhausted city of weed. The voice is then reflected, its own echo clashes with it, mutual annihilation. The voice is silenced leaving only a residue of trembling heat. The unseen black serpentine tongue flees back into exile.

We momentarily swap our positions, the dream fiction is reversed. Through this involuntary displacement, I have also gained his body and have access to his inner carvings. I feel its age, its hungers, and its heaviness. It still carries its burdens, its wounds of the past. A burning fever kindles in his flesh. I feel the relentless inner barbs. He is being devoured at the core by a malignant texture of darkness, an inner blackness, the darkness of his history. I feel his mask, palpitating with the exhaustion of a trapped wild animal, it hides its multifariousness. I know some of the alternative faces that have secreted into his mask, the others, the most tormented, remain a distressing anonymity. I have also borrowed his eyes, it grants me an acidic vision, I look down and see his wasting limbs, his arid hands and his broken feet. I look across and see myself bound with the chains. How

strange it is to see oneself in the mirror of dreams, how incalculably strange to see my ageless face and to see with another's eyes the tortured wavering light within the onyx orbs fastened to my own sockets.

It occurs to me, within this cave of shadow illusion, that I have never seen myself in an actual mirror, never had the opportunity or need. The decrepit and crumbling series of nests I have inhabited could never contain such a feature, nests where the lighted sections were the black parts of the rooms and the lamps or candles refused to celebrate the night. I was in a sense faceless, maskless to myself, yet never uncertain of whom I was. There has been the impatient dark shape I momentarily see when passing windows, a shape obscured and defaced by the caked dirt and dust, the uneven pane and skeletal frame. There have been the flashes of an uncertain, submerged catoptric being, that I witness near the surface of feculent dark pools which occupy the city's ubiquitous craters after rain or the city's imprinted liquid snake with its disharmonious mix of infuscated liquid and light. This intangible being was rendered malformed and featureless by the caliginous fluid; compacted and compressed by my angle; almost indistinguishable from my shadow that sometimes framed or polluted it.

I know well my day shadows, in all their forms, whether in the design of an appended pool of mud that I continuously tread in the middle of the day or the giants stretched by the low suns. It is by the latter, through their exaggerated, magnified frames, that certain parts of my features were revealed and highlighted. The night shadows, in contrast, even under a full white-green moon revealed nothing, not because of any obscurity, but because they seemed to me to be detached, a tenebrific leakage from another being, separate entities, spectatorial shadows. The only exception was when the shape-shifting, fractured version appeared, the tortured ghost layered by the moon when it gazed with its swollen citrus eye through the bars of a cirrus lattice. Through this bletcherous night shadow form, I had been able to extract a modicum of my designer's hesitancy, uncertainty and compunction.

Now before me with the clarity and constructions of dream, with its paints of colours and shades, I finally see a version of my full physical self, its total physical dimensions. The knots and nodules of my tempered flesh are tightly bound by a cadaverous integument; the flesh's housing skin with its deathly pale pigmentation. This pigmentation is broken by islands of encrusted tattoos from stains and scars of an enforced vocation. A skin mapped with a criss-cross history of discipline, the master's stamped seal of pain, the fading red ribbons from the strokes of the cat and cane. The hands and feet are ruins, stigmata of continuance. The skeletal imprint pushes through, wishing to escape the conquering flesh, my skull yearning to disentomb from my face and head, to disconnect from my distracting eyes.

Not a construction of perfect replication I suspect, but very close as far it relates to my body, for my dream has the benefit of sourcing through

memory what can be ordinarily directly seen and felt outside dream and this has been supplemented by these dark shades of reflections and shadows. My face in contrast has always been a mystery, unknown to my eyes, yet one I have never contemplated in any depth. Sometimes, a strange and complex sense of familiarity arises when I look upon ruins, where my imagination carves and animates faces from the unnatural angles, sharp protrusions and fragile holes. When I stared fixedly at the holes of these conjured faces, my eyes and these phantasmal eyes of my own creation become joined in a wound of reality.

Here I see my face now, what it could be. An empty space of mind now filled with dream fabric, moulded by the accumulation of insights from the womb of self-knowledge, feeble self-perception and the reactions from others when staring at me directly or through shifting glances. Perceptions, insights and reactions the dream sculptor, a creator who acts as a substitute god, has exhumed from suppression.

I turn my hard gaze on my own eyes from the other world, a looped stare with its closed system of vision. Between us (me) presence is at once alternate and simultaneous with two multi-rooted, multi-branched selves embracing and annulling each other, summing to zero. A distant cataclysm suddenly shakes the cell but not its walls and the dream shifts again. Our bodies realign and I have returned back behind my own eyes and into my own emancipated husk, back into a singular dream existence. I search the cell for any other dream sculpture. We are alone. Why has the other not arisen from the abyss into dream life? Why cannot she be orchestrated from the fabric of the unconscious and join the dream narrative and become a living absence? My dream cannot break the tyranny of death. To me she will always remain a native of the abyss. An invisible hand from an arm of extinguished phosphorus delicately presses on my shoulder. It burns.

I look upon the prisoner again. His body is still kept firmly erect by the tensions of the chains that are acting as a substitute for his languishing tendons, flesh and collapsing bones. His vagarish eyes are searching relentlessly with increasing speed and obtaining the sharpness of the eyes of prey trapped within a hostile inextricable maze, until they settle and he looks at me. His look although directed towards me appears to be consuming another space or veiled dimension. He is looking through and beyond me as if he was searching for my shadow, a residue of my past, or as though I was a prison wall that he had noticed for the first time. His eyes are transmuting. An albicant process is converting the red cracked yellow and black, into the all-white of unsoiled snow. He ceases to consume the light or darkness of this dream space, a double or triple blindness has taken hold. The pure white does not hold fast for the protruding niveous hemispheres are becoming stained by what seems to be slow moving images, reflecting what may be his own dream.

My own dream focus magnifies and sharpens the moving images. It is a farrago of giant black

crosses, banners, tall candles and baldaquins floating and jostling on top of a great moving tide. The image becomes greater still, and I can now see the tide's disturbed surface, a coarse undulation of creatural appendages and heads.

The event is hurled at me and I find myself in this dream within a dream. The mass becomes fully clarified. It is a crusade, pilgrimage or exodus of human forms; an advance, return or retreat. It is a great horde of the most unexpected combination. There are lepers with rusted bells attached to their rotting animal skin robes which are almost indistinguishable from their own hides. Useless bells, for there is no one here exacting a warning call from their discordant chimes that are released at each step. There are bedlamites, now turned serious, identifiable by their determined frozen faces of delirium. The furnaces of delusion and irrationality that would be burning severely in their minds are being subjugated and tamed by the marching beat. There are those, deformed through birth, accident or torture, displaying through their strides and resolute faces, an impetuous and ferocious power, a power sculptured by the deep footprints left behind, a power evincing that their afflictions are numbed by the polydipsia for their destination. Each has pushed into the realm of oblivion their knowledge of their body's form and the burden of their breath. There are slaves, some whose backs are swollen, carrying the appearance of concealed folded wings about to sprout. None of the slaves are carrying their primordial submissive humility. Their unwavering eyes shine with a primitive force, their chins are sharp and raised like monarchs, their nostrils have the flare of a commanding general's that is scenting the spill of enemy blood and the imminent resounding victory. There are a great many others inflicted by every conceivable harrowing pestilence or adverse human condition and infection. They are of all ages. There is every scale of suffering represented. This is a great swarm of human monstrosity that is magnificently enhanced by its collective determination and discipline. This is a magnality at once terrifying and wondrous, a collective sanctification of the grotesque and suffering.

All are moving in unison, in an ordinate formation that establishes an immense rectangle of military precision with rows linked by shadow, solidifying it into a crawling organism of singular frame. Thin tributaries are linking into this organised mass, comprising of those that are drifting in from nearby chimney smoking villages to join the marching legion and its purpose. All are marching in complete silence, the only noise being the drum of their steps and the bell chime from the lepers. Sporadically an unclassifiable brief disturbance, an undiscoverable phenomenon, ruptures their silence, what can only be roughly and inaccurately described as a noise or chant emanating from mouths stretched in concert in the form of a bottomless yawn or battle roar. It is an inconceivably strange music of the collective voice that would otherwise be unimaginable outside dream, impossible to be generated by the natural physical laws of vibrations and of such

incomprehensibility that no musical notation could possibly capture it. This is a phenomenon of conclamation that is digging tombs within my dream mind and filling each with the stench of time past.

The procession is being led by what appears to be some priest, isolated at the head of this most unusual flock. His extended arms are above his head where he is firmly holding a book. At regular intervals one of those marching break line and accelerate their pace leaving behind only their shadow. He or she marches in parallel to the priest. It is not clear whether any words are being exchanged or the seeking or granting of absolution, the later at least is doubtful as the priest never ceases holding the book above his head.

Upon inspection as I close in, still within my hovering somnial mist that allows me to observe and not participate in the spectacle, a detonation of recognition almost ruptures the nebulous dream membrane. It is him. The book, it is that book. They have entered through my dream of my father's dream for another encounter. He is identical except for the scarlet robe and his eyes. Both eyes now share that same luciform gaze, that new light. His lips move in silence. Although retaining its bestial countenance, muscular latent power and ambiguous luminosity, the book is somewhat different. It has a stronger existence within this realm of dream. Not mere part beast, part book and beyond vivid being and expressive artefact. It has become a veritable angel or variable demon. It holds a fierce majesty as it floats through the air, at that higher level above everyone's heads, leading its allegiant flock of black crosses, banners, tall candles and baldaquins.

An image slowly emerges upon the cover of the book that faces the direction the mass is moving to. The image is not entirely stationary, as there is movement, a distinct agitation and turbulence. It is a live city. I cannot ascertain immediately whether the book is acting as a mirror and reflecting this city from afar, or whether it is a derivative of the book's treasury of illumination, or whether this city is a depiction of the book's own dream. What is almost certain is that this city is the desired destination of the entirety of the moving mass.

As I am being entranced by the revelation of the identities of the two leaders of this horde, the city maquette reaches its full dimension and I suddenly find myself before the walls of the city. I have entered what may be the book's dream.

This city occupies an arid wasteland devoid of any verifiable existences other than the bed of sand and the vault of a sky that is unblemished by any stratospheric or cosmic intrusions. Both the sand and sky have an identical granular copper chromatic with a black tinge that, in unison, completely annihilate the evidence of any horizon and tones the windless atmosphere with the same hue. This is a city within the un-mappable world of a uniform topography, a city wholly contained within an all-encompassing desert of land, sky and air in ceaseless copulation.

As I view this city from the outside, standing with my feet submerged in the soft copper sand, it

appears to me to have the anatomy of a fortress built to withstand the assault of an uncommon enemy with a forinsecal constitution and creative ambition. Its perimeter is constituted by a dense wall of cold black fires that have consumed their own heat and light, emulating the shadows of flames, the shadows that each flame imposes on one another. An invisible magnetism gives this wall the vertical attentiveness of its stone equivalent, a status of fixture. A magnetism that imposes the traditional flat and angled geometry of walls that is in total contrast to, and in direct conflict with, the geometry of chaos instilled within the swirls and oscillations of the contained dancing black flames. A strange and expressive skin or exoskeleton for a city to have, that seems to have an inexplicable function beyond protection or encasement.

My vantage point allows me to discern the upper half of the buildings, if they can be termed as such, that have congregated within this city. These inimitable buildings are on the edges of the indescribable. They are not designed to accommodate human or any tactile form whatsoever. They have been constructed in the most curious fashion with unconventional geometry, ghostly geometry. They have angles, slopes, curves and volumes of the most uncompromising scheme. Their costume is constructed from materials woven from a variety of indeterminate substances, new elements. There are no signs of any occupants. The windows, or more accurately holes or possibly wounds of indeterminate depth or purpose are empty of light or tenant. These buildings seem ill-fitted to their allocated dream space and provoke unease, a sense that they are neither dead or live matter, but that they fall within an unknowable space in the spectrum that spans both sides of death. These buildings lie somewhere in the narrow band between shaped, sculptured death and formless, amorphous life. They require alternative arts of comprehension, unavailable even within the malleable and expansive sphere of dream, to ascertain their purpose and true form of existence.

A small section of the wall before me commences to morph into the state of stability. The black fires within this section are congealing into a black hole, what could only be a gate or open door and a sign for me to enter. I overcome a multi-angled state of indecision and commence my approach with heavy desert steps towards the gate. As I am about to be absorbed into the city, the black flames that immediately border the gate seem to flinch, giving me the impression of fear, that they are viewing me as some form of saliferous or other pain inducing contaminant.

Within the city there is a droning acousam emulating what could be the music of black stars at the edge of time, the last songs of skeleton suns as they join the celestial exodus. It is dark, black. The copper washed vision of the city has been replaced with the opacity of an interior night. I sense the wall of non-burning fire, the skeletons of fire, blazing behind me. The buildings cannot be seen, they have vanished, lost within the beaming darkness or concealed within the folds of this night.

My dream eyes are adjusting to the darkness, thickening their focus, and I start to ascertain filaments of edges and delicate contours of borders. It creates the dreamscape impression of emptiness entirely filled with irregular blocks of space. A nocturnal asymmetry that contains countless aleatory domains issued from the loins of nothingness.

I am convinced that each block contains an unfathomable content beyond fixed comprehension. A content that can only be properly ascertained and understood with a boundless imagination driven by a manifesto of anarchy, a faculty of imagination that is in a different league to that entrusted to me or my dream architecture. I somehow know that the man I had met, the one with the theandric presence and who holds above his head in a different sphere of existence of my own unconscious creation, a book whose dream I may now be encased in, could, with the roaring fires of his imagination, his maps of art and the revelations of that book, extrapolate and witness the content of this city's inner membrane.

An intrusion suddenly erupts. There is an invasion of my dream consciousness by an unverifiable source, possibly half-emerging or half-retreating from outside dream, what could be some form of mutualised source of the ether and netherworld. It is sparking a new dream awareness, guiding me, throwing torchlight across this night. All my dream senses converge, my dream imagination is amplified. An unprecedented feature of imagination also arises, as if it was being borrowed from elsewhere.

I can now strongly sense the constitution of these blocks of space. Each block is governed by its own deity with its quivering flesh of chaos and silent eyes of implicit observance. Deities with their arrows of light dipped into the endogenous flame and fired at no target, that only swallow the darkness, spewing it out in shadow. They wave their blazing torch of time that ceaselessly undresses the fabrics of nothingness, letting them shine and also swelling the dust with their hidden scintillation. Their imaginations have constructed their own Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso, realms captive of their own symbol and with their enforcers hiding behind their name.

Each deity is oblivious of the others, each eternally questioning itself through self-inflicted mirrors, and like the delusional artist, creates through un-creation their own emblems of the conscious and unconscious. They are in an unending war with the relentless armies of ruin, decay, disease, wound and death that seek to nullify their uncreation. They are not born of any struggle, not spawned from chaos and chance, and not formed by order and formula. They are gods that exist through their inexistence and tremble at the recognition of the reality of nothingness, its indivisibility and the unreality of all. They are gods that continuously ponder at the unsolvable creative riddle of the abyss and the unfinishable fact of existence. Gods who weep at the all-encompassing infinity, for there is one and only one infinity, and that singularity is their limitation, their frontier, their finiteness and their self-contained casket.

Even within this casket, their infinite attention is annulled by their infinite expectation - nothingness. This is coetaneously a living city and a catacomb of gods.

I am perplexed at the revelation of this city, uncertain as to whether the book is dreaming or instead is letting me witness a crumb of its actual content, a fragment of a possible secret scripture or euchologion on unreality and letting me do this through the only mechanism possible, through a dream within a dream, through a city's fabled gates. A question I cease pondering since a dense acid mist has started to form, draping the theatre. The mirage of the desert time of sleep, the illuminating interim that is dream dissolves. The flash of oblivion returns, a flash that unites night with night.

The night is startled once again and I feel the grip of the teeth of entrapment, I sense its latent bitting crush. I know I have left the asylum that is the cave of sleep and have been re-infected with consciousness and that I again hound the void with my thoughts. I am once again within the architectures of familiar time, within the frames of a transitory and malignant present, on the wave of an illusory perpetuity of instants. I also know the beast is closing in. It is determined. It has decanted my wait long enough. I can feel the tremors of its final preparations. It is blossoming within the darkness, its roots are gorging on the fertile pitchiness, spikes are blooming, ashes resuscitated, its pact with fire is enforced with sharpened blades of flames being summoned, and a rebullition of black blood storms its veins. It is readying itself to burst through and inflict its spiritual terror, to clutch my soul with talon and fang, lacerate it with paroxysmal intensity, scorch it with its fiery breath and consume the threshing wreckage through a journey of its hells, infernos and furies. The verdict has ripened in my mind, a tremor of anxiety possesses me that is the echo of an irrision from an uncompromising source, the devil's laughter no doubt (or is it God's?).

My body grows heavy. My mind grows even heavier, weighed down by the muculent remnants of my dream. I am still partly anchored to the dungeon, to the trodden field and to the city. There are crude resurgences of now imprisoned images that have been transported in a river of silences, from the abstract sphere of propelling dream into the shell of living memory, into uncertain consciousness. I see again the rhythmic images of the denizens of the dream: select visages of the uncompromising horde, the faceless czars of the city of gods who inhabit their own transparency, the face of my father ruptured by the dream inflicted lineaments and my self-portrait painted with black mirrors. I sense strongly the black void, the blackness of the absence, that hole that could not be filled even in dream. I am perplexed at the inestimable scale of this abyss. Nothing can diminish its magnitude, and only nothing.

The last memory of the alley returns, it is tainted by a vein of imagination or expectation. The dogs have mapped the scents and bark, the rat is dragged by its impatient shadow and flees, the

birds soar into the air with the power and focus of unhooded falcons and the equine furiously rasps the hard dust with its hoof. The humans remain unchanged, remain undecided masses of living matter, stagnant in the grey ruins, but I now hear their voices. Intermingled and dominant is an unexpected voice, from someone who was not in the alley at the specific time who should not be within the closed system of that memory. It is the voice of my master. He is conveying orders, in a grating voice, encountering resistance, tempers crack the air, the resistance fails. The orders are not directed towards me.

My dream visions, and the memory of that encounter within the grey art of the alley, of the man and his sibylline book, enmix and a new blend arises that creates, imposes a new perception. Flesh and book have merged into a single entity, a fusion of both fluid mind and imprisoned word. The man and the book together have become the manifestation of a prophecy and the illusion of a theophany.

My dream remnants and memories now withdraw into their palimpsest sanctuaries. Above me hovers a dilapidated opalescent light that is pitch-grey stained by a static cloud of floating ash, defying the spectre of gravity. A light that has found its tomb at the end of its final anfractuous journey and a static cloud which is now being stirred and awakened by the spiritistic cries of the amputated tentacles of gusts of winds. Gusts and ash that are now spawning upon my canvasses of imagination, vile, cinereous demons with hidden teeth, each feverishly circling their prey, readying to devour the gleaming entrails of dead ghosts.

A mere ventage reveals to my consuming eyes and confirms to my inner eye the temporary blackness of the pit below me, cool and impassive in its latency. Temporary, since a faint glow now erupts through this ventage. A glow that also penetrates my locked border, thickening and creating a luminous halo that enwraps my fermenting and suffocating body; before revealing within its concentrated clarity, the claws, encrusted with the crystallised blackness of fossilised fire, that tightly grip me. Assurgent warmth now bathes my swollen bare feet, effortlessly penetrating their numbness. A freshened ash spewed from the ascending ignified air starts to fill my lungs. I, Horrox, failed merchandise, do not need to imagine the writhing red-swollen limbs, climbing, funnelling to loosen the blockage and clear this flue.

The intense whiteness of the moment is a counterweight to my scream.



The Secret Wound in Life

Joseph Dawson

"THOU art drunken, O my God, upon my kisses."

Crowley, LIBER LIBERI VEL LAPIDIS LAZULI



By WHAT AGENT can all or anything be said to push past attributes
To Being Itself beyond the vanishing present,
Past all freedom to condemn or forgive, outside movement
And the weighted scales of circumstance and sorrow, beyond
That precious bond of years whose end is all times end,
With whom the double fountain conceives its love,
Giving to our lady there, a garden within which the heavy burden
Of our labours bloom? Is there not That whose Will is All, before which
The unflinching tide of life believes itself to be by contract,
Love or state its brother and inheritor?
Regard here these ordered lines, these subtle forms and ceremonies
Whose efforts here upheave into the common run of signs
Instantiated worlds, timid and uncertain of the colour they must contain.

Upon the centres straight edge standing, the silent other passes by.
Imagination births a glyph of trailing stars in exhalation;
A terror and a wonder to those below whose lives are given
To the Unvarying mean, to those in love with the necessity
Each circling movement mends; that self-same, self-creating Will
Whose power and worth is Being and Prophecy itself.

The centre holds - unfrontiered by any great event in time.
Here that self-same spirit speaks again, interpreting afresh
Its meaning and its form where each separate motion self- refines
In dissolution the scope of all attainment, to better mask those thoughts
Whose shadows still imagine with the perfume of eternity,
Dumbly waiting for the promise that was made and meant for each.

From the centre rose Imaginations laws, cornerless and infinite,
Whose arch of Being is all experience, whose strength goes
Unpredicted by any of its living parts, whose strength is all the worlds' strength,
Whose word forbears the mirror world of implied forms
With which that shadow-hating other, so enamoured,
Lives amidst the spectral dead, grim and unremembering.

Beneath that unseen crown of glory; the first and final phase of all epiphany,
Material proves in measure that mercy builds up each
Stark and mighty form whose firm foundations, heaven high,
Match the more than profound depths from which they spring.
These Giants hold a power proper to each state enclosing
In the womb of Mater bright visions of eternity half-imagined to unlock.

Our first fathers, having seen, fixed the pattern of their soul to mean and measure
So that they might better know the other whose five-fold pattern is a masterpiece
Of perishable stars which come to us in temporary nescience to which,
Each form, horizon bound, is sunken. The way is clear.
When free, there is virtue and authority, fecundity and wonder,
Whose power is playful goodness, a spiral of self-accumulation.

Gracious spirit, doubly enthroned, whose child is both master and lover
To that half-seen heaven whose stature, given into wondrous consequence,
Spreads like daylight over all, a multitude of inherited powers.
This nature, in Itself secure, augers certain destinies
With gifts of patient mastery, whose first instruction mantles attributes,
Whose letters, well constructed, give a name to all that number can encompass.

Lovely Virgin, immeasurable and elusive whose movements
Concentrate and simplify. Through seven stages you instruct us
Towards that crowning good which lettered men call peace.
You recover to yourself a mind beset with images whose charms
Obstruct. Tamed to your bidding are the laws of resurrection
Whereby the mental-fight continues amidst a garden planted innocently.

You, who without error, our errors never overlook but hold in state
All forms with silent inhalations yet multiply and nourish
When your breath goes forth creatively. Here there is no rest.
The far horizon curving downward into darkness is the plaything of
A moon advancing, clothing in mercy the allowance Justice cannot give.
Behold now the web of all our doing and the hour of change that comes.

You secure in happiness the constellation of whole action.
Through labrynthine paths everything traverses rhythmically towards
Its centre which is that Terror, that Beauty whose light is inexpressible.
Here change is irresistibly achieved and slowly does the work advance,
For the knot the nine tie must knit before attainment is accomplished
The nothingness of clay to that which has been authored mercifully.

He stumbles who neglects to take his brothers hand. The way is difficult
And all that has gone before expires once again before naked infinity.
The One who is unfolded, unfolds each act of power
Whose ground of Being stirs everything to mortal speech,
Whose Word outweighs all tomes of learning, whose
Light instruction fits our thoughts and vision to completion.



If the trees are ancient,
Are their shadows solemn?

If love goes unexpressed,
Is holiness increased?

If the lamp is bright,
Does youth remain attentive?

If you make your bed in a dream,
Does your house remain unkempt?

If humbled before oneself,
Is the position unconquerable?

If made bitter sweet with wine and pain,
Does the world exist without?

If dust on the road is hot,
Does labour cease?

If speech is purified,
Does the garden flourish?

If broken on the wheel of the world,
Does the spirit wander?

If the God is the bull of his mother,
Who then are his people?

If the perfect work is stillness,
What then follows on?

Old age loves what love has lost,
Repairing old and broken thrones, finding in its greying bones
A lustre living still, scoring out its seasoned path,
Suffused in tinted glows, a light that autumn branches know,
At length disclosed the passionate lie that youth has told.

Wisdom loves what age has lost,
Its crooked back, sorrow bent, severe; a rend for every tear.
Unforgiving innocence has breathed upon the path.
Morning in its Evening arms in love with one another sing
Embrace then die, each shattered in its demi-paradise.

Faith loves what reason has lost,
By turns the author of our need; chanting out its ordained creed
Into whose hands a thousand times upon the path
Receives the tyrant benefactor till history with wounds is sore,
Yet confounds itself with another kind of wonder still.

He calls to me insistently,
The cup is dry, the rim is stained,
Upturned it feeds the tables grain;
This other self in mimicry

with crowning mute appeals bind
Aureal light and shadow play,
tasks the heavy lided eye
with semblances more refined

than memory; this rose red wine
the somnolent hours baffle
with sobering forgetfulness
And calls each here to now enshrine

Beyond the gloom of vagrant forms,
The wild surety of changing hours,
Unsealed Form and Fervour;
How invincibly it warms!

Right the cup, revivify!
Unshackle from the House of Dark
What seemed most faint and fleeting.
Give back to life its strong reply!

Give back to every passer by
The stillness of that upper world
Whose guiding spirit recreates,
Whose light will overtake us all.

I
SHALL
s e a r c h
thee out
in the ghost of
every volume
whether profane or
devout. In Will or on
your sisters loom. In
draughts from thy horse
formed fountain Among the earth
that bears your print. In the sweet
clear air of mountains. In a swirling
mass of time. In the footsteps of idle wan-
derers. In all places conceivable. In the eyes of
hidden brothers. Among the hazel, alder, yew and
birch. In the antique thought of hungry scholars. In
carved icons, a withered eastern church, In priest craft
fraught with tired energy. In the pattern of unforgiving
stars. In a phial full of mercury. In an alphabet of trees. In an
enneads whirling symmetry. I shall search thee out In the silence
of my lonely room. And weigh the stone of doubt In a philosophick
language. Among the pleasures we die in. I shall search thee out In that
parasitic image. The unravelling twin, Painted still upon the face of life. In
some experimental effort Or in the burning ray of glory Imagine I sought thee
through despair. In the whim of every mythic plot. The gorgons face or Selene's
mare. A field of wheat, an earthy clot; Yet still you yield nought. Thou, barren planet,
poets' patron Loneliness alone thy wealth has bought And unremitting doubt, or bouts
Of hope to keep thy servant dancing.





Burnt the Fire of Thine Eyes?

Oliver Smith

"THE lights were out in London, and over all the earth
terror crept like a man without a face."

Kennet PATCHEN, JOURNAL OF ALBION MOONLIGHT



It was April 20th 1820. A dozen barrels of gunpowder had gone astray from the armoury and there was talk of assassination. In the accounting office, Mr Pomfrey searched through a pile of invoices and ledgers desperate to determine where and how it had been diverted. Solomon Asquitte leaned over his desk and whispered, "Surely, any enemy of Great Britain would want to keep King George alive as long as possible, the better to ruin our finances and our reputation."

"That is treason," Pomfrey said, "nothing but treason."

This small treason gave him some reassurance that no larger one was afoot. Mr Pomfrey renewed his investigations of the figures with increased enthusiasm.

"But," said Edward the common clerk, "the theft may have been conducted by patriots for the same purpose."

At this Mr Pomfrey broke into a sweat.

"Indeed," said Asquitte, "remember, King Charles divided the nation so much that the nation divided the King."

Edward drew his finger across his throat to illustrate the point of royal division.

Mr Pomfrey beat his fist on the table, "I will not have your treasons in my office," he said, "any more of this and I'll have you both transferred to the West Indies."

As the difficult day wore out, the arguments grew hotter and the accusations colder. Pomfrey sat dwarfed by the dreadful columns of numbers in the victualling books. He sweated and fretted over the Sisyphean complexity of the additions and subtractions. A great arithmetical boulder had rolled upon him and it would require an Archimedes or a Newton to budge it. The perspiration stood out on Mr Pomfrey's brow and he ran his fingers through his hair and tugged his ears, worried that any moment there would be an explosion from the City and Jacobins and *Sans Culottes* storm the Admiralty. He laboured through pages of victuals and supplies, all listed in the chancery script. The hands of the clock drifted through the long slow seconds, through tortuous minutes and through galloping hours. Each shilling, each penny, each pound he recalculated as the sands of time trickled away like cash through the King's fingers. As the light dimmed towards six, Mr Pomfrey untangled a particularly problematical piece of Asquitte's accounting; the spidery figures on the page swirled before his eyes and the complex knots of numbers resolved themselves into a satanic and terrible form. There at the centre of the devil's sheep-shank was a transposed figure.

"Solomon," he said, "the weather is terribly chilly in London. I hear the Indies are wonderfully hot all year round. You will let me know won't you..?"

Solomon wept and Mr Pomfrey laughed all the way along the corridor and past the portraits of Frobisher, Drake, and Nelson. The powder was accounted for, the King safe, and he was free to leave.

Outside the Admiralty building he purchased a few roasted birds from the Costers at Charing Cross and made his way through the early evening crowd to the Strand.

Pomfrey had seen Mr Unwell's travelling circus, complete with an elephant and a hippo and real live mermaids; he had visited a camelopard and giraffe exhibited among the freaks and wrestlers at the Bartholomew Fair, and he even been admitted to the menagerie at the Tower on payment of a small bribe, to see a poor show that consisted only of four mangy lions and a grizzly bear called Martin. This evening Mr Pomfrey would visit the very finest zoological collection in all London, if not the world. Tonight he was going to see Mr Cross's Royal Grand National Menagerie at the Exeter Exchange.

The street was somewhat muddy from the spring rain and a great many carriages were about for the same reason. He skipped and jumped from puddle to puddle and nearly tripped over an escaped pig that was rummaging among the day's litter of bones and discarded food. He kicked the beast and proceeded.

At the door of the Exchange, a liveried servant in a bottle green coat with an unnecessary amount of gold frogging took his money and Mr Pomfrey joined a crowd of fine gentlemen in new felt hats and ladies in their best bonnets. They progressed past a jungle of potted palm trees and some fine nude sculptures of George Augustus Frederick wrestling some wild beasts.

In the first cage there was a hyena who turned out to be a jolly ragamuffin and prone to much laughter. He was much like a fellow Mr Pomfrey knew in the Anchor on Bankside. Mr Pomfrey leant on the visitor's rail for ten minutes or so, laughing with him, and eating a roasted lark. Mr Pomfrey flung the remains through his bars and the hyena gratefully snapped them up. Next he passed by the lion who was like his wife's old cat, Tom, and spent most of his time asleep. For a little while he viewed a jaguar who was a most elegant beast. He moved on then to the Tyger. He admired how the Tyger lounged with a patricians ease; the embodiment of fluid grace and solid terror. Mr Pomfrey threw him a whole roasted thrush. The Tyger was not grateful. Mr Pomfrey was shaken by a great roar from the beast that made several gentlemen faint and a few of the ladies draw their pistols. The arrogant Tyger sat by the door and flicked the thrush from his cage. As their eyes met the Tyger pulled back his lips with so much disdain that Pomfrey immediately detested him.

"You, fellow," he shouted, "get back and behave yourself, scoundrel."

The monstrous beast drew himself to his full height and his muscles rippled beneath his horrid yellow and black coat. He stood on his hind-legs and pawed through the bars at Pomfrey. Saliva dripped from his long white teeth and there was a flicker of wild and untameable fire in his eyes.

Mr Cross pushed Pomfrey aside and bowed deeply before the beast. In spite of his expensive and fashionable trousers, Mr Cross knelt on the floor before the cage and bowed four more times. He prostrated himself before the animal. Mr Cross addressed the beast, "If I may beg, your Majesty, if it would please you could you possibly be so kind as to calm yourself and I will fetch the goat for your supper."

The Tyger paused for a moment to consider, he cocked his head. He looked up at the ceiling and scraped sparks from the floor with a set of scimitar claws. Having considered Mr Crosses request the Tyger turned his rear towards Pomfrey and flicked his tail, disrespectfully showing Mr Pomfrey the parts of a Tyger that no gentleman should see.

Mr Cross mopped the sweat from his forehead. "Mr Pomfrey," said Cross, "you have upset him dreadfully; you should not speak so to his Majesty."

"What do you mean his Majesty?" Pomfrey said, "He is not even an English beast."

"He is a Royal Bengal King Tyger," said Mr Cross, "and he must be shown respect."

"Pft, the only person who is addressed as Majesty in this country is King George. You should not allow the beast such airs. I said 'Pft', sir."

Pomfrey said it again more forcefully, "Pft!" and walked away, flapping his coattails and showing Mr Cross and his King Royal Tyger Beagle all the disdain he could summon.

The great beast flung himself at the bars of his cage and roared at him. Mr Pomfrey turned his back upon them and while the coward Cross fell to his knees and begged before the Tyger, Mr Pomfrey left the building.

Outside the Exchange, the sun had set upon the Strand and the lighters were out. They were ragged and many wore coats that would have been fashionable in the days of the King's great grandfather, as they shuffled in the dusk with their tapers and poles igniting the mantles of the gas lamps. The streetlights glowed feebly in the twilight and Pomfrey splashed through the mud and puddles meaning to stroll to his rooms in Hanover square. A London Pig eating a heap of rotten apples blocked his way by Grosscount Alley, a fetid lane that impinged between two rickety medieval constructions. Pomfrey kicked the pig but it ignored him and continued to eat its supper. Pomfrey kicked it again. In the depths of the alley, Mr Pomfrey heard a sharp claw scrape on stone and saw a pair of yellow eyes flicker like candles in the darkness. In the darkness he heard a huge heart pumping, in the darkness there was a roar. The Tyger was free. The Tyger had followed. The Tyger was after him. Mr Pomfrey vaulted the obstructing pig and ran. Such was the scraping of claws and chomping of hungry jaws and cries of distressed

pig, that Mr Pomfrey feared the scoundrel had invited several of his friends for dinner. Mr Pomfrey retreated from the noise of rending flesh and the agonized squealing of the Tyger's first course. The second course ran through the deepening shade from pool to pool of lamplight, but in the growing darkness he could hear only the rapid pad of the huge paws just a little behind him. Mr Pomfrey fled back to Cross's Menagerie, but Mr Cross had retired.

He banged his fist on the door. "Mr Cross," he called, "save me. The Tyger has escaped."

Mr Edward Cross was quite taken aback, he leant from the window in his nightgown and shouted, "My dear Mr Pomfrey," he said "my dear Mr Pomfrey. The King Tyger is in his cage and asleep – he has dined on a goat."

Mr Pomfrey felt foolish. His nerves had got the better of him. All was well. Mr Cross had said so.

But when Mr Cross closed his window and Pomfrey stepped away from the lamplight, he saw the Tyger standing on his hind legs grinning with all his bright sharp teeth and the blood of a freshly slaughtered pig on his muzzle.

Pomfrey fled again, he sprinted between the illuminations. Behind him golden eyes glowed in the darkness, the scent of death carried on the breeze, and the velvet paws padded on the cobbles. He ran towards the river and cut through Strand Lane in search of a Wherryman for hire. There, floating by the river-wall of Somerset Place, was a boat. Mr Pomfrey placed a shilling in the man's hand and said, "Get me away from here."

"Thank you, Mr Pomfrey," said the Wherryman, "are you going over the other side?"

"Just row me down to Westminster, I want Hanover Square- do I know you?"

"Bones, sir" said the Wherryman, "I'm Mr Bones," he chattered away as Pomfrey watched the thick brown river flow beneath the keel illuminated by Mr Bones' lantern.

"There's nothing like London river water is there, Mr Pomfrey," said Mr Bones bending to his oars.

"I fear the London River is nothing like water," said Mr Pomfrey, "when I was stationed at Leghorn awaiting Lord Nelson, the waters were blue, deep, deep blue, azure as Lord Byron has it."

"Don't sound natural, sir," said Bones, "everyone knows English water is brown."

For a moment the brown English waters swirled behind them and a long striped Bengal back broke the surface.

Pomfrey flung himself flat in the bottom of the wherry and lay there shaking. He said, "If you would be good enough to put me ashore now, Mr Bones."

"My, you look scared half to death, are you sure you don't want me to take you over the other side?"

Mr Bones landed him by the stair on Bridge Street. Mr Pomfrey rested for a moment on the balustrade of Westminster Bridge, where a new stone statue of Lord Liverpool signing his pact with the Devil towered before the Old Palace. There was a splash and the muddy sucking noise of a great animal

extracting itself from the Thames. There was a roar in the darkness of the arches that made all the street lights flicker.

The alarmed Pomfrey sprinted, he flitted like a moth between the poor weak lamps, and sought sanctuary in St Georges Church. He stood in the fine new portico, but the doors were barred and the Corinthian pillars grew like a row of grey gallows trees from the stone. It was cold there and the silent bell tower loomed above him like a tomb. The icy wind carried bad smelling dust from the dun coloured streets that swirled in motes and clouds lit by a rotten white moon. Mr Pomfrey shivered and in the darkness of the churchyard two yellow eyes burned, a set of sharp teeth glinted like scimitars and into the moonlight stalked the King Tyger. From its great jaws saliva ran in contemplation of Pomfrey's flesh and it roared to the empty lonely stars, so the paper thin buildings wavered and fluttered before its great voice. Pomfrey stood for a moment fascinated by the awful fire in its eyes and after that moment ran through the empty streets with the great beast close behind. He ran and ran and ran until his breath came in great uneven gasps. He gulped at the air and he thought his heart was going to burst, but as he slowed he still heard the subtle pad of the Tyger. His only hope was a front door left slightly ajar in a non-descript row of modern buildings. With no further thought he ran up the steps and slipped into the strange house. He closed the door and locked himself inside. A golden-orange paw scratched at the road without.

Mr Pomfrey was submerged in darkness, but it was inside darkness, rather that the terrible outside jaws of devouring darkness where the dreadful King Tyger waited. He stroked his hand across the wall in search of a clue to the layout of the strange property. He felt his way along and the texture changed from wall paper to wood. He made wide sweeps across the door to try to fathom its outline. He found the handle. Mr Pomfrey gave it a hard tug but it was locked fast. He was disappointed.

As he stumbled through the darkened house, he found many doors barred before him. He searched blindly through pitch corridors and up blacker stairs. At last a warm light shone from a crack. Mr Pomfrey knelt upon the floor to spy on the inhabitants through the keyhole. There was the shadow of an old man with a brush in his hand painting before a lamp that burned bright with whale oil. Behind the old man a fainter shadow lurked. Mr Pomfrey opened the door so gently that it made no sound. He crept through the door to enjoy the company of human beings once more. He noted that, contrary to the laws of the Great Newton, the old man didn't touch the ground; his naked feet floated a few inches above the dusty floorboards. As he floated he worked on an easel portrait. How beautiful he looked in his ragged coat with silvery hair that rose towards heaven like a candle flame lit upon his head. How he contrasted with his model: a small scaly and demonic creature that posed with tiny bulging muscles and a little cup.

Beside the artist an indistinct figure held his implements, his brushes, knives, buffers, and riggers. That obscure figure exuded a pure and beautiful light. Mr Pomfrey reached out his hand to touch the illuminated face. Beneath his fingers he found nothing: however many webs of golden shadow he brushed aside, the face always hid in yet more golden shadow.

The old man noticed him. "Oh," he said, "a poor child of Albion; fetch him a blanket, Mr Gabriel."

Mr Gabriel drifted across the room and produced a blanket for Pomfrey.

"Should we get him a drink, Mr Blake?" Mr Gabriel asked, "He appears to be troubled."

The old man, Mr Blake, smiled a kindly saintlike smile, "I suppose so and in the circumstances a little beer do you think?" Mr Blake drifted up towards the ceiling and showed Pomfrey the multiple patches on the seat of his trousers. Mr Gabriel also appeared blissfully unaware of Sir Isaac Newton's law of gravity and flew across the room with a cup for him.

"You name, sir?" enquired Blake.

"P-p-p Pomfrey."

Pomfrey shivered, he almost sobbed as he drank the flagon of ale Mr Gabriel had procured. "A Tyger sir," Pomfrey said, "please save me, there is a Tyger outside and he wants to eat me."

"A Tyger," said Mr Blake, "how monstrous."

Mr Blake floated like a feather to the window and raised the sash slightly to allow him to peer out into the night. Ever so quietly he lowered it again, without even the slightest click. Mr Blake drew the curtains and stood with his back to them. He placed his finger to his lips and the light on his table cast his great black shadow over the ceiling.

He whispered, "He is out there in the darkness. We must keep your presence secret until daylight. Then we may leave and seek help."

"Who will help him, Mr Blake," said Mr Gabriel, "so many of Albion's spirits have succumbed to Sir Isaac Newton's small vision. They have been narrowed down and circumscribed. Trapped in his little calculus."

"Newton!" said Blake and righteous anger clouded his face, "shall we never be free of the Alchemist Newton? I hear him all the time: the dreadful scrape of compasses as he measures out the universe in mean little degrees and arc-seconds. He will slice and divide it all into grey dust."

"What are we to do then?" said Gabriel.

"We must draw back the veil, let the doors of perception be cleansed and everything appear as it really is. Now is our chance, Mr Gabriel. We must persuade the Tyger to lie down with the lamb."

"Surely the animal should be shot, Mr Blake?" said Pomfrey.

"Vain the sword and vain the bow," said Blake, "He is a creature of terror and violence, terror and violence are his meat and drink. It will make him wilder. He must be reconciled with his opposite."

"And his opposite?" asked Pomfrey.

"Is a lamb." said Mr Blake.

"I don't wish to be rude, Mr Blake," said Pomfrey, "but I think he will find the lamb delicious:

he has habitually dined upon goats and to my knowledge devoured a whole London pig in under a minute."

"Do not be bound down by narrow perceptions. Let us sleep safe here until the daylight diminishes his power."

Mr Pomfrey awoke late after a horrible, dreamful slumber and found Mr Blake had been at work for a couple of hours and had completed the portrait of the demonic little being.

Mrs Blake made him a poor breakfast of bread and butter and a little tea. As she bustled about the dust swirled around her grey skirts. All Mr Blake's rooms were very dusty. Mr Pomfrey drew his finger through some of it.

"I really must get to work, Mr Blake. The admiralty- I have important orders to make for the Navy."

"No, we must confront the Tyger," said Blake, "he has conceived an enmity for you and it must be cured."

"I'm afraid Mrs Pomfrey will be unimpressed with my absence last night and also I am going to be late for the Victualling Office."

It was too much and Mr Pomfrey felt like crying. He sat in Mr Blake's dust with his head in his hands. "If the Tyger doesn't kill me Mrs Pomfrey will and the bits that Mrs Pomfrey and the Tyger leave the Victualling Commissioners will kick into the river if I don't get to work."

"Come, Mr Pomfrey, the game is afoot." said Blake as he took him by the elbow and rushed him down the stairs and out onto South Molton Street."

"How will we track him?" said Pomfrey.

"Mr Alukah Leech, whose portrait I made last night is a most spiritual being. His diet is the blood of the living, however it takes all sorts in this world and the next and his eccentricity has made him a connoisseur - a veritable Bloodhound. We will use his fine nose to trace the Tyger."

Mr Blake produced Leech from his threadbare pocket and placed him on his shoulder. Mr Leech nodded sagely and nibbled on Blake's neck with his small sharp teeth. His eyes glowed an unpleasant shade of blood-red and Pomfrey felt that Mr Leech looked a little too hungrily at him. Mr Pomfrey's hand drifted up to his throat and he checked his jugular. It seemed intact. Mr Leech gave a little throaty laugh, "Call me Al, Pomf," he said, "call me Al."

At the end of Mr Blake's road, Brook Street and New Bond Street already thronged with tradesmen and costers, liveried servants and uniformed cooks, pickpockets and beggars, angels and demons, gods, demigods, and all the mad prophets of London town. A few gentleman and ladies appeared among them, though this was a little early for the better people to be up. The smell of assembled humanity outgunned the scent of the horses and dogs and the stray pigs and chickens escaped from various dwellings to eke out feral existences in the gutters of Mayfair.

Mr Leech sat upon Mr Blake's shoulder like a demonic parrot. Mr Blake's hair floated about his head and his feet lightly propelled him over the paving stones just for the sake of appearances; as Blake advanced the crowd parted like the red sea before Moses. Mr Pomfrey followed anxiously like an escaping Israelite, he was nervous regarding the presence of the Tyger; even in the daylight he thought he caught sight of an orange flank, striped with black, creeping among the crowd.

"Are you sure, Mr Blake, we should not borrow guns and powder from the admiralty?" he asked.

"No, that would do no-good. To meet violence with violence won't work, it would just make him angrier," said Blake, who took Pomfrey firmly by his arm. Behind him he noticed Mr Gabriel followed with a stout stick in his right hand and a small lamb under in his left. There was no going back.

In Old Bond Street between Mr Vawdrey's harpsichord shop and Keckilpenny's run down milliner's an old door in the wall stood suspended between two ancient statues of Saxon kings. It had resisted the coming and going of Normans, roundheads, Jacobites, architects, and nearly all of the Hanoverians. Blake placed his knuckles against its surface, but before he could knock it swung effortlessly open on its ornate iron hinges and Pomfrey caught a brief glimpse of a beautiful garden, where priests walked their rounds among pretty graves, and flowering trees scattered blossom in warm breezes.

A fashionably dressed young lady with a small barrow of the most deliciously scented meat pies blotted out the scene as she manoeuvred through the gateway into the throng.

"Away Screech Owl!" shouted Mr Gabriel.

"Good morning Lilith," said Mr Blake.

The pie seller stopped and petted the monstrous little Alukah.

"Now don't start that again, Mr Blake, you know I'm just simple Nancy Turpin," she winked and scratched Alukah Leech between his pointed ears. Alukah stretched and squirmed like a tame cat petted by its favourite mistress and licked her fingers with his long eel-like tongue. She turned to Mr Gabriel and grasped him firmly by the nose, "and I think someone rather close to you said something about throwing stones. I have a name, and it's not Screech Owl or Forsaken One or Strige."

"Sorry, Whore of Hell," said Gabriel.

She kicked him sharply in the ankle.

"Now, I'm sure we can all get along if we try," said Mr Blake, interposing himself, "Can't we Gabriel?"

"As you wish, Oh Prophet," said Mr Gabriel who looked rather sulky and rubbed his ankle.

"Bless you, Mr Blake," said Nancy; her forked tongue flickered about her green lips, "would you like to buy a pie?"

"I myself need nothing but the good London air, with which, coincidentally, my pockets overfloweth" said Mr Blake, "but Mr Pomfrey-I'm sure you are hungry."

"The pies of paradise, Mr Pomfrey. Just one bite," she said.

"Not on my life, I mean no thank you madam."

"Are you sure I can't tempt you?" she asked and her lips glistened with the most delightful venom.

"Young lady," said Pomfrey, "my appetite has quite gone. I have far too much sympathy for the poor beast that died to fill your pie. I'm sure it did not want to be a pie. Did it have a job, a wife? Did the butcher creep up on it through the shadows and snatch it from the bosom of its friends, its loves? Did it strive through life to be nothing more than good, happy only to please its betters, reserving only for a little amusement for itself?"

"Of course something had to die to go into the pie and something into his pie and so on *ad infinitum*." Said Nancy, "it is the way of things,"

"It is a shame," said Blake, "but Nancy's pies are rather special. You really should buy one. They will fling wide the windows of your soul, unhinge the doors of perception, and let the true light shine within your eyes."

"It' a cruel world," said Pomfrey who wiped a tear and took a bite from the pie.

"It is indeed," said Nancy, looking hard at Gabriel.

"Too true," said Gabriel looking hard at Nancy.

"Delicious," said Pomfrey.

As Mr Pomfrey ate, he found the skies were full of angels and the gutters full of stars. Ezekiel in his chariot rolled across the rooftops and the gate between Vawdrey's and Keckilpenny's expanded with his mind, until it became a massive portal leading from Old Bond Street onto a broad paved road that snaked between twisted briars and fantastic darkened forests.

"I've never seen those growing in London before," said Pomfrey.

"Well step on through, my lovely," said Nancy, "this is where we are going to hunt your Tyger."

She led the four of them between the stone Kings and along the road; they crossed a great chasm where a river of sullen fire ran and sulphurous fumes poured up. Mr Leech breathed deeply, he took big lusty lungfuls of the acrid air and bounded ahead like a young dog after a rabbit. Close behind him followed Blake with a firm grip on Pomfrey, followed by Mr Gabriel with a firm grip on his lamb, and last came Nancy propelling her barrow of perpetually steaming pies before her. Mr Leech led them along the great highway between standing stones, over lonely moors, and down into a valley where a vast citadel rose. They passed between great sunken towers and into the shattered ruins of the ancient city.

"Atlantis, or perhaps Troy," said Blake.

"I thought they were both in Greece," said Pomfrey.

"The spirit is Greek, the location local," said Blake.

Leech led them down a spiral staircase and along many underground roads. He led them in the subterranean darkness, where Blake took on a slight glow and his hair became even more like a flame. After what felt like an eternity of lefts and

rights, a few ups and downs, and several sit downs to think, at last Mr Leech gave full throat to the most hound-like yelp yet. The pie seller picked up speed after him. Mr Blake held Mr Pomfrey's coat tails and Mr Gabriel held Blake's foot with one hand as they floated like angelic party bunting through the broad tunnels of old London. They passed beneath the towers of New London that reached unto heaven. Some roads were paved with gold, other roads were cobbled with blackened skulls, yet more roads were thick with mud, or flowed with blood, or were crowded with fat grumpy pigs. They crossed the single arc of a great iron bridge that spanned a violent torrent. Mr Leech led them down the stairs at the foot of the bridge to a waiting Wherryman aboard his black boat.

"Welcome aboard again, Mr Pomfrey." said Bones "would you like me to take you to the other side today?"

"We are going to the City," said Blake.

"Just down the Old Fleet River then."

"We are on a Tyger hunt," said Blake. The little demon chattered excitedly on his shoulder and snapped at the cloud of miniscule angels that circled Blake's head.

"Why bless you, Mr Blake, there are no Tygers in England. The King would not allow it," said Bones.

"The Tyger travelled here from abroad, Mr Bones, we are seeking his den."

"Ah - an invader. Won't you need a gun, Mr Blake? I hear Tygers are sturdy animals."

"Oh we'll be fine," said Blake, "we have a lamb."

"A lamb..."

Mr Bones's rather hollow laughter echoed over the river. The lamb agreed with Mr Bones and with a sad bleat jumped from Gabriel's arms into Nancy's lap where it hid its soft little head and shivered as the mad torrent drew them through the darkness. All around them other vessels bounced and yawed on the rough waves and Mr Alukah Leech sat on the bow yelping like a pack of fo-hounds. Alukah pointed ahead at a tunnel mouth that framed daylight and water. A new sun illuminated them and within the sun stood the golden figure of a woman.

Mr Pomfrey blushed.

"She is..."

"She is clothed by the sun," said Mr Blake.

"What other world is this?" asked Mr Pomfrey as they swirled in a maelstrom out into the Thames where barges and wherrys all tacked about in a complex game, never quite colliding, as they skimmed over the foul brown waves. The angels were thick on the water and rose from the river in buzzing golden clouds. Inland bulged the great dome of St. Pauls and beyond it a dark shadow moved among jewelled fantastic towers.

"I do not recognize the other buildings," said Pomfrey.

"That is the New Jerusalem," said Gabriel.

"I am glad your eyesight has improved, Mr Pomfrey," said Blake

"Thanks to your revelatory and sinful pies, Vile Mother of Demons," said Gabriel.

Nancy ignored Mr Gabriel and stroked the lamb.

"Those spires beyond are the cities of Los and Golgonooza," said Gabriel.

"And there is the giant Newton," said Mr Blake, "whom the world has pretended dead. Here he is alive and grown to a monster; a modern Chronos devouring his children."

Sir Isaac was about as tall as St Pauls Cathedral. He strode among the celestial towers and domed temples and with each tread the ground shook beneath his titanic feet. He wielded a ruler and set of compasses. A great golden tower that spiralled upwards like a turitella shell carved with many winged angels crashed to dust as Sir Isaac attempted to measure it.

"Illusions," he bellowed, "how they fall before reason."

The angels descended from the sky in roaring black torrents like rain against the giant philosopher. Above the glass and crystal towers Sir Isaac in his periwig and long coat shooed them away with his gigantic dividers. Every now and then he caught a Seraphim and used a tiny pair of screws to compute its circumference. Each time he measured one it withered away to grey dust.

"He is a menace," said Blake, "worse than the Urizen and Lucifer and Sir Joshua Reynolds all together. I fear he will turn the world to a rubble of mere numbers."

Alukah Leech led Mr Pomfrey, Mr Gabriel, Nancy, and Mr Blake through the stinking streets. Streets where horses and dogs had deposited their foulness and drunks had vomited, where the dead beggar lay in the gutter covered in buzzing, crawling metallic green angels. Among the death and foulness, the usual London crowd ebbed and flowed: apprentices, beggars, footpads, stranglers, gamblers, Satanists and saints, dandies in black and fops in purple, lords in ermine and wild men in rat skin, sailors, soldiers, butchers, murderers, bow street runners, ladies, maids and menservants, frogs, chickens, cats, and the ubiquitous London pigs gulping down whatever came their way.

Mr Leech approached a fine tall gentleman who wore a black frock coat as affected by Mr Brummell; a black frock coat and trousers down to his ankles; a black frock coat with an immaculate cravat and subtle pinning of diamonds and gold. On his head he had the tallest hat in all London.

Mr Leech sniffed at his well shod ankle and bounded back to Blake.

"That's 'im," said Mr Leech.

"But that is a person of status. A duke or foreign prince," said Pomfrey.

"Well, he is a Royal Bengal King," said Mr Leech.

"That is his daytime form," said Mr Blake, "he is more approachable that way. The unhinged spirit of the night has left him and he is touched, at least momentarily, by the reason of Apollo, the

awareness of Lucifer, the humanity of the Woman Clothed in the Sun. We must attempt to calm him, to introduce him to finer thoughts. Encourage him to lay down with the lamb as it were."

Gabriel and Nancy looked at the lamb. There was some serious doubt in their faces.

"I do not wish to get that close," said Mr Pomfrey.

"Well, you look after Mr Leech," said Blake. "And I will engage the Tyger in conversation."

The little monster jumped from Mr Blake's shoulder and nestled close to Mr Pomfrey's neck. Mr Leech smelled like a musty old blood pudding and his touch was feverishly hot. As soon as Blake left them Mr Leech whispered in Mr Pomfrey's ear – "stroke of luck, Pomf. There's a gun shop over there."

"Mr Blake said not to..."

"To tell you the truth, Pomf, Mr Blake is considered quite eccentric, even in unearthly circles," said Mr Leech, "you should get one just in case."

Mr Pomfrey found it easy to slip away from his minders. Gabriel had put aside the battle with evil and was enjoying the fruits of a nuanced moral perspective in the form of a pie in his hand and another in his mouth.

"Heavenly," he said.

"What shall we call him?" said Nancy bouncing the lamb on her knee.

Across the road, Mr Blake bowed before the supposed Tyger-pretending-to-be-a-duke and the two fell swiftly into conversation. Mr Blake took the ducal arm and led the aristocratic gentleman to Nithercott the printseller. The ragged, dusty Blake with his floating hair and the finely dressed Duke stood together enjoined in vigorous discussion as they examined the fine prints.

Pomfrey crouched low by the door and tried to listen.

"The gothic line is so much more beautiful, more Christian, than the dreadful smoke and smudge of the later Italians," said Blake, "see, my Lord, how it leads the eye about the page on a pilgrimage, how it makes all clear..."

"Is not the modern style of Sir Joshua Reynolds to employ less line and more shade? said the Duke of Bengal, "Sir Joshua was, after all, supposed the most accomplished artist of the age."

"No, no," said Blake, "he was a trickster, an illusionist. He presented the illusion of the optical world not the truth of the spiritual world."

"I am of course familiar with both illusion and spirit, Mr Blake..." said the Tyger-Gentleman revealing a set of supernaturally sharp white teeth.

"Here, Pomf. Come on." said a voice.

On the other side of the road an old musket swung from a hook above a low door and the little devil, Alukah, swung from the musket and beckoned.

"Come on," said Mr Leech, "you don't want to be eaten do you?"

Pomfrey felt rather hot and mopped his poor perspiring forehead with his sleeve. An angel kept buzzing about his ear. Then it settled; it hung from the lobe and swung like a naughty boy in an apple tree. It made a noise like "no, no, no, no."

He brushed it away and returned his attention to the Mr Leech and the angel floated across the road to worry an idolater. Mr Pomfrey crossed the cobbles and entered the armourer's shop.

An array of sporting guns and finely fashioned muskets greeted him. Row upon row of brass and iron barrels glittered in the greyish spring light. Mr Pomfrey's eyes and heart settled upon a carving of a snarling Tyger head on the stock of a very long gun. It was a beautifully crafted Mughal flintlock: inlaid and engraved, polished and oiled, sculpted, refined, and magnificently constructed. Mr Pomfrey asked the merchant the price, and felt a little sick at the answer.

"I'm sure I could procure cannon for less," said Pomfrey.

"Well it belonged to the Maharaja of Pala," said the gun man, "try it for balance."

It was as heavy as a swivel gun and as long as a punt gun with a bore like a blunderbuss. Mr Pomfrey struggled under its weight. He struggled to raise the barrel from the ground. He struggled to take aim.

"Looks good, Pomf," said Mr Leech, "a real Tyger killer. We'll find something to rest it on when we shoot 'im."

Mr Pomfrey also bought a bag of two ounce musket balls and a quantity of black powder.

The gunsmith wrapped the purchase in oiled cloth and he placed it on Mr Pomfrey's shoulder. Mr Pomfrey staggered. Mr Leech swung from the barrel and whistled and Mr Pomfrey carried the gun with bent back and bowed legs onto the street. He wondered how the civilized gentleman, who discussed art with Mr Blake, could be the Tyger and if he was the Tyger whether he could get a clear shot at him. If he got a clear shot, he wondered, would the gentleman revert to his Tyger form or would he be just a dead Duke? If he were a dead Duke what would be the attitude of the magistrate to him, Pomfrey, a mere officer of the Victualling Office, who had shot a Duke? Mr Pomfrey inadvertently put his hand to his neck to check it was not already encircled by hemp. Even though there was none he felt a little choked. He forgot the choking and his worries seemed as nothing when a great compass needle crashed through the wall of Anderson's chandlery shop opposite. Out from the collapsed building spilled hammers and bilge-pumps, mops and marlinspikes and a host of ships victuals and supplies. Great coils of rope and cordage rolled down the road; tallow, tar, and turpentine flowed from broken barrels across the pebbles.

Blake rushed from the Printseller's onto the street and shook his fist scattering the hoard of angels that floated about his noble head like a mote of sunlit dust. The Gentleman-Tyger followed behind him and seeing the destruction turned tail and ran with his newly purchased collection of prints beneath his arm.

"Damn you, Sir Isaac," shouted Blake, "can you not see us down here you old Cyclops?"

Sir Isaac ignored Blake and concentrated on his quadrant and compasses. His head was several

hundred feet above Mr Blake and his ears so huge that he was probably no longer capable of receiving such high pitched noise as human speech.

"Quick follow 'im" said Leech pointing to the Tyger-Duke, who was already some way into the distance with his folio of prints.

The weight of the gun slowed Pomfrey and Mr Leech dashed ahead among the crowd. A begging one legged soldier tried to attract Pomfrey's attention, "damn that chain shot sir, spare a penny?" but on Pomfrey staggered.

A begging one eyed sailor pulled at his sleeve and called, "damn the grape shot sir, spare a farthing." Still Pomfrey staggered in pursuit of his enemy.

Wheedling whores and lurking procurers called out, "spare a moment, sir, for your pleasure" but he ignored them and persisted in the chase.

A host of obstructions together with his encumberant musket prevented him from gaining on his enemy. The depredations and destruction wrought by Newton drove the tide of the crowd against him and Mr Pomfrey fought the flow of Britons uprooted by the force of brute Reason. Still Pomfrey would not let his enemy escape, not let him gain the safety of the night when the tables would again turn and he, Pomfrey, would become the hunted.

"'Ere" said a voice by his foot, "'e's over there by the fountain."

Pomfrey and Alukah crept around the edge of the quiet square until they found a stone veranda with a good view of their prey and some cover in the form of an ornamental laurel bush. Pomfrey rested the barrel on the ancient balustrade.

At the centre of the courtyard was a water-sculpture that showed George Frederick Augustus as Neptune and several Mrs Fitzherberts as naiads; the Tyger sat on a little bench beside the perpetual stream that bubbled from the naked god's and goddesses' mouths.

Mr Leech sighted him along the barrel while Pomfrey attempted to pivot the weapon according to his instructions.

The Gentleman-Beast unsheathed a fine etching to study in imitation of a man of wealth and taste. He sat there in the sunshine admiring his purchases without a care in the world.

"Up a bit, left a bit. No too far, nearly there, nearly there, stop," said Leech.

The Duke held his picture up to the light and a smile spread across his face as he became enamoured of some artistic detail. He opened his mouth in joyful song, "*and did those feet, in ancient times...*"

The little devil shouted "fire!" and Pomfrey pulled the trigger. He should have closed his eyes as the flash from the pan was like the bright sun. Where it had illuminated his eye it left a dark shadow and bright spots circulating through a dimmed world. The thunder of the explosion was like being caught amidst a storm on a mountain-top and clouds of sulphurous smoke stank around

him as if he were already in Hell. The Duke recoiled and scattered his precious artworks. His tall hat flew off and the great tawny beast rolled into a ball and bounced across the road under the impact of the bullet. He recoiled ten times his length and demolished a wall that supported the overhanging stories of a rotten oak-beamed house. The building had loomed over the street since the days of Queen Bess. Under the force of the shot-Tyger it collapsed and the mud and straw, the lathes and plaster, the witches brooms and dead rats in the walls all spilled out onto the road.

"There," said Leech," that showed 'im."

Pomfrey agreed that the beast had certainly been shown. Though he was worried that on the horizon the monstrous form of Sir Isaac Newton strode across London and its many aspects: across Hell and Golgonooza and Jerusalem. The towers of those other London's shuddered beneath his tread.

On the south side of the square, Blake and Gabriel, with the lamb on a string, jumped down from a drover's cart. Nancy with her pie-barrow extracted herself from the crowd on the main road and the four of them crossed by the fountain to join Pomfrey.

"You should have used the lamb," said Blake.

"But I have slain the Tyger," said Pomfrey who posed heroically with his tiger gun before the pile of rubble.

The lamb gave a fearful little 'baa' and beneath Pomfrey's feet the rubble trembled. The ground rose and shuddered and from the heap of sticks and straw and old oak beams a golden paw bearing five sickle claws reached out. Broken lumps of plaster and rotted bricks fell from iron-muscled shoulders and the rubble began to smoulder. The Tyger was not only flame coloured, now he was aflame. The Tyger burned with demonic heat. His whiskers bristled and dripped molten fire.

"Oh my," said Mr Blake, "the powder has ignited him."

"He will burn up then?" said Pomfrey.

"He will burn forever like the fires of hell. There will be no extinguishing him. His anger and rage, the power of unreason and his natural wildness have rendered him incandescent," said Blake.

The great beast shook sparks from his coat and advanced upon them with lava dripping from his white-hot teeth, sulphurous foam surged thick upon his lips, and steam poured from his nostrils.

"Bring forth the lamb," said Blake.

The Tyger roared horribly and black smoke billowed from his mouth. The lamb looked at Nancy and bleated pathetically.

"Quick," said Blake, "they must be unified."

"Don't you dare." said Nancy holding the Lamb behind her back.

"I think we should flee," said Gabriel as he bundled Miss Nancy and the Lamb onto the pie-trolley and unfolded a large pair of angel wings.

"'Ere, come back you cowards," shouted Alukah Leech just as Sir Isaac Newton bisected the road, and Mr Leech with his compass. The compass cut a furrow through the paving stones and

knocked the drover from his cart and separated the cart horse from his harness. The droverless cart rolled downhill, as it must, as no lesser person than Sir Isaac Newton had decreed it should in accordance with the unalterable law of gravity. As it rolled past them Blake flung himself aboard.

"Quick, Mr Pomfrey," shouted Blake and he held out his hand. Mr Pomfrey grasped the hand and Blake pulled him up.

"Your gun, Mr Pomfrey," said Blake, "Shoot him again."

"But you said..."

"I know, I know, but do it."

The shot lodged between the Tyger's flaming eyes and he howled. The shot burned red-hot for a moment and then dropped to the ground as his head expanded.

"Again," said Blake, "reload."

The cart rattled over the cobbles as the now gigantic Tyger squeezed between the houses after them. Mr Pomfrey struggled with his gun as the cart bounced and rocked; he poured far too much black powder into the barrel and wrestled with the eight-foot ramrod to force the massive bullet down the fire-fouled barrel. Blake tried to assist with the loading as they rattled down the hill towards the river where Sir Isaac straddled the Thames with a massive line and a plummet attempting to divide the Abyss beneath.

The ramrod seemed to be stuck. Pomfrey gave up. He pointed the weapon, ramrod and all at the immense Tyger, closed his eyes, and pulled the trigger. A normal shot would have hardly registered on the Tyger. The eight foot ramrod, however, stuck painfully in his cheek and his growth accelerated.

"That's done it," said Blake, "we are as fleas to him now."

The titanic beast stepped over the rooftops, straddled the building, and walked over them in search of larger prey. It jumped between the streets and its massive tail swept through the air knocking several chimney pots from their support and it was gone. For a moment all was silent. Then above them an enormous voice said, "Puss, puss, puss"

Sir Isaac had the Tyger by the scruff of the neck and was tickling his belly. The tiger spat and clawed, chewed at him and bit at his fingers. It roared, breathed fire and wriggled and growled and hissed and burned.

"Puss, puss, puss," said Sir Isaac who now wielded a dividing rule. He took a measurement, then another. After several minutes of Newton's measuring Blake said, "I believe Sir Isaac has shrunk a little."

"An illusion," said Pomfrey.

With flourish of Sir Isaac's ruler the tiger burned smaller and brighter in his hand. Another scratch and bite and Sir Isaac visibly diminished.

"His opposite," said Blake "I should have guessed that the Tyger is his opposite - what fearful symmetry."

"They are going to disappear," said Gabriel wheeling his sweet Nancy and their little Lambkins along on the barrow.

"Well almost," said Blake, "let's go and find the remains, there may be some use left in them."

Mr Blake gave Mr Pomfrey Sir Isaac enclosed in a glass bottle. "Here," he said, "take him where he can be among his own kind."

Pomfrey carried him immediately to the Royal Society at Somerset House. He managed to explain his purpose to a Clerk and was asked to wait. He waited on a hard seat beneath the society's famous sculpture of Newton Bludgeoning an Angel.

The seat was very hard and although he had no empirical data he was sure it was becoming harder. He checked his watch. He had been waiting two hours. Mr Pomfrey took the bottle Blake had given him from his pocket and looked at Newton. The homunculus shook his tiny fist at him. At least he hadn't suffocated. Mr Blake felt air holes were unnecessary. Mr Pomfrey did not entirely trust his judgement.

After another half hour two liveried servants entered the room and announced the arrival of the society's president, Sir Joseph Banks. Two of the younger fellows wheeled him into the room in a bath-chair.

"Gout, I'm afraid," said Sir Joseph, "now Mr Pomfrey, I understand you are from the Admiralty; have brought me some new plant from your distant voyages? Australia perhaps? I sailed there with Captain Cook, splendid navigator. Tasted like chicken I'm told."

"It's Sir Isaac Newton."

"Dreadful man. I never was much good at mathematics," said Sir Joseph. "Now about these plants, from Australia you said?

"I have Sir Isaac Newton," said Pomfrey, "in this bottle, he is a member of the Society," he held the miniscule Newton up for Sir Joseph, "he belongs to you."

"Crompton," called Sir Joseph, "we need to see a seed."

A servant even more ancient than Sir Joseph manoeuvred a huge magnifying glass on a brass frame to aid Sir Joseph's observation of the tiny physicist. Crompton secured the bottle in a clamp beneath the lens and Sir Joseph leaned over it and blinked.

"You see, Sir Joseph, he is complete in every detail" said Pomfrey.

"Well, we'll try to get him to germinate; I've had some wonderful successes with orchids," said Sir Joseph, "quite fascinating, a member of the mandrake family if I am not very much mistaken," said Sir Joseph.

The great naturalist was overjoyed. He shook Pomfrey by the hand, "Thank you so much Mr Pomfrey. I shall talk to Lord Melville and ask him to promote you."

Mr Pomfrey returned via Mayfair. In his pocket he had a letter of recommendation to the First Lord of the Admiralty signed by Sir Joseph. He thought perhaps he should call on Blake to thank him. As he turned into South Molton Street, Mr Pomfrey

noticed a large swine feeding from a pile of discarded pies beneath a dazzlingly bright gas light; the blazing light glowed outside Blake's house; a lamp powerful enough to illuminate the whole road. Pomfrey patted the pig and stood on his tiptoes beneath the post: within the clear globe a miniscule and incandescent Tyger was imprisoned. It paced backwards and forwards, it circled the mantle, it scraped white hot claws against the glass. It recognised Pomfrey and gave a tiny, squeaky roar.

"'ere, Pomf," said a voice from on top of the globe, "what do you think would happen if I let 'im out?"

King Oak

Philip Fracassi

"HISTORY is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake."

James Joyce, ULYSSES



WILLIAM WAS LATE. He despised tardiness, and although he knew Basire wouldn't give a damn, he himself found it deplorable. And besides, today was a big day at the engraver's. His satchel carried the rough verses of his newest work, and he was excited to begin creating one of the final plates for the book. After years of bending to James's damnable old-fashioned styles – that *Book of Job*, for God's sakes! – he was quite ready to unveil his own, modern style to the world, despite how much the old codger frowned upon it. Soon he would be a master engraver and no longer an apprentice; able to work full-time on his own art, his own ideas and visions. And my God! What ideas! What visions!

William was reaching Holbourn Street, still lost in thought about the design for his newest engraving, when he first heard the noise. *A ruckus*, he thought. His body jerked instinctively when he heard the crass sound of smashing glass. A roar of cheers went up from somewhere just up ahead – or no – toward the Thames, from Fleet Street. He slowed his pace, unsure whether to proceed or wait out the commotion. In the end, his natural curiosity got the best of him and he went forward, keeping a wary eye toward the intersection from where the noise seemed to emanate, and indeed it grew louder and more brash by the second. He could hear individual screams now, people chanting. He could make out phrases – "No Popery!" being a common intonation – and other cast-about words ("Catholics Be Damned!", "No Monarchs!", "Follow the Scots!") that triggered something in his mind, a madness about the Papists Acts, the Protestants all in a stir and rioting. He supposed this was more of the same, and certainly nothing he wanted involvement in. Religion! A mockery. Man's need to categorize power, to create

a practice – *rituals* – in order to grasp the infinite. Swedenborg, he knew, would be impressed by the vivacity of the protesters, although he'd also find them terribly misguided. William wasn't so sure. Perhaps there was something to this idea of *overthrow.* The wildness of rebellion, the *freedom* of man's spirit in tearing at the fabric of this flimsy reality, seeking to find… what? *Something.* The world that lay beyond.

William allowed himself a smile. If the fools only knew how wondrous this reality was, how infinite the world in which men lived. If only humans were not inhibited by their five senses, a leftover construct of creation to protect man from the things he could never grasp in his current corporeal state, his soul tethered like a ghostly anchor, awaiting enlightenment. If only mankind could see using the full power of their hellish energy, bought in blood by Christ.

He felt a rush of excitement, the thrill of his ideas colliding, sparking like gunpowder with the physical manifestation of these attacking brutes, these men and women of imagination and action, sending him forward even faster, almost running now to greet the gathering commotion as it neared him. He reached the intersection at Fleet Street.

And there! *My God, what a multitude!*

Thousands of men and, yes, even women, surged toward him. A bubbling mass of humanity devouring the breadth of the entire street. Despite its early hour some carried torches, many more hefted pickaxes and shovels, dirt from the fields still crusted to the metal. *The true weapons of the weary,* he thought.

He waited on the corner as they approached, all screaming and cursing and chanting as they came. Many spotted him, locked steely eyes with his own stunned, impressed visage. He smiled and nodded, as if giving his consent – nay! his approval – of their activity. William noticed a few men at the front who seemed to be leading the rest, directing their path. But to *where?* William couldn't fathom, but they certainly did not come off as directionless, despite the ruggedness of their dress, the madness of their individual countenances, the swarming, pulsing chaos of their number.

William ran forward – caught up fully in the thrill, the pure, violent *action* of the mob. He fell in stride alongside one of the men in the lead, a chap as young as himself, or nearly. Mid-twenties, perhaps. His hair was black and long, and he wore no hat, no coat. Unlike many who seemed to be favoring bright blue cockades on their hats and chests, his simple clothes were unadorned. He carried no weapon other than a thick

stick made of dark wood, and this he thrust forward like a baton, a rod to divide the sea so his league of men might follow, although William knew for fact there was no Canaan before them, and the Thames, as well as the governance it contained, was not so easily parted.

The man looked askance to glare at William. His eyes were dark brown, and set back into his skull's flesh with such force that, accentuated by his sweeping black hair, brows and stubble, made them as splinters of coal set within a face of pale iron. His features appeared chiseled, his forearms sinewy, his exposed chest carved marble from a classical mold of Adonis. William smiled sheepishly, jostling his satchel under one arm so he might doff his bowler like a gentleman. "William Blake," he said.

The man smiled back at him, exposing a row of white canine teeth that appeared strong enough to chew rock. *It may even be what the chap has in mind,* William thought quickly, and this was followed by the utterly insane notion of wanting to sketch an image of the man on the spot, though he doubted he could forestall the stranger's propulsion long enough to capture his features as he'd want. Still, he tucked away the image in his mind as best able, for a later illustration, and the right verse.

"You joining, mate?" the man nearly screamed over the rising volume of the army behind him.

William nodded, stupidly and without thought. "Quite!" he screamed back, so invigorated with the energy of the thing he felt like tossing his satchel and bowler to the cobbles below, letting the mob stomp them to dust, then pull his waistcoat off and fling it away, free his flesh to this marvel of human industry. Instead, realizing they were passing the porch of an old family acquaintance, he ran quickly ahead and dropped his precious pages and hat on the stoop for later retrieval. In a fit of mad inspiration, he did indeed strip off the silk waistcoat – leaving himself in nothing but breeches, vest and shirt – and dropped it on top of his other belongings. Giggling like a fool, he jogged back to the front and fell into stride once more with his companion.

"You're not a Catholic, I hope?" the man said, and gave William that smile again. William wondered how the man could be so damnably charming while leading a bloody group of rioters through the streets of London. There was something else, a familiarity with the stranger.

"No," he replied, and laughed. "I have a different view on things."

The man only nodded, then raised his stick and roared to the mass behind him, "Across the bridge! To Newgate! To Newgate! Free the oppressed! Liberation for all!"

The mob roared its approval, and William could hear the words being repeated in bursts as it fell back toward the rear of the stomping heels of vicious humanity.

"Newgate? The prison?" William asked.

"Aye! We're going to tear the fucker down!" the man screamed, and voices again barked approval from behind.

William nodded, smiled nervously. He wondered if he'd bitten off a bit much joining the rabble, but figured it likely too late now. Still, this is what he wanted, what he craved from mankind. The ability to *act,* by God! That said, he thought it might be prudent, if things were to go awry, to step back at some point to watch the action from a safer distance. As if reading his concern, the stranger suddenly threw his arm around him and laughed with such bluster that William felt instantly foolish, and eager once more for the challenge.

"Don't worry, William! You're going to be magnificent!" the man bellowed, and William, quite surprisingly, heard his own name echoed throughout the throng.

They were on Snow Hill now, across Newgate bridge. The massive prison lay dead ahead – two stories of brick and metal, bars on the windows that reminded William of the Tower, although this behemoth was much newer and better constructed, or so he'd read. Wanting to be sure his new friend wasn't turning green at the sight of the fortress, he turned to study his face, and found again that sense of intense familiarity, like looking into the face of a prodigal brother you hadn't seen since childhood, or a school chum that happened to sit next to you at a restaurant while on holiday. He turned to the man once more, gripped his shoulder as they strove forward. "Do you know me? Or, rather, do I know you? You seem damned familiar!"

The man said nothing, only walked a bit faster. The feet behind them, tromping like rolling thunder, quickened their pace as well. William quickened his own stride to keep up, yelling through heavy breaths now as he continued to grill this man even as they went headlong toward violence, so ardently did he feel there was a connection he could not place.

"By that I mean, well, you know my name, don't you? But I don't know yours…" he huffed, then raised his voice loudly, "Nor do I recall meeting you! But again, I feel like…"

"We've met, my friend!" the man yelled back, raising his stick above his head as they trotted down the hill toward Newgate. "We've had such conversations, you and I. You will remember soon enough!"

William shook his head. "I'm sorry! I don't recall your name, although your face does strike a resemblance…"

The man laughed again. "Look at them ready themselves!" he roared, and William looked ahead to see the large entry gates sealed, a row of guards in front, sabers sheathed at their hips, muskets at the ready in their hands.

"They look well-armed," William said, thinking of the shovels and pickaxes behind him.

"'And the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose,'" the man yelled close in William's ear, his breath hot and fragrant as flowers. "'It shall blossom abundantly…' *abundantly* William! That's Isaiah, but you know that, don't you? Oh, sir! Oh, friend! If only you could see what I see!"

The man was quickening now, almost a sprint, and William felt his heart bumping more rapidly, blood flooding his veins. He studied the guards with their muskets and sabers, poised before the looming black gate, and felt such a surge of energy and unbridled courage that it didn't even strike him as foolish to be attacking such a front without so much as a pick or hammer, not to mention firearm. He grabbed the man's strong, free hand, pulled at him. "Please, sir!" he yelled, almost hysterical, "your name!"

The man's black eyes met William's one last time, and there was such fire behind them as to make one tremble and piss themselves, but to William it was elixir to be lapped up like a thirsty dog, to be devoured as a starving babe attacks a woman's engorged, flowing breast.

"Call me King Mob!" he bellowed, releasing William's hand, and laughed so loudly the skies echoed it back with a roll of thunder. William felt raindrops strike his skin and looked up to see the sky boiling with grey clouds, dark as coal smoke, squirming like monstrous fat snakes.

King Mob lifted his stick, screamed in triumph, and *ran.*

William screamed as well, raised his own arms and flowed along with the thousands who poured forward like the rush of an incoming sea.

Bloodlust overtook him as a volley of shots rang out from the guard's muskets. William heard a whine as a bullet went past.

They were close now. The earth shook with their progress. The sky emitted an air-shattering *CRACK* and suppressed clouds burst, dropping heavy rain. He had lost sight of his friend, but as he ran he was focused fully on the guards ahead, trying to decide where to throw himself. He picked out a younger man, seemingly stuck between attempting to reload his musket and pulling free his sabre. William roared, hair matted against his skull by the rain, and let his body drive itself into the lad full-force. They both slammed against the solid black iron of the prison doors, and William heard a satisfactory *crunch* from the boy's body. The guard dropped to his feet and without thought William stepped atop his body as the mob pushed mightily against him, the full weight and propulsion of them pressing him against the rough metal, crushing his chest, squeezing his very breath from him. He lifted his head and laughed, felt the cold drops of rain hit his hot face, spatter into his gaping mouth.

Just as the thought entered his mind that he might die were he not somehow released from the press, and quite soon, there was a surge of cheers and something *snapped* and a tremor went through the metal doors as they suddenly gave inward. He stepped off the boy and, as the doors swung open fully, made a point to find his feet again, lest he be trampled entering the courtyard, where more armed guards waited.

The mob surged in and crashed over the frightened and badly outnumbered prison ward. William allowed himself to be pushed to the side as they rushed the courtyard. He saw bodies flop to the earth as a row of guards fired into the bellies at the frontline, watched in a shocked awe as a screaming woman carrying a cleaver tripped and fell in a flurry of grey fabric, her bright blue cockade stamped into earth by those who would join her in action, her body smeared as one with the pulpy red mud in the space of seconds.

Enflamed by the violence, William continued toward the jail itself, where the prisoners were even now being released. At one stout doorway, which men had reduced to splinters with axe and hammer, he stepped on something hard, looked down and saw a discarded pickaxe lying in the mud. He lifted it, the handle releasing from the earth with a *squelch*, and gripped it firmly in two hands, his tightening fingers squeezing sludge out between his knuckles to ooze down the back of his hands, into his cuffs.

A fire had been set on the far side of the yard, and now he could see guards running, running away, out the massive dark gates; for the most part being let leave, let live, with the exception of a few who turned to address words given and received a blade in the guts, a kick in the crotch or a shovel to the face in reply.

The rain slowed to a drizzle, and the sky rumbled overhead, grey and angry. Prisoners came out in a rush, some feeble, some tall, some stout. Young and old alike.

A blacksmith was herded to the hanging platform (luckily for the guards it was free of nooses this day). There the smith, a lanky fellow with a scarred forehead, worked with his tools to remove the chains of each and every prisoner. Soon there was a line of them waiting to be freed. Debtors, no doubt, William mused. But murderers, also. Rapists. Thieves. All together in that line, all waiting for the blacksmith's hammer, or running over to another who was moving among them, his hands shining with a heap of jailer's keys.

As the chains were removed they were dropped into a great pile beside the wooden platform, one that grew and grew as William watched, mesmerized. He hadn't swung his weapon once, and began to feel the adrenaline slipping, the energy of the moment waning, a tiredness of his limbs and body encroaching upon his lapsing attitude of rebellion, of freedom, of action.

"The army!" a voice rang out, clear as a bell, and all heads turned to the gates to see people pointing at something in the street, toward Old Bailey. Those inside the prison couldn't see the subject of the commotion, but a concussion was heard. A rapid series of reports filled the air. William saw a man's forehead explode, and a woman's face splatter red with blood. A boy, no more than twelve, was flung backward, fell like a heap of brown rags near the open gates of the prison.

William spun, looking for direction, for a proposal of action, and he saw *him*. He was near the prison entrance, his face bloody but still smiling that toothy, fangy smile, and how his deep brown eyes burned.

King Mob met William's gaze, as if he'd been looking for him all along. He raised his bloody stick, winked, then roared at his mob.

"The empire is no more!" he screamed, and then ran headlong toward the prison gates, to the army that waited beyond in the wet streets. William also yelled out, following at a run, pickaxe held across his body like a musket. Someone grabbed him,

friend or foe he knew not, and he rammed the butt of the pick's handle backward, felt it connect with something hard. The procrastinator fell away, one clutched fist tearing William's wet shirt at the seams, fabric ripped. William tried to right it, but his arm caught within the torn sleeve.

"Damn!" he yelled. He dropped his weapon, pulled off his vest and shirt, threw them down in the muck, then plucked up his weapon once more. Bare-chested he charged forward, sprinting now. He sensed more than saw the others running with him, alongside him, ready to fight and die in order to *see* what lay beyond tyranny – tear down the veil, this oppressive construct of reality man had been blinded with.

He pulled even with the gates, saw a blurry line of red coats standing shoulder-to-shoulder at the joint of Skinner and Old Bailey. There was a series of popping percussions and puffs of white from the tips of their aimed muskets, and the man next to William fell screaming.

William never broke stride.

He and a hundred others met the band of soldiers and had at them. Most of the soldiers retreated, to regroup and rearm, but the others went down, devoured in the mass of frantic exposed flesh and gnashing teeth. William himself buried his pickaxe into the meat of a soldier's chest, pulled downward, splitting the man's torso. Blood and innards spilled onto the cobblestones, splashing William's shoes. He started to scream victory when something hard as an anvil slammed into the back of his head and he went down on his face into the warm remains of the soldier. Someone stomped on his back. Fighting men danced on his legs.

"Hold!" a voice roared, and William heard the clanking percussions of horse hooves against the stones of the street.

The stomping feet left him and he was grabbed by the bicep of one bare arm, lifted from the ground, brought face to face with his rescuer. King Mob stared at him, his eyes lit and laughing. "William!" he yelled, "Take my horse, man!" The King and a few others pushed William up onto the horse, the wet slick saddle soiling his crotch. Where the black beast had come from he knew not.

"Make way for the poet!" King Mob yelled, and others cheered. "He will write of this day, lads! He will make great words of our rebellion!"

They led William – his socks and pants sodden and torn, his upper body exposed, covered in warm sticky blood, his face and hair matted with mud – back toward Newgate. He was dazed, partially, but also elated. At the gates of the prison he looked over the scene. Fires had spread and were burning within the walls and throughout the courtyard, too hot and too plentiful for the light rain to douse. Corpses and moaning bodies lay all around, and prisoners were dancing and cheering, picking up dropped weapons and running through the streets, eager for more carnage, or perhaps simply escape.

"Evil is eternal delight," William said quietly, taking in the wonderful horror. "Look how hotly the fires of man's imagination can burn."

He watched without emotion as a fellow rioter dipped his hands into the belly of a fallen guard, smeared his palms against the brick of the prison, painting the words in blood:

K I N G M O B

A hand tugged at William's knee, and he looked down into the eyes of that same man. "What now?" William asked.

"Ludgate, then Fleet," King Mob replied, the glee of triumph giving him a distinct glow.

William nodded. "And what of I, my friend?"

The man turned and yelled out for other men to bring the chains recently cut from freed prisoners. They brought them by the handfuls and laid them over and atop the back and withers of the horse, around the legs and waist of the rider. King Mob suggested a man go down to all fours in the bloody mud (and he did so acquiesce without question), then stood up onto his back as if he were a stool. More men and women lifted handfuls of chains to him and he draped them around William's shoulders, his torso, even his neck and head. Then he jumped down and laughed, and all the men and women now stared at William, mounted and armored in twisting metal. Some smiled, some gaped, some looked unsure, even afraid.

The leaden sky flickered with lightning as he and his horse sat covered in the twisted armor of the oppressed, the evil, those bloody roses. The chains shone bright against the light of the fires that tore ruthlessly into the night. The orange-ridged ashes of the

burning prison fell in massive flakes like rain made from drops of crusted flame and William had time to think: *the fire, the fire is falling!*

He closed his eyes, breathed in deeply. He could smell the copper of spilled blood on his face and chest, but also the sweetness of the rain, the ashen destruction from the hellish blaze which consumed the prison, flames leaping toward heaven. He felt like a thousand men.

When he opened his eyes it also opened those other senses of the soul, the ones beyond the body. The hidden senses that allow man to see – truly *see* – the world in which he lives when those doors of perception are wiped clear by actions; when a human discovers the infinite *reality* of what is all around them.

He turned his palms skyward, lifted his arms away from the creature, inspected himself.

The chains had become pale bones, ropes of human skeleton tied with sinew, wrapped around him and the black horse. He thought of Ezekiel's "valley of bleached bones clothed in red clay" and wanted to laugh for the truth of it. He turned his head to look down at the man who called himself King Mob and saw Satan there, long teeth gleaming, a lustrous angel wreathed in a halo of fire. And he knew him.

"Rintrah!" William yelled, and that beautiful creature, that angel Satan, lifted his own face to the heavens and laughed loud enough for it to echo from the prison walls. The sky answered with an earth-splitting shatter that deafened all those that crawled the London earth that day.

William twined the leather reins into his fingers and turned the horse toward the street where the mob was already forming to move onto the next prison, the next pronouncement of liberty, the next bloody stage. *Like the Americans,* he thought, *so was it divine. So was it providence.* He pushed the beast forward through the mass, studied those around him. Most were men, but many other were devils, scurrying among the humans, carrying torches and picks, lapping at pools of blood, gnawing fresh flesh, sucking the soul marrow from the fallen. These demons screeched and flew and crawled on two's and four's as they scurried alongside men and women. Their blackened skin shimmered in the earthly rain.

Overhead, the dark shadow of a serpent long as an ocean writhed among the clouds, its massive bulk breaking them apart. The Leviathan bellowed thunder down on man

and devils alike, and all shuddered at its wrath and pleasure. William turned his horse onto the street and saw the procession awaiting him – rows of demons beckoned him forward from all around as bright angels hovered and spun in the sky above, watching, waiting to witness man's glory.

And to William's eyes the earth was infinite, and the strength of all the gods swelled inside his chest, and as trumpets blasted far off in the heavens so too did the flicker of rising flames crackle and spit beneath the cobblestones at the foot of his steed, the beast's forehead now marred by a spiraling pike of writhing black horn, its flesh crawling beneath the drapery of bones as if each hair on its body were alive.

William smiled and howled for the angels, his head seeming to swell so large as to encompass the earth. But as is always the case with man (call it Cain's flaw), he considered that he was but a fleeting shadow in a dark void, the immensity of which cradled planets; a single candle flickering along the boiling surface of a thousand suns.

He shook his head, willed the weak thoughts away, and lifted his bloody chin. He would not be constrained by the curse of man. No, he would bleed! He would act! For it was in the course of such evil doings that man would find salvation.

William twisted around on the saddle, his adornment of dry bones clicking, and studied the bright fallen angel walking slowly behind him, trailing a cape of dripping flame, and nodded.

Lucifer smiled gloriously in return. For now, he would suffer man lead the way.



La Fleur Infernale

Leopold Nacht

"BURY me unto Thy Glory, O beloved, O princely lover of this harlot maiden, within the Secretest Chamber of the Palace!"

Crowley, LIBER LIBERI VEL LAPIDIS LAZULI



LUDOVIC SAT beneath the flaming bulbs of an intimate café not far from the Abbey of Saint-Germain des Prés. One hand rested on the surface of his table, an open book propped up against his extended fingertips, while the other cradled a glass containing a meagre quantity of sweet vermouth. His brow, bathed in the tawny glow of gaslight, appeared serene and undisturbed, yet a hint of disappointment could be read upon his bearded face. The words he gazed upon had failed to excite the finer of his sensibilities, and yet, like a man in the embrace of a disappointing lover, he was not yet ready to be done with them.

The place, petite though it most certainly was, was dismally underpopulated. An older gentleman could be seen sitting in a corner by himself, silently exhibiting his contempt for all of Paris over a glass of sparkling wine. A younger couple occupied a cherished space before a window, their stilted conversation occasionally giving way to furtive bursts of amorous activity. Ludovic found the couple to be somewhat embarrassing in their tentative expressions of mutual desire. He felt the slightest bit self-conscious himself, drinking alone in such a desolate environment. He preferred to hide himself inside a crowd.

After several minutes had passed, and Ludovic had neither partaken of his aperitif nor advanced the page of his book, a second man walked through the door of the café and took the seat opposite his own. Pharamond couldn't help but notice that a glass of red transparent liquid resided on his end of the table. "I took the liberty of ordering you a Campari," said Ludovic, looking up at last from the printed page. "The poetic soul, I'm sure you'll agree, thrives on new experiences."

Pharamond sat down before the liqueur, affording it the entirety of his attention. He lowered his distinguished snout to the mouth of the glass and allowed himself to sample its generous fragrance. "It smells a little sweet," he observed, his voice edged with cautious disapproval.

"The sweetness resides like a flame at its core," answered Ludovic, placing his book, still open, upon the table before him, "though you'll find initially that it strikes the palate as somewhat bitter."

Pharamond took the glass into his hand with all due caution. He held it briefly before one of the bulbous lamps above, peering through its contents as if to inspect it for impurities. He once again made eye contact with his friend, as if to ascertain that it was indeed safe to consume. "Go ahead," urged Ludovic, never for a moment losing patience, "try it." Pharamond raised the glass to his lips and allowed a little of the liquid to pass

over his tongue. A moment passed in silence as he allowed the flavor of the aperitif to leave its mark upon him.

"I think I could almost grow to like this," he declared as he placed the glass back on the table before him. "At least, I find it a tiny bit more tolerable than the liquid candy that you've foisted upon me on previous occasions."

"Where other men graduate, with age, from an appreciation of the sweet to that of the savory," declared Ludovic, "I feel compelled to do whatever I can to aid you in your passage from the latter to the former."

Pharamond's eyes shifted downward to the pages of the open book that lay upon the table. Ludovic, noticing his friend's interest, took the book again into his hands. The cover was bound in half-leather, while the marbled boards displayed an understated orgy of whorls and tendrils in a variety of pleasing colours. "Listen to this," instructed Ludovic, the fingers of his free hand gently stroking the page before him.

"'In the heart of night,
before a desecrated church,
We came upon a fountain of basalt.
Its basin was flooded with the sediment of exile;
We partook of the sweet sacrament
with eager mouths.

We pushed ahead beneath
the subterranean stars,
Intoxicated by the ancient spirits;
The temple loomed before us
like a house of sin.
At our backs, the waters overflowed
onto the black earth.

The sanctuary revealed a tiny altar,
Its doors and panels stained
with ichor and abandon.
Beyond, inside the sacristy, slept a drunken god,
An iron tablet crushed between his jaws.'"

Ludovic placed the book back on the table, cover closed. The expression on his face would seem to indicate that the aim behind his recitation, whatever it might be, should be self-evident.

"A peculiar fragment of verse," opined Pharamond. "I find that it comprises a compelling contrast to the Campari, in fact."

"What perplexes me," said Ludovic, taking his glass again in hand, "is precisely what I cannot find between its pages. Several years have passed since I last set eyes upon it. Naturally, there are sections that I remember differently and some that I don't remember at all. More alarmingly, there are entire scenes whose imagery I can recall with perfect clarity and yet which don't seem to exist."

"Well, that's not so inexplicable," said Pharamond. "Perhaps you've got a different version of the text. Is it a work in translation? Who's the author?"

"Myself," said Ludovic. "I had the book privately printed and bound several years ago, having failed to attract the interest of a publisher. The

verses recount the wanderings of Aeneas and the Sybil of Cumea through Hades, inventing several fantastical episodes not found in Virgil. I don't pretend that it's a finely crafted work. I was far too young for such an undertaking at the time that I penned it. Having further honed my craft in the ensuing years, I'd been thinking to extract a handful of episodes and give to them new life, but it appears that instead I'll be forced to compose them for the first time."

"Memory is the oracle that lies," observed Pharamond, "it can be trusted only to distort the truth into strange new forms." He reached out a hand and picked up the book that he might peruse its finer features. Examining the spine, he took note of the title, *Canticles of Avernus*, printed in decorative gilt.

"What truly interests me is the question of where the imagined verses came from," said Ludovic, as he signaled to the staff to bring another glass of vermouth. "I can only conclude that, having paid homage to the infernal muses, they've decided to repay my efforts by supplying me with new material."

Pharamond's attention was distracted by the entrance of another customer, a fairly young woman draped in a long white evening coat adorned with dark, polished buttons. Light blond hair fell in delicate waves to either side of her face, framing a pair of soft, luxuriant eyes. Immediately upon walking through the door, she took herself to the empty chair that stood between the two dilettantes. Pharamond, assuming that she was an acquaintance of Ludovic's, looked over at his friend and was surprised to observe a total lack of recognition on his face. Shifting her eyes first to one of them and then to the other, the woman reached into her handbag and produced what appeared to be a paper ticket. "Gentlemen," she uttered as she raised the slip before her, her voice as coy and soothing as a swallow's, "one of you is cordially invited to the establishment of which I happen to be in the employ." She turned the slip around with a single, dexterous twist of the fingers. "A single visit will be afforded you, along with the services of the house, free of charge," she continued. "Now, which one of you will it be?"

A moment of awkward silence followed. Ludovic, having noticed that the woman's attention was firmly trained on his friend, was the first to find his wits. "I think the lady's made her choice already," said he.

"Indeed, I have," she replied, and placed the card, face-up, on the surface of the table in front of Pharamond. Before he could so much as glance down upon its face, she reached out a hand and placed it over his own. Not used to being touched by either sex, he found himself at once enticed and slightly disturbed. Her immaculate flesh, naked and unadorned with rings, felt pleasing upon his own. And yet, there was something to the intimacy of contact that caused him to recoil a little. It called to mind the vague sensation of nausea that crept over him upon catching sight of his own nakedness in the mirror. "If you would carouse with tigers in their cultivated houses," she said, fixing his eyes

with her own, "then perhaps you'll be found worthy to keep company with me in mine."

Before Pharamond could so much as attempt a response, she took her hand from his, rose from the table, and sauntered back out through the door of the café. Ludovic seemed to find his voice in the space left by her sudden absence. "You'll go, of course," he encouraged his friend, though he knew far better than to suppose that any such thing might be possible. "It is unwise to refuse a gift delivered to you by the night itself. If the soul of Paris adorns itself in fine apparel and offers itself upon the altar of your senses, is it not a sin to refuse her?"

"Of course, it's perfectly absurd," sighed Pharamond, still not entirely having recovered from the abrupt encounter. "As for gifts, I've received nothing more than an advertisement."

"Well, what does it say?" asked Ludovic.

Pharamond looked down at the slip of paper before him. The display printed on its surface was simple enough. The establishment in question was *La Fleur infernale*, located in the quiet auspices of the Rue du Pré-aux-Clercs. Below the address appeared an elegant depiction of a flaming candle rising from the center of a languorous flower having five petals. Along the lower border of the card were printed the following words: *The soul of sweet delight can never be defiled.*

Pharamond read the epithet aloud for the benefit of his friend. "Well," he said, looking up from the ad, "I most certainly am not the type to carouse with tigers, housed or otherwise. I think this most rightly belongs in your hands." He pushed the slip of paper across the table until it rested, bottom-side-up, before Ludovic.

"Not so," insisted Ludovic, pushing the paper back to the place from which it came, "I, being so well-versed in sweetness as it is, would do better to refrain, while I'm certain that you could stand to benefit from a night of debauch. It might make a poet of you yet."

"Poetry is an affliction of the blood," argued Pharamond, "to which I am apparently immune. Every morning when I rise, I fall to my knees and thank the heavens that this is so."

"Just consider it, is all I ask," said Ludovic. "You could always simply make an appearance, feign indifference, and leave with promises to return at a later date. Merely to set foot in such a place would do you good."

Pharamond, committing to nothing, continued quietly to nurse his single serving of Campari while Ludovic enjoyed a third glass of vermouth. The conversation between them meandered like an ailing wind from place to place, always returning to the single subject in which Ludovic considered himself an authority. Upon stepping out into the frigid streets and parting company with his friend, Pharamond decided to stroll along the Boulevard Saint-Germain before returning to his apartment. Ludovic had filled his head with anecdotes of dubious veracity pertaining to the Comte de Saint Germain. Though Saint-Germain des Prés, after whom the boulevard was named, was not the same as his more enigmatic namesake,

Ludovic steadfastly maintained that the two were connected through their names alone. The one, he insisted, may be taken to be symbolically interchangeable with the other. Thus had he been known to leave white candles burning before the Abbey and in the hidden corners of the boulevard in order to attract the poetic emanations of the mysterious figure.

The air was crisp and invigorating beneath the pale effusion of the streetlamps, while the life's blood of Paris, though far from flowing at full force, stoked those fires in Pharamond's heart which the Campari had done its best to extinguish. Men and women of a more spirited class than he passed by in both directions. The bustle of activity inspired his bolder sensibilities. Of course, Pharamond had no intention of visiting the brothel. Little more than humiliation and unease could possibly await him in a place like that. And yet, a spark of curiosity blazed with a low flame within his heart. It occurred to him that there was a certain virtue in acting against one's own inclinations. He decided to pass by the establishment in question so that he might at least observe it from the outside.

With this in mind, he took a detour down the Rue des Saints-Pères. The night sky lay spread out in soft cascades of indigo above the rooftops like a courtesan partially concealed. The gaslight, far from choking out the darkness, rather embraced it like a lover. As he drew nearer to his destination, it occurred to him that he stood some chance of again encountering the woman who had invited him there. So terrified was he by this notion that he nearly turned back. He paused, wondering what he could possibly say to the woman were he to face her a second time. At length, he resolved simply to deny any memory of their encounter and continue on his way. To an outside observer, it would appear as if he were merely being teased, while his dignity, for the most part, would remain intact. He steeled himself against the occurrence so effectively that by the time he reached the Rue du Pré-aux-Clercs he almost hoped to find her waiting outside the brothel door.

Upon reaching the address in question, he was a little disappointed to find no trace of *La Fleur infernale*. Two dark-painted doors in a fairly intermediate stage of disrepair languished below an ornamental crest, the residence number clearly printed on a plaque affixed to one side. While the lower windows to either side of the doors were blocked with squares of black-painted wood, the windows above were dark and uninhabited. Pharamond removed the paper from his coat pocket and again checked the address. Though he could barely read the printed words in the dim glow of the distant lights, there was no question that he'd come to the location indicated. Why, he wondered, would he be given an invitation to a place that doesn't exist? He was surprised to find that its absence pressed a little on his heart.

He stood for a moment, like a dejected child, before the dark and uninspired facade, partially relieved, yet not quite ready to let go of the sense of adventure which had taken hold of him. Stepping

toward the door, he placed a hand against its surface, relishing the rough grain of the wood against his palm. On a whim, he gave it a gentle push, having not the slightest expectation that anything would come of his brash action. He received a formidable shock as the door swung open before him without the slightest resistance.

His field of vision was flooded with the soft embrace of amber light. The lavish curves and vibrant hues beyond so assaulted his senses that he found himself unable to move from the spot. "Come inside!" a harsh, sharp voice admonished him. "And close the door! By god, it's freezing out there." Without a second thought, he stumbled through the portal, politely closing the door behind him. The reprimand had originated from the acid tongue of a heavyset woman who resided behind a short desk near the door. She was far older than was he, though not without her charms. She was attired in a rich, dark gown which left much to be revealed beneath. An opal hung from a chain around her neck, set into a pendant decorated with delicate traceries of gold. He was so taken with the stone that it took him a moment to register, to his escalating horror, precisely what he'd done.

"You have an invitation, I presume?" the woman demanded of him, in response to which he produced the card from an inner pocket of his overcoat and placed it on the desk. He immediately regretted the thoughtless act. All he'd had to do to extricate himself, he realized a moment too late, was to affect an attitude of ignorance as to the nature of the place. He cursed himself for being too slow-witted to respond to the situation as he ought to have. The woman took the card in hand, performed a cursory examination of its surface as if looking for a secret mark, placed it in a little basket half-filled with slips of paper of a similar size and colour, and turned the venom of her attention back to Pharamond. "You may as well have a seat," she said, eying an elegant wooden chair beneath a double-headed lamp which cast a warm pool of diffuse light over the area around the entrance. Pharamond lost no time in doing exactly as he was told. He considered simply dashing out the door, yet his legs would not obey him.

He cast a sheepish glance around the lobby, finding himself in an opulent chamber of modest size in the company of several individuals of dubious character. The effusive glow of the wall-mounted lamps was complimented by a luxurious chandelier that hissed and seethed like a nest of serpents as it shed light upon the iniquities below. Everywhere the eye might wander was occupied by magnificent grotesqueries: paintings and mirrors in extravagant frames, dressers and end-tables of rich, dark wood, couches of deep red velvet, and carpets that he suspected he could drown in. A woman attired in a silken sarong of cream and pale gold entertained two well-dressed and corpulent old gentlemen who resided on black lacquer chairs. She was naked from the waist up save for a rich headdress that fell in beads of amber from her majestic curls. A cigarette protruded from between her fingers, while her countenance was suffused

with an opiated levity. Two young ladies reclined on one of the couches that peppered the open expanse. One of them held Pharamond in her salacious gaze, while the other appeared to doze against the bare shoulder of the first. Unable to tolerate the burden of eye contact, he turned instead to examine a rather poorly executed painting of a young girl dressed in furs and carousing in a fountain. His newfound tenacity had flown from him like a bird escaping its cage. He felt like nothing more than a perfect ass perched on his chair, his face flush with a continual rush of contrition as his hands lay enclosed in one another's terse embrace within the safety of his lap.

His eye continued to dart from place to place around the confines of the room. Above an archway drenched in ochre light appeared a series of declarations painted in bright scarlet:

The pride of the peacock is the glory of God!
The lust of the goat is the bounty of God!
The wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God!
The nakedness of woman is the work of God!

Pharamond wondered if perhaps the epithets were intended to pander to a clerical fetish. It hardly seemed possible that any permutation of desire might go untended to in an establishment such as this one. He pretended to study the soft symphony of shadows on the far side of the arch, still acutely aware of the persistent gaze of the woman on the couch. He was certain that she was toying with him for her own amusement. The capricious laughter of the topless woman on the far end of the room seemed to punctuate his increasing discomfort like a series of malicious notes along a musical score. Pharamond wondered how much more he could take.

After what seemed like an eternity of waiting, the voice of the woman behind the counter stirred him from his self-induced paralysis. "Why don't you go with Mara?" she suggested. "Mara, darling!"

Pharamond's head turned, without his volition, back to the couch in the center of the lobby. The sleeping girl, her somnolent face framed in thick strands of fiery auburn, had stirred to life. The other woman shot him a placating glance as if to indicate that he'd escaped her wiles this time, but that she would be certain to catch up with him sooner or later. Mara placed one hand against the other's shoulder, giving the flesh a tender stroke with her fingertips as she rose from her place upon the couch. The light of the chandelier fell over her head and shoulders as if by accident, bathing her body in a resplendent mantle of molten gold. She brought herself before him with a graceful step. "Are you going to get up," she said, her face alight with gentle levity, "or will you take me right there on the chair?"

Pharamond shot up with a rapidity that nearly upset his balance, enheartened by the kindness in Mara's sleepy eyes. The possibility of going through with the ordeal that lay before him seemed not so distant now. Ludovic had made a habit of this kind of thing, after all. The worst that lay in store for him would be a graceless exchange climaxing in a

dismal failure to perform, which, as humiliating as it was, he would at least survive. He was surprised to find himself attracted, in an almost childish manner, to the woman before him. There was something almost pure about her, or so it seemed to him beneath the splendor of the brothel lights. In an effort to appear sophisticated, he executed a barely perceptible bow, though his utterance of "I am at your service," came out half-whispered and most likely unintelligible.

The sound of the madam's directive from behind nearly startled the life out of him. "Take him to The Peacock Suite," she said, as if referring to a load of cargo. Mara's expression looked like melted butter, her lips curling upward in an elegant smile. "The peacock suite," she mouthed, without allowing so much as a whisper to escape her. To Pharamond, she seemed almost a saint next to the woman that had accompanied her on the couch.

Mara briefly shifted her gaze to that of her client before she turned and headed toward the far archway. "Come along," she said, the light shimmering along the folds of her gown as she proceeded with a lazy step. Pharamond followed her into a cozy chamber lit by the flames of a row of tall white tapers. The candelabra resided on a dark wooden table that stood against a wall, the fiery wicks caught in reflection in an oval mirror set in an elaborate frame behind. A stairway rose beneath the play of the surging lights. The ornamental lamps that lined the walls of the space above were so dim that the décor was overwhelmed by shadows. "You are lucky little man," said Mara, as she ascended. "Not everybody is afforded an encounter in The Peacock Suite on their first visit." Pharamond had nothing to respond with. He passed before the low flames of the candles as through a baptism of subtle fire as he stepped onto the stairs.

A quick trip beside the balustrade under the quiet flicker of the lights took them to the far end of a corridor. A graceful pair of doors stood closed before them. The plaster frame was sculpted into a voluptuous curve crested by a tile of white limestone. Set into the surface of the rough stone square was an impression of the bird after which the suite was named. The elaborations of the harmonious creature were barely visible under the paltry emanations of the lamps that burned to either side of the entrance. Its tail rested, unextended, behind its breast, while its gaze was turned back upon itself.

The leftmost door was opened without a key. Pharamond followed Mara through the portal and was immediately dazzled by an opulent arrangement of texture and colour. While the suite was not a large one, it was hardly cramped. Its diminished size lent to it a pleasant atmosphere of intimacy and repose. A single chandelier sufficed to illuminate its copious charms.

Pharamond was especially taken with a silken tapestry that occupied the entirety of one wall behind a low table. A facade of iridescent sapphire

served as a backdrop for an intricate tableau involving winged courtesans and demonesses, marvels of architecture and topography, royal intrigues, ancient rites, robed assassins, and fantastical beasts. His eye immediately fell upon a scene depicting a host of armed women on horseback. They emerged from a dense wood above a waterfall of olive and viridian, their horses rearing in mid-air before succumbing to the inevitable plummet that lay before them. Scimitars were raised above their heads as they charged blindly forward, their faces gleaming with bloodlust and oblivion. Elsewhere, in a bedchamber open to the night sky, a flock of murderous owls descended upon a sumptuous four-poster bed. A man in fine clothing slept on his back beneath the canopy, two sinuous flames arising from his upturned palms. In a nearby doorway was found a woman in despair upon the floor, her body adorned with precious gemstones and her face buried in her hands.

In yet another section of the tapestry was shown a royal throne room, the throne in question being occupied by a personage that sent chills down Pharamond's spine. The women, quite naked, reclined like a high priestess upon her regal seat, every facet of her body bejeweled with open eyes. They shone like stones of living diamond in the landscape of her flesh, their gazes all-penetrant and filled with life. Several men resided on their knees before her, some prostrate as in worship, others with arms raised in the air before them as if in exultation. The woman's hair fell in luxuriant curls to either side of her face. An air of dominance clung about her presence like a gown of gossamer. It was not the indecency of the woman on the throne that caused Pharamond such disquiet, nor was it the eyes that appeared embedded in her limbs and torso. Rather it was the disposition that appeared upon her face that most disturbed him. At once deceitful, sovereign, wise, and depraved, her expression was unlike anything he'd ever seen before. He was painfully aware of a desire to know more, though he would have preferred not to have encountered the image in the first place. Several additional spectacles, far too many to examine in one sitting, appeared within the warp and weft of the intoxicating design. Peacock feathers wound their way from one scene to another, their fringes tapered like flames in the interstices of the narratives.

"One night per week, I entertain a client who desires nothing more than to study the different sections of the tapestry in exhaustive detail," said Mara, having seated herself upon a pillow at the further side of the table. "He keeps a thick, black leather notebook in which he scribbles his observations with a furious hand. His penmanship is so obscure that I doubt that he himself can make heads or tails of it."

Pharamond noticed, for the first time, the conspicuous lack of a bed. Aside from the tapestry, the space was decorated with several intricate cabinets of carven wood, a modest dresser, immaculate carpets that covered every inch of the floor,

and miniature shelves so low to the ground that they served no discernible purpose. A second door appeared in the opposing wall, the modesty of its construction suggesting that it concealed little more than a water closet.

"I suppose you'll want to close the door behind you," uttered Mara, her chin resting upon her folded hands while both elbows were supported on the table's surface.

Pharamond did as he was bid, not failing to notice the absence of a lock of any kind. The latter detail troubled him. The thought of another customer walking in on his humiliation by mistake made him shudder with revulsion. Scarcely knowing what else he might do, he sat himself at the table opposite Mara. She gazed at him through eyes as soft as goose down. Her expression seemed to betray a genuine sense of contentment.

Feeling a pang of guilt at his attraction for the woman, and in turn silently chiding himself for being absurd, he turned again to study the convolutions of the tapestry. The woman's eyes remained upon him. She almost seemed to make a study of his nervous distress. She reminded Pharamond of a nurse who had attended him before he underwent a minor, yet crucial operation as a child. He'd been terrified of the doctors, and the degree of care and patience that she'd shown him had caused him to regard her as a minor saint. So soothing were her attentions and so profound the sense of safety she bestowed upon him that she came to occupy an exalted role within his mind which had stayed with him ever since. Suddenly, the thought of making love to the woman before him took on additional complications.

"Perhaps some music will calm your agitated nerves," she said, straightening her spine above the pillow. "I think I have just the thing."

Without so much as rising from her space upon the floor, Mara turned around and opened up the painted doors of one of the cabinets that lined the wall behind her. From within its shadowy confines, she retrieved a modest box of black lacquer equipped on one end with a handle of polished brass. This she placed on the table between them, the cabinet doors remaining open on their hinges. Pharamond cast a cautious eye upon the device. The lid was decorated with a skillful illustration of a woman robed in white on a field of immaculate black. A pair of wings arose from behind her shoulders, one of which was rendered bare by the slipping of the robe some distance down her arm. She held a sizable urn between her ivory hands. A pillar stood to either side of her. The one to her left appeared to have had its capstone smashed off. Her face was turned toward the defaced masonry, her expression a mask of ire and mistrust. Below appeared an epithet in stylized letters: *The cistern contains : the fountain overflows.*

Mara placed her fingers on the handle and gently began to push it in Pharamond's direction. A tune emerged from the interior of the box, a simple progression of notes produced by the plucking of tempered steel by metal pins set into a rotating cylinder. Mara's entrancing eyes turned up toward those of her client as she continued to turn

the handle. There was something about the music, if it could be called as much, that subtly disturbed him. The richness of the timbre, along with the exceedingly high pitch, conveyed a sense of debauched pleasure that he found decidedly disagreeable. The melody seemed to find its way inside of him, giving rise to the impression of a sweet, white fire that threatened to corrupt the very breath within his lungs. Mara maintained a masterful control over the tempo of the tiny symphony, accentuating the tune with occasional pauses just before the onset of certain notes. The salacious theme seemed to surge and break like a rolling ride, threatening at any moment to rise like a wave and burst the bounds of its container.

"I think that will be quite enough!" said Pharamond, his voice imbued with greater urgency that he'd intended.

The rotation of the handle ceased, Mara's fingers rising by a barely perceptible degree above its surface. "What's the matter?" she said. "Don't you like music?"

"Forgive me," he uttered. "I am somewhat of a connoisseur. It's only..." he grasped for something halfway reasonable with which to account for his behavior. "Well, I'm afraid I've trained myself to require the full force of the orchestra. Anything less, you understand..."

"I understand completely," she replied, placing one hand over his. Her touch put him in mind of the woman that had invited him to the brothel in the first place. He had assumed, had he the temerity to visit the establishment in question, that he would meet her here. The sensation of Mara's flesh was different from that of the other woman. If she wasn't necessarily more refined, she was at least a little less aggressive. Pharamond found it almost comforting. "Listen," she said, withdrawing her hand, "I'm going to step behind the door and divest myself of the last remaining veil that stands between us." With her eyes, she indicated the gown that she wore. "You'll wait for me, won't you? I won't be a minute."

"I'll wait for you," said Pharamond, his every nerve stretched taut, "yes, of course I'll wait." A pernicious fire seemed to have taken hold of his heart, causing his face to flush with blood and restricting the flow of his breath. Mara rose with a single, graceful gesture and took herself across the room. She slipped through the door with the agility of a field mouse and softly closed it behind her.

He turned his attention back to the box upon the table. He placed two fingers on the handle and gently pulled, as if to test the weight and resistance of the mechanism inside. A single note sounded from within, filling the hollows of the room with its resonant tone. Pharamond imagined a company of sirens, perched upon some rock amidst tumultuous waves in the middle of an open sea, using music boxes rather than the glamour of their voices to attract their hapless victims. Odysseus, too, he pictured, bound to the mast of his ship as the melodious tunes produced by the devices drove him mad with untamed desire. He was forced to stifle a chuckle at the absurdity of the notion. The

fantasy lifted his heart a little. Perhaps, he thought, he was beginning to relax and accept the bitter medicine that fate was serving him.

He attempted to lean back against the wall, found that it was much too far from him to do so, and instead placed his elbows on the table before him. Turning his head toward the tapestry, he spent some time admiring the intricate scenes that unfolded along its surface. He allowed his thoughts to wander as he perused the lavish display, thinking again of the phrase that was printed on the music box. Having nothing else with which to occupy his mind, he compared the relative merits of the cistern and the fountain. After several minutes had passed, it occurred to him that Mara was taking an undue amount of time behind the door. No sign of movement could be heard from the space beyond. So quiet was the place to which she'd retreated that he began to harbor doubts as to whether she was there at all.

After a torturous period of straining his ears, he at last worked up the courage to speak. "Mara...?" he uttered with uncertainty, his voice barely above a whisper. In his mind's eye, the woman stepped out from behind the door without a stitch of clothing on her body. In truth, not a sound was offered him in response. He called her name again. His speech was swallowed in the ensuing silence. After what seemed like an excessive pause, he rose from his pillow. He wondered if he was simply being toyed with. With trepidation, he crept across the room and lightly tapped upon the surface of the door.

Time passed, and more time still. Again he knocked, a little louder, and, receiving no response, he resolved at last to open the door himself. He paused before his hand could touch the handle. It occurred to him that he didn't necessarily wish to pursue the woman to wherever it was that she'd gone. Here was his chance to escape, he realized. Were he to walk out through the brothel door, there would be nothing to suggest that he was anything other than a satisfied customer. Once he'd passed into the street he would be free of the humiliating ordeal.

Without a trace of hesitation, he turned around and took himself to the double doors that led back to the corridor. He was dismayed to find, upon attempting to pass through, that the handle wouldn't budge. Several attempts to jostle the brass bar yielded nothing. The door itself could hardly be made to rattle on its hinges. His eye sought for a bolt or lever of some kind. Only one of the two doors appeared to be designed to open, in any case. As far as he could ascertain, the other was merely ornamental. Had the handle somehow become jammed, he wondered? Perhaps it was constructed in such a way that it could only be opened from the other side. In the end he concluded that nothing would allow him to pass back into the outside corridor save for an excessive amount of force.

It seemed that he would be forced to try the far door after all. He couldn't help but imagine his dismay upon finding nothing but an uninhabited washroom on the other side. If the other door was

locked, he could at least hold out some hope for Mara's return. He was palpably relieved when the door opened before his gentle pull to reveal a corridor drenched in an exquisite radiance of golden light. He stepped onto the wooden floor beyond like a thief in flight from his cell in the Bastille.

He passed by several tall, dark doors, each flanked by lamps mounted to the upper section of the wall, their surfaces awash in elongated halos of fire-tinged ochre. Narrow chairs were placed before them, to be occupied, so he assumed, by the fittest of the brothel's courtesans. He imagined an esteemed client passing back and forth between them as if they were fine linen, thus enabling him to choose his companion for the night. Pharamond wondered if Mara was concealed behind one of the doors. She might be peering at him through a spyhole even now as he traversed the corridor, delighting in his pitiable flight from one end of the brothel to the other.

He was startled by his reflection in one of the mirrors between the doors. He looked like an Italian devil beneath the rude glow of the lights. He'd seen such a beast in a museum once; an automaton that had been carved from wood by an inspired friar in Milan. With a turn of the crank, it rolled its eyes and flailed its arms and silken wings. So put off was he by the mechanical fiend that he hardly slept for a week afterward.

At the corridor's end was a slim arch which gave way to the head of a stairway. The stairs curved in a half-arc, terminating at a landing not far below. A further hallway extended to his left, while an imposing iron door barred the way on his other side. Pharamond chose to descend, thinking it more likely that this would take him closer to an exit from the building. He crept down the stairs beneath the vivid glow of a hanging chandelier, his shadow pursuing him like a capricious lover. A single door flanked by tall white pilasters lay slightly ajar before him at the bottom. With a tentative hand, he pushed it open and stepped into the awaiting chamber.

The elements of the space before him fit together like the facets of a jewel. So rich was the décor that his eye had a tendency to slip over it as if it had been carved from ice. A deluge of effulgent scarlet gushed forth from the upturned bulbs of two slender lamps in the far corners of the room. Between them lay a bed encased in a frame of hand-carved wood. Pharamond was startled to find that he was not alone. A woman in a red corset and trailing white skirt glowered at him from beneath the dark wooden canopy. She sat with her back to the far wall, elbows resting on her raised knees. One hand held a cigarette in the air before her, a trail of white smoke drifting upward like an ascending prayer from its lit end. Dark black hair cropped just above the shoulder complimented a pair of ambivalent eyes and a subtle underbite. Her expression betrayed more than a hint of disdain. Her very presence put Pharamond distinctly on edge.

"I don't mean to disturb you," he said, his gaze darting from place to place about the room, "but I'm desperately hoping to find an exit from the building. Perhaps you can help?"

The woman remained in silence, her dark eyes partly veiled in shadow. She placed her cigarette in one side of her mouth and regarded him with a stoic gaze. Pharamond watched in agony as the smoke cascaded from her lips like water from a fountain. Four wide panes of coloured glass spanned one side of the bed to the other just above the woman's head. The details of the design were partly veiled by the shadows cast from the canopy above, yet so vibrant were the colours - vermillion, coral, amber, and bright yellow - that they stood out even in the dim light. Winding vines traced languorous spirals across the lush display, while a foliate blossom unfolded at a different angle in the lower section of each pane. The space on the further side of the glass was entirely concealed in darkness.

Pharamond was just about to turn back and try the corridor above when at last the woman spoke. "You'll go out the way that you came in, I would think," she said.

"Of course," he said, "but you see, the door of the suite in which I found myself has somehow become locked. Going back the way I came would not appear to be an option."

The woman's eyebrows raised a little. A smile crept across her lips. "Locked?" she said, with some amusement.

"Indeed," said Pharamond, his eyes softening as he attempted to match her sardonic temperament with gaiety. "I don't quite know how it could have happened."

"Well, then you'll never get out, will you?" she said, the smoke from her cigarette slowly curling in voluptuous tendrils along the dark wood above her head. "You're trapped in here with us."

"Trapped," repeated Pharamond, disheartened. He wished, with every atom in his body, that his predicament might be navigated with dignity and ease. It seemed to him increasingly unlikely that this would be the case.

"I can't say I envy you," said the woman, turning slightly on her side to face her unexpected guest. "We're all so dismally bored here that we'll do anything to amuse ourselves. The tedium of our profession is beyond belief. We find it necessary to resort to ruses, games, deceit, and long-running jokes merely to keep ourselves from succumbing to ennui." She placed the cigarette into her mouth and greedily inhaled. "Anyway," she continued, after purging herself of a long burst of smoke, "who were you sent up with?"

Pharamond had undertaken a study of the woman's face. He couldn't quite determine if she was truly cruel or if her banter was intended to be lighthearted. He shifted his gaze around the perimeter of the room. Before the bed was a low table, just as in The Peacock Suite, while at the other end of the chamber resided what seemed to be a fireplace, though not a scrap of wood or ash was found upon or below the grate. The mantelpiece was given to decorative urns and other statuary, while a mirror framed in gold leaf occupied the space above. He turned his attention back to the

woman on the bed. "Her name was Mara," he said at last, in as matter-of-fact a manner as he could.

"Oh, Mara!" A wide grin appeared on the woman's face. "She's the worst of all of us. She'll seduce you with kindness, but of course you can't trust a word out of her mouth. I'd stay well away from her if I were you."

"I'm afraid it's a little late for that," he responded, a hint of resentment in his voice. The woman merely smoked her cigarette in silence, watching him through eyes of curiosity and amusement. Pharamond was surprised to notice, behind the glare of the lamps, that a slender wooden door was found to either side of the bed. These presumably led to the space behind the stained glass windows.

"Since you've already been forced to put up with Mara's wiles, I'll be kind to you," the woman propped herself up on the bed with one bare arm. "I'll give you a key if you want it."

"A key to the door of The Peacock Suite?" asked Pharamond, hope returning to him.

"Not to that door, darling," she said, eyes aflame with subtle duplicity. "That door doesn't lock. If you couldn't open it, that means Mara's done something to it. That's beyond my power. My key will take you someplace else entirely."

"Where then, exactly?" Pharamond had gently folded his hands before him.

"That isn't so easy to define," she answered, before taking one last pull from the cigarette and stubbing the remains into an ashtray beside the bed. "A key implies the promise of a lock. It comprises one half of a contract. By its very nature, it has to lead to somewhere. The contract must inevitably be fulfilled in one way or another."

Pharamind allowed himself to sink into a seated position on the floor, leaning his back and head against the wall behind him. He looked up at his tormentor with a sullen eye. She had lowered herself onto her stomach, her head resting upon her arms at the outer edge of the bed. "Do you want it or don't you?" she said.

"I suppose I have no choice," said he. "You may as well just give it to me."

"That's the other issue," she said, teasingly, one bare foot rising behind her. "It's not so easy to simply pass this key from one person to another. There are certain formalities involved."

"Of course there are," he muttered. He was put in mind of Aeneas on the floor of hell, led ever further into its pernicious depths by the incorrigible sybil. The woman rose from the bed, visibly cheered at the prospect of a willing victim. "Remain exactly where you are, my sweet novitiate," she said as her feet touched the floor beside him. "It will just be a moment while I get everything prepared." With that, she slipped through the door nearest Pharamond and into the darkened space beyond. As she closed the door behind her, he wondered if she, too, would disappear. He raised his fingers to his brow and gently massaged the space between his eyes. Of all of the possible outcomes, he considered, the woman's disappearance was among the most benign.

He turned his attention to the side of the room opposite the bed. His eye was attracted to a copper plate that formed the rear wall of the furnace. An image had been etched directly into the metal. He leaned in to take a closer look. A host of tiny devils were shown merrily dancing around a lit candle that arose from the center of an opening flower. The latter icon was exactly like the one that had appeared upon the card that Pharamond had been given in the café. A phrase appeared in fancy letters above the scene: *The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom*. The plate was divided down the middle and featured wide handles to either side of the divide near the top. Perhaps it was designed to be opened, he thought. Was there another space concealed on the other side? He imagined a metallic shaft, directly behind the furnace, that descended all the way to the heart of Tartarus. The devil himself might thus appear to worthy patrons of the establishment, come to bestow infernal revelations upon lovers locked in dubious embraces.

To either side of the mirror above the fireplace hung a small portrait in an oval frame. The images displayed not people, but architectural constructions painted in soft, yet meticulous watercolour. The buildings were rendered in monochrome with a preponderance of black, as if they'd been steeped in the lassitude of a thousand dismal winter nights. They each portrayed what appeared to be a cathedral, their towering spires and arches vying for the undying glory of their God. Due to the technique with which they had been rendered, it was impossible to tell whether they were overwhelmed by a torrential downpour or had been set ablaze beneath a starless sky.

As if in response to the darkness which engulfed the edifices displayed to either side, the sun seemed suddenly to dawn within the mirror above the fireplace. The light came from the stained glass windows beneath the canopy of the bed. Two points of flame shone from behind the glass, the resulting radiance pouring through the coloured designs like water through a spout. Pharamond, having risen to examine the twin portraits, turned around in time to witness, through the intricacies of the windows, a hazy and distorted impression of the woman in the red corset. Her arms were extended and bent at the elbow, hands raised above her head. She seemed to gaze upward toward the ceiling as the light played in shimmering waves across the visible portion of her body. Mere seconds after he caught sight of her, she descended in a forward bend and disappeared beneath the lower extremity of the glass. Pharamond advanced a little toward the windows, seating himself upon the edge of the bed. He found himself strangely compelled by the actions of the discourteous woman.

Moments later, she arose again, hands still elevated upward. Her voice faintly echoed through the thick glass as she spoke. Despite the barrier that stood between them, Pharamond could just make out the words that escaped her lips: *"That my brow may be anointed with the sweetness of the breath of Christ, the sublime intoxication of the son of man."* Her delivery was affected by what sounded to be a

genuine attitude of devotion, though Pharamond remained skeptical.

Down she went again below the window, only to rise less than a minute later. *"That the bitter waters in which Lucifer rejoices grace my breast,"* she uttered in a tone of heartfelt reverence, *"for in nature's forge is found eternal delight."* Pharamond turned himself around upon the bed, leaning back against one of the posts that supported the canopy. That such an elaborate production would be carried out merely to toy with him provided a not unwelcome measure of flattery. He could almost imagine the banality of working in a high-end brothel such as the one in which he found himself; the boredom that must attend pandering to the indulgences of patrons with more wealth than they knew what to do with, the constant suppression of disgust and antipathy, the thin veneer of forced affection which must somehow be evoked night after night - on top of all of that, he didn't imagine that the women were paid particularly well for their services. The fact that they had somehow managed to retain their sense of play was somewhat admirable, now that he considered it. His reverie was broken by the opening of one of the doors behind him. He turned around to find his mistress standing in the door opposite the one through which she'd left. Pharamond recognized the smell of burning frankincense wafting into the chamber from behind her.

"Are you going to come in and claim your key," she asked, "or are you more of a little mouse than a man?"

"I am a mouse through and through," claimed Pharamond, rising with mock pride as if to assert his title to some obscure nobility, "but I will claim my key in any case. You have simply to lead the way."

The woman, showing no trace of sympathy, simply instructed him to enter through the opposing door before she slipped back out of view. Pharamond stepped through the door to find a space in which the clerical fetish that had been foreshadowed in the lobby might be fully gratified. The reflection of the flames from two tall candelabras flitted across a floor of white marble tiles like doves in a holy chapel. The peculiar effect of the stained glass from behind lent an element of disorientation to the display immediately below. On a very low altar which hardly rose above the ground sat an oversized book, its pages left wide open and decorated with an epithet that had been painted in thick crimson lines. Below the decorative phrase appeared a circle, its perimeter inscribed with curious characters. An upright triangle, in black, intersected the boundary of the circle, in the center of which appeared an image of the brothel's logo, the petals of the flower wilting slightly as if suffused with a suffocating abundance of pleasure. Dark, clay plates sat to either side of the book next to the candle stands. Thick clouds of fragrant smoke careened upward from smouldering piles of golden resin on their surfaces. Before the plates were tiny finger bowls, each half-filled with liquid which reflected the effusions from above. Opposite the extravagant display,

though a wide stone archway, a descending stairway could be seen hiding in the shadows. His dubious companion stood to one side, indicating with the turn of a hand that he was to seat himself before the altar.

Pharamond was reminded of the midnight masses he'd attended with his father as a child. One night per year they would trek through the frigid streets of Rouen and take part in the sacred service at a local church. Aside from the tedium that accompanied the holy rites, the sense of piety, as he remembered it, was not so very different from the pervading sense of sin with which this concealed room was saturated. Following the dictates of his would-be muse, he lowered himself into a kneeling position before the open book, taking note of the elaborate text that had been written, recently from the look of the still-wet ink, upon its pages:

Thus the Executors of Providence elected Seven
called the Seven Eyes of God
&
the Seven Lamps of the Almighty

The Seven are one within the other
The Seventh is called Christ
and the first, Lucifer

Crouching down before him, the woman placed two fingers of one hand into the first of the two bowls, which lay to Pharamond's left. The phrase '*Ancient Wine*', so he noted, had been engraved into the marble before the small white vessel. With this, she reached up and carefully anointed his brow, her touch as cold and didactic as Mara's had been soft and genial. Shifting her body to his other side, she wet a single finger in the bowl marked '*Fresh Water*' and, with a gesture at once deft and invasive, slipped her hand beneath his overcoat, through the spaces between two buttons on his shirt, and gently pressed against his breastbone through the thick fabric of his undershirt. The anointing complete, she stepped back out of Pharamond's view as the last frail tendrils of incense smoke ascended past the windows above.

"The bestowal of my key is a multi-part process," she said from behind him, her voice as supercilious as ever. "I think you'll find it worth your while. It will unlock for you the sanctuary wherein the Eternal has lodged the secrets of nature."

"That's quite an unusual key you have," he muttered. Despite himself, he found that his resentment for the woman's contrivances was diminishing as swiftly the incense smoke. He could almost be said to be enjoying the benefit of her company.

"First, you'll need to ask of me three questions," she continued, ignoring his remark, "each of the latter two arising from my answer to the question before it. It is essential that our dialog proceed in this way. Your queries and my responses must be as links in an unbroken chain."

As tempting as it was to inquire as to the quickest means to an exit from the building, he considered that in all likelihood this would only

delay the inevitable occurrence. He fumbled for a reasonable question, but his mind was as blank as the unwashed sky. Perhaps it was the incense with its rich associations, or the effect of being subjected to a ceremony that he in no way understood. In the absence of a more reasonable query, he simply asked the woman to disclose her name.

"My name is Eliana," she said, "the emanation of the Comte de Saint Germain."

Pharamond nearly choked at her answer. Was it possible, he wondered, that the entire evening had been arranged in advance by Ludovic? What an incorrigible scoundrel! On the other hand, the funds required to provide for such an extravagance seemed so far beyond Ludovic's means that he immediately put the idea out of his head. Whatever the case may be, he considered, there was nothing to be done but to proceed with the charade. "Emanation?" he asked, knowing full well that the single word would constitute his second question.

"Every one of us is little more than the anemic emanation of an eternal selfhood." She spoke as if she were reciting from a book. "If there's a single goal in life, it's to return to the perfection that we so miserably fail to embody." After a brief pause, she added, "Hence, my profession."

A not unpleasurable vitality surged down Pharamond's limbs and into his fingertips. He felt lightheaded, almost giddy. An image of the woman that stood behind him flashed through his imagination, her bare arms and shoulders appearing perfectly inviting beneath the delicate flicker of the candlelight. He was surprised to find himself moved by an uncharacteristic urge. He exerted a modicum of effort to regain control over himself. After the benefit of having taken a deep breath, he proceeded with the next obvious question. "And in what manner," he asked, "does your profession further so lofty a goal?"

He could feel her presence drawing near to him from behind. "Here, the fallen are redeemed," she said as she placed a gentle hand upon the back of his head. With the merest suggestion of force, she pushed his brow toward the open page of the book. Pharamond was not in the least moved to resist her gesture. The last thing that he saw before he closed his eyes was the candle rising like a lonely column from the open petals of the flower.

Rather than the expected darkness, his vision was flooded with a pale and homogeneous light. He seemed to drown within its vastness like a tiny vessel on the face of an unmitigated ocean. Downward he drifted, like a sailor lost at sea, suffused with essences and fragrances that entirely overpowered him. He seemed to travel down the center of the candle, drawing ever closer to the heart of the flower which pulsed and quivered with an intoxicating rhythm. Upon reaching the lower extremity, he continued onward, breaking through into an infernal court replete with blazing cressets and towering cathedrals. Circulating hordes of winged devils cavorted through the air, their bodies joining and dissolving in intricate permutations. The revel in the bosom of hell surged upward like a pyramid, the celebrants at its peak engaged in a licentious sequence of immodest rites.

At its base resided a ring of fiery supplicants, their bodies arrayed in vestments of unchecked desire. Something broke within the depths of Pharamond's conscience. It was as if a fetter had been released. Rather than face the panorama before him with terror or abasement, he found himself embracing it with a fervor previously unknown to him. He exulted as a sudden blast of trumpets announced the presence of a sovereign power. The aeriel swarms turned to attention, drifting in slow circles in their raiments of limpid flame. The father of the ancient night stood naked and crowned with the residue of stars, all the treasures of the damned bursting from his upturned jaws as his impassioned minions wheeled around him. The revelations rose like scepters through the ferrous ores above, permeating the mantle of the earth and issuing forth from the mouths of poets.

Pharamond rose as if pulled up on strings, so dazed by the vision that had been bestowed upon him that he was scarcely cognizant of where he was. A bell had been struck somewhere behind him. Its sonorous reverberations echoed through the fragrant air. The wooden walls, the candlesticks, and the marble tiles beneath his knees came into focus once again as the remaining scent of frankincense returned him to his senses. "There is still more to come," whispered Eliana, her tongue as sharp as tempered steel. "You may rise and face me now."

He stood on numb and tremulous legs, his heart enclosed within the coils of a winding serpent. He turned to face the mysterious woman, surprised at the allure which she held over him. She stood with bare arms behind her back like an icon of forbidden sweetness. The attraction that he felt for her was nearly irresistible. His body was rigid with a bestial desire which threatened to shatter his decorum.

"There is yet a third part of the key if you will have it," she murmured, eyes aflame with provocation. "I can bestow it upon you only in my most intimate embraces. Are you willing to accept the sacrament?"

The serpent in his breast loosened its coils. A ravenous fire coursed through his limbs in search of a satisfaction that he was certain was impossible to attain. Whether Eliana could quench this fire was immaterial. His thirst for her was nearly too much for him to bear. "Yes," he stuttered, rooted to the floor before her, "yes, I would very much like to."

"Then come into my tabernacle," she implored, "and I am yours."

With that, she turned and headed through the arch, darting down the stairs and into the embrace of the shadows below. After the briefest of pauses, Pharamond headed after her, no longer troubled by thoughts of escaping from his distasteful situation. He passed through ill-lit parlors and extravagant halls in his pursuit, his pace never exceeding that of a brisk walk. Swinging chandeliers cast whirling pools of shadow on the walls and floors as the corridors which he traversed swayed back and forth. The brothel seemed to breath and palpitate, as if it were not only alive but in the

throes of a convulsive fit. For a single terrifying moment he'd convinced himself that he'd lost the trail of his hunt. He was relieved to be disabused of the notion as he again caught sight of her. She passed beneath a row of lamps and slipped though a modest doorway. He was quick to follow, stepping into a small antechamber set ablaze with the resplendent glow of gaslight. There she stood before an elaborate pair of doors, their scarlet painted surfaces inset with innumerable carvings of birds in flight. Wide-brimmed bowls of unpainted copper resided in deep niches in the walls to either side, the petals of white poppies having been arranged around their bases by a careful hand. The bowls themselves were filled with dark red fluid. A portion of their contents, having spilled over the edge, had stained the ivory petals like a poison.

Before Pharamond could address the object of his passion, one of the doors behind her was pushed slightly ajar. None other than Mara herself slipped out through the opening, looking like a tender lioness beneath the lamps in her fiery hair and amber gown. "So there you are, my sweet paramour," said the woman who'd left him in The Peacock Suite. "I'd wondered where you'd run off to. I see the horses of instruction were not enough for you. You've come instead to carouse with tigers."

Pharamond halted, clammy and bewildered, unable to reconcile the conflicting emotions that surged through him. While he had no doubt as to the identity of the woman who stood before him, in his mind's eye he looked upon the face of his childhood nurse. An inexplicable sense of shame thrust through him like a dagger, piercing his heart and twisting deep into its core. The amorous flame that had so recently enthralled him was extinguished like a candle. He stood as if condemned before a tribunal of his loved ones, a wilted flower drained of its essential force.

It was Eliana who spoke next, her fingers clutching the ebony handle of the partially opened door. "For a gentleman of true distinguishment and esteem, we offer nothing less than the tiger in her den," she announced with a tongue of penetrating venom. "Here lies the soul of poetry unveiled, the eighth and final of the flaming lamps of heaven, the immaculate oracle, the fountain overflowed, the true and only Daughter of the Seraphim!"

Both doors were swung wide open on their hinges, revealing a spacious chamber bathed in fluctuating waves of light and shadow. A small group of men and women could be seen from behind. They were clothed in admirable attire and possessed of a bearing not uncommon to the ministers of governance and commerce. They sat in wooden armchairs arranged in a semi-circle, their faces betraying a desperate thirst for ever greater excess. Upon a low platform, before a lustrous curtain of emerald silk, stood a figure at once diabolical and sublime. She was entirely naked, flaming torches held above her head, her pale skin artfully decorated with innumerable painted eyes. They scrutinized her audience with a pitiless regard, while, above, a head of golden curls framed a face

of depravity. Pharamond recognized the woman from the café, at her feet a mass of writhing bodies engaged in acts at once ecstatic and obscene. She presided as a goddess among them. The scarlet eyes that adorned her body glistened like polished rubies in the shuddering light of the flames above. The twin courtesans bowed low before the shameless display with unconcealed mockery. Pharamond could take no more of their vicious caprices. He turned and broke into a run, giving way to the heedless excess of blind panic.

The spiteful laughter of his tormentors quickly faded into the distance as he careened through unfamiliar corridors and dashed down unlit stairwells. He came at last to a heavy wooden door at the terminal end of a short hall. He grasped the handle and pushed with all his might, nearly shouting with relief as a burst of cold night air assailed his face. He scurried down the confines of the narrow street and emerged once more into the familiar embrace of the Boulevard Saint-Germain. There he fell onto his knees among the high iron rails and darkened shop windows, surrounded by the bustle of swiftly moving bodies and excited voices. The city had been swept up in a breath-taking spectacle. All heads turned toward the sky in astonishment as bright flurries of icy snow poured down onto the streets. The frozen crystals pirouetted through the still night air like silent ghosts, illuminated by the ever-present spectre of the street lamps. Pharamond gaped in stupefaction at the downpour. Had the stars been ripped loose from their immaculate sheaths? Had the angels exceeded the capacity of heaven?

I Can! I Can!

Henry Jovial

"MYSTERY has its own mysteries, and there are gods above gods."

Jean Cocteau, LA MACHINE INFERNALE



THE HISTORY of ladders is not a subject that many have chosen in which to immerse themselves deeply, but Kwill Amiable had long ago decided to become its greatest authority, and even now he was working on a book that he felt confident would one day be regarded as the supreme reference work in this abstruse field of scholarship. Whether he would succeed in getting it published was a question that never troubled his mind, for his main concern was actually finishing the thing. It grew longer and longer as his researches uncovered more curious facts and anecdotes about ladders and their various uses in the distant past.

And speaking of length, his chapter on the longest ladder of all time was the one that had to be amended most frequently, for he kept finding evidence of ladders that had more rungs and reached higher into the sky than any previously known to him. But Kwill refused to become disheartened, for he told himself that there had to be a longest and that he would discover it eventually, even if it took the remainder of his life. There always has to be an ultimate of anything; the oldest tree, the fastest horse, the ugliest woman, the largest apple, the thickest book, and so on. He was determined and erudite. The answer would be found.

As for his other chapters, they were relatively simple to complete. The chapter on the widest ever ladder, for example, was already finished and it seemed unlikely that it would need revision, because the *desire* to create a wide ladder is not a significant one in the annals of human striving. There had been a castle and a siege, and a wide ladder was needed in order that as many soldiers as possible could scale the wall at the same

time. That particular ladder had been as wide as the castle wall was long and it was later chopped up for firewood. Something so ungainly and expensive but not especially impressive isn't worth keeping.

But the longest ladder of all time is something else, for men have always yearned to reach higher and further for its own sake. Such extreme ladders might well be quite dangerous to those who climb them, for the materials from which they are made will bend and break under too much weight, and a very long ladder must necessarily carry its own considerable mass, thus rendering it already under stress before a daring fool even begins to scale it. But Kwill was less interested in the fate of the men or women who climb them than in the ladders themselves, in their composition and the distance between each rung, even in their colours.

His research consisted of visiting provincial libraries and obscure bookshops, of browsing markets and junkyards for relics and remnants, of chatting to tradesmen in taverns and buying them drinks. A housepainter might remember an anecdote related by his grandfather, who had heard it from *his* grandfather, about a man who plotted to steal the weathervane on top of a cathedral steeple and who tied seven normal ladders together to make one excessive one; but at the top he had fallen, or lightning from a clear sky had frazzled him, or an eagle had pecked out his eyes, or the sexton with an axe had felled the ladder from the bottom.

Such stories always seemed to be moralistic fables rather than true accounts of an actual happening. And yet, one day in a market that chiefly sold tarnished bric-à-brac, Kwill was examining the merchandise of a stall that offered aged woodcuts when he came across a most peculiar picture. It depicted a scene at night, with a sprinkling of stars and a crescent moon that had tumbled over and was lying on its curve. Down on the earth three figures stood in the lunar glow and one of them was preparing to climb a ladder of such immense length that it reached to the moon itself. The other figures stood to the side and were only observers.

Kwill purchased the print immediately and didn't even bother to haggle with the stall-keeper. Later at home he studied it more closely through a magnifying glass in an attempt to pick up clues that might prove useful. He kept an open mind about the scene, whether it depicted an actual event or was merely some form of symbol. Most children would have assumed the former, most scholars the latter; but he had enough

experience to be cautious in making a judgement until he had all available facts at his disposal. And in order to obtain all the facts, one must work hard to extract them with precise investigation and deep cogitation.

He came to believe, and at first he wasn't sure why, that the print was a record of an incident that had really occurred. The figures in the picture seemed to have about them an air of authenticity; the way they positioned themselves, and what little Kwill could see of their expressions, led him to believe that the scene was copied from life. A man had once attempted to climb a ladder to the moon and there had been at least two witnesses, three if one counted the artist responsible for the drawing. Now it was simply a case of working out who the people were, where the incident had happened and whether the fabulous ladder still existed.

He couldn't accept that such a magnificent object would be destroyed. If it hadn't snapped during the climb, then it must still be intact and safely stored somewhere, but where on earth does one keep a ladder ten times longer than the equator? This was a great mystery. Kwill was in the grip of an obsession. He would apply all his critical faculties to the solving of this enigma, to the unearthing of the history of this mighty ladder, to obtaining the artefact itself, if that was possible; and if anyone was capable of the task, it was he, for his mind was alert, his knowledge formidable and he had a tenacious nature, one that refused to give up.

Kwill began his investigation by analysing the terrain on which the three figures were standing. If he could work out where it was, assuming that it *was* a real place, then he stood a reasonable chance of learning a lot more. There was very little background detail to aid him. It was a barren landscape, completely devoid of vegetation, almost lunar in its starkness, and it sloped steeply out of the frame on the left side. Gazing at the clothing the figures wore, it seemed they were sporting fashions of two centuries ago. This was a good start. He had a very rough timeframe, within only the last six or seven generations. And that wasn't too old.

Something so amazing that would have been contemporary with the father of the grandfather of his grandfather could not have vanished utterly from the awareness of a still thriving community. Somewhere there was an individual who knew the story well, who would be able to relate it to him in full. But Kwill had to locate the region

where it had taken place; that came first. Then he had an inspiration. As well as the moon, the woodcut showed seven stars in the sky. If he could identify the most likely constellation they belonged to, he would be further enabled to narrow down the site of the heroic climb. He nodded to himself.

"I need a star atlas, that's what!" he said aloud, and he rose to fetch one from his crammed bookshelves, where he kept all his volumes. He turned the pages and gazed for a long time at each of the zodiac constellations. The stars had to be in a zodiacal constellation because the moon only passes through those twelve star patterns. In the print, it was shown in the middle of the sprinkling of seven stars. It was possible that the moon in the print was passing from one constellation to another, but even so that wouldn't make it difficult to work out which two constellations were involved. It was just a matter of matching the star positions.

Kwill managed to match the seven stars to seven stars in Scorpius. Although the match wasn't perfect, he reasoned that the artist probably wasn't hugely interested or skilled in astronomy. Certainly Scorpius fitted better than any of the other zodiacal constellations; those could be disregarded now. The three stars to the right side of the moon were probably α, β and ρ Scorpii, and the four to the left were surely θ, κ, λ and η Scorpii. Five of these seven stars had proper names: Antares, Acrab, Sargas, Shaula and Girtab. Scorpius is a striking constellation, its major stars bright enough to shine even when the moon is passing through it.

It was also possible for Kwill to work out the cardinal directions in the print. The moon in the scene was a waxing crescent; this was clear from the fact that although it had almost completely tipped over, it was still slightly angled so that the illuminated segment was more on the right side and the dark part on the left. In other words it was slowly growing from a new moon to a full moon. Was it still rising up the sky or had it started to descend? It had to be the latter, because the scene was at night. The sun had set and could not be illuminating it from the east. Thus the west was on the right side of the picture and east was on the left.

Therefore the artist who had drawn the picture from life must be looking south, and Scorpius too must be in the south. This meant that the scene had taken place in the northern hemisphere, not the southern. From Kwill's latitude, Scorpius never rises very high over the horizon. The star atlas informed him that from 51° N the stars in

this constellation will be fairly low in the sky. Observers from lower latitudes will see them higher in the sky. The positions of the seven stars in the print in relation to the ground and the three figures could be used to work out the approximate latitude of the scene. This is what Kwill attempted to do.

His calculations yielded an answer of 46° N and he checked his figures and ended up satisfied with this result. It was not possible to work out longitude from the data in the print, at least not from the moon and stars, but there was other information in the scene that might narrow down the location of the incident even further. First it would be necessary to make a list of countries on the 46th parallel. This was easily done and he examined the list to make an informed guess about which countries were the most likely candidates. He could rule out the Asian lands immediately. The three people in the print were wearing European garments.

That still left the entire continent of Europe at that latitude from Russia in the east to France in the west; and also parts of the United States and Canada. Then Kwill had another inspiration. In order to manufacture the ladder, a vast amount of wood would be needed and therefore many trees would have to be cut down. It should be possible, though tricky, to work out the number of trees needed to create a ladder long enough to reach the moon. The print gave him a good idea of the thickness of the stringers, in other words the vertical rails; also the diameter of the rungs and the distance at which they were regularly spaced from each other.

With this information he should be able to estimate the quantity of wood in the ladder itself; wood that had obviously come from trees, with deductions for twisted branches and other parts that could not be used in the ladder's creation. This quantity would give the number of trees that were needed and had been cut down, a different number depending on the species of tree. He would have to make several calculations for many trees types. Then he would have to find an area in Europe or North America on the 46th parallel where an area of land had been cleared of that number of trees two hundred years ago. This was a daunting task.

But Kwill had a hunch that the wood used in the ladder was oak, simply because oak is sturdier than most other woods available in Europe. With his magnifying glass, he came to the conclusion that each stringer was three inches in diameter, and each rung

was one inch in diameter and spaced ten inches from the adjacent rung. The width of the ladder seemed to be about fourteen inches, making it narrow but not unclimable. The moon is 238,900 miles distant from the earth and there are 63,360 inches in one mile, thus the distance of the moon in inches is 15,136,704,000. The calculations that he performed with this data were as follows:

For each stringer, 8,905,427,520 square feet of wood were required. And for each rung, 10.92 square inches. At the distance they were spaced, a total of 1,513,670,400 rungs were needed, which translates into 1,377,440,064 square feet of wood for them all combined. Added to the two stringers, the final total is 19,188,295,104 square feet of wood. Call it twenty billion to be on the safe side. That's a lot of wood and a lot of trees. The average oak tree is 82 feet high and 26 feet wide. This means that the total amount of wood it contains is 43,542 square feet, allowing for inaccuracies because every tree will be different from the 'average'.

Kwill reasoned that the errors would cancel each other out if the sample of trees was large enough. 20 billion divided by 43,542 is 459,326. In plain language, almost half a million oak trees were needed in order to construct the ladder. Because they can grow fairly close together, they wouldn't have to cover such a large expanse as might be expected. Gisburn Forest in Lancashire, known to Kwill from a walking holiday a few years earlier, contains a million oak trees; and he had hiked from one end to the other in less than a day. The hard part would be finding proof that half a million trees were felled in a short space of time.

But Kwill was dauntless and he lived to solve such problems. He consulted books on land clearance and agriculture; and in the archives of a library in London he found in a ledger full of yellowing pages, the records of an administrator who was reporting to his superiors in the city of Szeged in Hungary. He was a forestry inspector working on the Pannonian Plain and his report mentioned that one of the last oak forests of the region had been bought and felled by a rich landowner. The number of trees cut down tallied closely with Kwill's estimate of the amount required to make the ladder. Kwill wasted no time setting off on the long journey.

Crossing the sea to France and passing through many countries, he finally arrived in the tiny village of Örménykút in the very heart of the great Hungarian plain. At one

time the entire *puszta* was covered in forest. Men had cut it down in order to create grazing land, or to deprive bandits of cover, or simply because they wanted the wood as a building material. Örménykút was where the landowner mentioned in the report had lived. This part of the plain remains an obscure destination for any traveller and Kwill was regarded by the villagers with suspicion. Unable to speak a single word of Hungarian, he had to communicate in German.

But German is commonly in use throughout Hungary and he was understood well enough. He asked about stories of the olden days, about strange incidents that might have occurred two hundred years ago, but the people were very reluctant to consider his request. It was plain they regarded him as a meddler or a government spy and he had to seek out for himself the probable location where the ladder had stood. He soon found a steep slope on the mainly flat plain that closely matched the slope in the print and he waited here for night to fall. When the stars came out and Scorpius rose in the sky, the positions of the stars were roughly right.

The moon was out too and it was a waxing crescent, absolutely the same as in the mysterious picture. Kwill congratulated himself on his ingenuity, but he was still no nearer to learning anything about the ladder. While he was standing there, looking up at the moon, he heard a cough behind him and he turned to regard a man in a cloak who was very polite and turned out to be sympathetic to his quest. The name of this man was Gyorgy Rakoczy and he was frequently to be found on this spot at night, doing exactly the same as Kwill, watching the moon for the same sentimental reasons. He introduced himself and spoke with quiet assurance.

"I heard you were asking about the ladder to the moon. I can tell you everything you want to know, because I am the direct descendant of two people closely involved with the incident. I think about it every day."

Kwill had brought the picture with him, and he showed it to Gyorgy, who nodded at it affectionately. "Yes, that couple you see embracing," he said, "are my ancestors. As for the man at the base of the ladder, he was called János and he was the daredevil of the village, always ready for an adventure."

"Did János climb all the way to the moon?" Kwill asked.

Gyorgy shook his head. "He didn't even try. That is not the reason he is shown at the base of the ladder. You have misinterpreted the meaning of the scene, but I don't

blame you for that. Your assumption the ladder was made in order for a man to reach the moon is understandable. But it's not right."

"Tell the tale," urged Kwill.

"One night, the very same night as shown in your print, my ancestors were still a young unmarried couple, walking romantically under the stars. They often did this a short way from the village. The plain is flat and figures can be seen in moonlight at a great distance, but there is one hollow in the ground that affords some privacy. That's where they liked to go, because they wanted to be free of interference and the gossip of their neighbours. As they walked at that very spot, something strange happened. A ladder descended from the sky and came to rest on the ground near them. It had come all the way from the moon. Imagine that!"

Kwill was amazed. With a sigh, he shook his head. "It never occurred to me that it might have happened that way around. That makes sense. But the moon is a smaller celestial body than the Earth. How could a ladder of such extreme length be stored on the lunar surface without its ends poking far out into space? Yet the moon is regularly observed through powerful telescopes and nothing of the sort has been seen. Perhaps the ladder was moved to the dark side afterwards and propped vertically there, so it is hidden by the bulk of the satellite's body?"

"You mentioned telescopes," said Gyorgy, "and the ladder was a telescopic design that collapsed into itself. That's the answer."

Kwill smote his forehead and grinned at his own folly. How could he have missed such an obvious method of concealing an incredibly long ladder? He asked, "But how did János fit into all this? What happened?"

"I'm coming to that. The sight of the ladder coming out of the sky so alarmed the young couple that they shouted out. It was János, a light sleeper, who responded first, for he continually lived in hope of a chance for action. He dressed hurriedly and ran to the scene and he reached the base of the ladder, clutched it and gazed up. He saw that something was coming down it. The young couple were terrified and kept to one side, but János showed absolutely no fear."

"What came down it?" asked Kwill in a low voice.

"An invasion of moon-dwellers. Selenites! It was a raiding party. The forests of the moon were cleared millennia ago, and since that time the creatures periodically visit

Earth to steal our trees. This was found out later. In the meantime, János stood at the base of the ladder and tried to oppose the invasion with bare hands. Needless to say, his attempt was courageous but futile."

"They overwhelmed him, I suppose?" said Kwill.

"Of course, poor János! In the print it seems that he is a greedy dreamer, a man who is asking for the impossible, but that isn't right. He was a selfless defender of humanity, who gave his life for his fellow terrestrials. The print is badly labelled. It says 'I Want! I Want!' but in fact it should read 'I Gave! I Gave!' and yet that's just one of the ironies of life. Our best intentions are redefined as low designs, and our noble aims are regarded as self-indulgences."

Kwill absorbed this lesson and turned his attention back to the moon. "Who was it that drew the picture of the incident?"

"I don't know. That is a mystery to me too. The village artist perhaps? Maybe he was roused from his sleep and was the fourth person to arrive, bringing his pen and paper with him. Or maybe it was drawn by someone not actually there who had a vision or dream of the scene and didn't know its full meaning; a mystic artist. That does happen on rare occasions. The main story was passed down to me, but the part of who was responsible for the drawing wasn't included. The Selenites swarmed over the plain and cut down the last trees remaining in this locality, half a million in total, and carried them back up to the moon."

"Then pulled the ladder up after them?" said Kwill.

"Exactly! Making it impossible for anyone to go up and retrieve the timber. The invasion made such a noise that all the villagers became aware of it. But this is an isolated community. No one outside the immediate region had any idea that creatures from the moon had been here. The village council met to discuss the invasion and to debate what further action to take, if any."

"What did they decide?"

"The richest local landowner, a powerful authority in the village, expressed his fears of government interference on a massive scale if an account of the invasion became widespread. He knew that life would be disrupted to an unbearable degree. So he 'bought' the trees and pretended that he had felled them himself. He was able to buy them through writing letters, and the government officials based at Szeged didn't need

to come and see the trees first. In this manner, the entire incident was successfully covered up. János was honoured only in secret. The official line was that he had been ripped apart by wild dogs."

"Thank you," said Kwill.

There was only one aspect of the case that baffled him. Why had the Selenites cut down the exact quantity of wood that tallied with his calculations? If they had taken more or less than this amount, he would never have traced the incident to Örménykút and heard the story from Gyorgy. But then it occurred to him that the invaders needed to replace the wood they had used to manufacture their ladder. This made sense and he smiled sadly and turned his gaze back to the moon. The fools up there had totally destroyed their own woodlands and now had to dwell in throbbing envy on a desolate surface that resembled a pockmarked face.

There was no more he wished to know.

He took his leave of Gyorgy and began the journey home and he wondered about the moon-dwellers. They seemed a dying race to him, he couldn't say why, but he decided not to include his findings in his book. For one thing, it would give him the reputation of a crank; for another, he didn't want to give the Selenites any publicity at all. He would turn his attention to rope ladders instead, for they tend to be neglected by ladder historians, not that there are any such historians apart from Kwill Amiable. He was unique. But from now on, moonlight would have a different meaning for him and would seem contemptible rather than buttery.

Christian Singles

THOMAS PHILLIPS

"THE KINGDOM of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away."

MATTHEW 11:12



"Brothels [are built] with bricks of religion."

The home is the refuge. He settles there, feels warmth and comfort and makes odd noises. Comments, questions himself, aloud, nobody around, why not, and cooks moderate dinners, abstains from too much television, becomes lost in other screens. He makes flatulence or drifts in effortless waves of imagination. Safe within its walls. His sanctuary, though hardly akin to that space where wisdom encourages, scourges, with familiar civility, and song fosters fervent emotion, all caught, in moments of grace, by many-colored prisms through which the sun might illuminate a Sunday morning, stained glass further emboldening parishioners in presence and in faith. He is a body in the home. Not without flights of contemplation, remembrance of things holy, prayers to the great Otherness, but still very much a body that consumes and excretes and wants things, and it's not an insolvable problem. It's okay. Living in the body with its needs, the good-natured heckling of desire. Until things become serious and it's no joke, the body, and he forgets why he's alive – to die with biblical decency – which happens more often than he would like, in or out of the sanctuary he calls home, to admit.

The home gives way to public space on those occasions when loneliness strikes with ferocity. She sits in the café, secular space, music, people, the conversation, and all that matters is that she be temporarily enveloped by the world outside an isolated self – not forsaken, not abandoned by Christ, merely in need of the stimulation provided by small others, like herself but less sensitive to piety. Her screen is bright, she has to darken it, look away periodically, which is why she's there, to see in others the strange

creatureliness that moves us, and to be seen. The brightness of the screen hurts the eyes after some time. She also has a body, a separate thing. An entity in which she is a tourist on her way to the proper death. But aware of pleasures and torments. Or the countless stripped down neutralities that govern a life, spans of time that eat the life and often taste quite good with the support of moderate to quite privileged resources. In the café, her foot itches and it seems imprudent to remove a boot just to relieve what will soon dissipate. What people think. The person at the counter was nice. He asked about the meaning of her bracelet and she opted out of explaining its faith-based significance. Perhaps something was lost in this moment, though it is such an exchange that draws her from the refuge of her often lonely apartment, that finally makes her like people and acknowledge her debt to them. The itch vanishes long before she again considers removing her boot for a scratch, thus exposing a foot in the café, the phantom limb of a sensation.

What is God? A question asked, in the immense solitude of everyday interiority, when time weighs on the otherwise light frame of a man or woman, the believer for whom faith lapses on occasion, laps teasingly on the shore, or ripples on the surface of what is ordinarily calm waters, his certainty, her inerrancy. Temporarily undone by the body and life and the countless mysteries undergirding so many assurances and convictions, the man, the woman. What we know is that He is not the body. Not at all. Surely His majesty and omnipotence have nothing to do with *physical* being, comforting as the beard and the robes and the blood and the resurrected body are, and wings of holy servants that sometimes appear in cloud formation to the trained eye, we'll never let them go, they think. His is purely a metaphysical entification, an omnipresence that belies flesh, my own included, they reason, He is not me. Not my body that is prone to confusion. Or my petty concerns. I feel confused. The honesty with which they interrogate themselves a product of catechism. Though when they ask about God amidst rolling wavelets, or violent breakers upon the shore of a day, a perplexing minute, they are asking about themselves, in the lonely cavities of their ordinary lives.

A contemporary woman, a man. People who drive and get lost in television when the solitude becomes rather another feeling. Benighted, haunted. Regressed. They reserve

Love for the savior but adore comfort and gadgets that keep the apparitions of languor at bay, nestling into suede sofas, they primp or otherwise toil, eat well according to taste rather than nutrition, like most, the sun rises before they greet the day and a full moon, illuminating the shadows of towering, jutting tree branches in the darkness of night is occasion to marvel over mystery, though so many of their questions are already answered. Their cars are new. Exotic travel means proselytizing to varying skin colors and cultures. Only one is pleased with how her driver's license photo turned out, the other is strangely proud of his iron skillet, neither has been tempted into drug use, they both adore and suspect themselves when drinking moderately priced wine. Heaven is awaited with earnest anticipation whilst the flesh is given its due in the meantime of lesser states, everyday possibilities, and compromised positions. They pine for companionship.

Within the same week they post advertisements for themselves on their expensive computers, foregrounding the things they believe and the popular phenomena they enjoy in the interstices of belief. Church, movies, one likes camping, the other, volleyball, trips to the coast, perhaps a family someday, someday, you are stuffed with respect, honesty, loyalty, reliability, come fill the space in my heart. They are both on the friendlier side of middle-age and remain active. The room in which she types glows in muted phosphorescence, it's late, she types with the owls, and warm against the chill outside. Her grandmother knitted the blanket that covers her knees. She believes the earth is burning in light of what is in fact a considerably warmer temperature than is average at this time of year; he can think only of conspiracies and how can mere humans have such an impact, for he has purchased the serpentine movement of an idea from the mouth of the CEO to the politician to the lowly, believing people, in all of its slithery transmutations. We are blameless, the idea says to him, immaculate conceptions, and science is lies. Though they're not yet aware of this difference in perspective, the man, the woman. His athletic trophies gleam above the desk. He knows that he is guilty of other things, preoccupations, as the gold-plated cups shine and shimmer and he types into the computer, his body is lean, worked out. But the earth is just fine. The feeling of awkwardness around writing and posting such a personal is mitigated by his desire, so he smiles a bit, peers solemnly into the space of a mind evermore committed

to His counsel and presses the key that establishes him as another candidate for lowercase love.

They find one another and make a date.

"THE LUST OF THE GOAT IS THE BOUNTY OF GOD."

The missionary with a penis lies on top of her, reaches that point where he is only vaguely aware of her, the woman beneath him who disappears into his steady evacuation of fleshy, even beautiful otherness that might inform him of the great mystery. He has neither time nor the imagination to consider a different position, another means of entry and receiving. The fantasy plays out in his thoughts over dinner, they both ticked the pleasure in dining out box, where she is here, in front of him after the pleasant, digital exchange. He flits in and out of attention, but increasingly in. His moments of breaking from the usual preoccupations and being present to her a series of crystals forming on the surface of their growing comfort and bedazzlement. Small quakes of nucleation between them. She is mostly attentive. Other people recognize a freshman effort, the couple asserting or feigning attention, that soupy mixture of self and other in all of its immediacy, the many questions, those vocalized, others hidden in the recesses of quiet judgment, observation, and the efforts to know and become known. They are like adorable kittens or infants. That all such creatures eventually scratch and puke is irrelevant when love is maneuvering two more of our species toward fulfillment. He orders for both of them after learning her preference, thinking it classy. She fears for the planet but appreciates modern chivalry. They both read of King Arthur in school.

The way she picks at her food one might think her appetite is stunted but this isn't the case. She was taught to eat slowly by her father, a gentle man, a deacon, a collector of Old West fiction. Her dress is not the kind of which her father would necessarily approve, and yet the Mighty Father is forgiving, understanding of what a woman must do in these circumstances, even fellatio is acceptable, so she and her friends have come to believe, as long as coitus is avoided until after the ceremony. Black, not white, and revealing without crossing the now highly debatable line into stripper attire, her dress.

Cleavage is acceptable as a bird's plume, the billowing peacock, is warranted in its own ornithological universe. He comments on the dress as a gentle man displays graciousness toward a lady. And he is gentle, the fellow-feeling violence of athletics notwithstanding, and aside from identification with corporate hegemony, he listens carefully to her anecdotes, laughs at the right moments and nods empathically when reminded of his own persecutions in the face of secular modernity. He lets his gaze fall not to her cleavage but to his plate, introspective, alert to the nuanced dynamics of two people circling one another, expectations driven into the heart of their center; she, she can only admire his thoughtfulness. And he grazes his hand against hers when it's time for both man and woman to reach for the check, a split second of flesh, followed by his absolute insistence.

Every part of him reacts to the touch of her skin in screaming silence. Every thought turns to possession.

"THE NAKEDNESS OF WOMAN IS THE WORK OF GOD."

The voice of God can only be heard in silence. She read this once and believes it, in some psychic space of her person, ever compromised. Chattering moments, dancing or laughing with friends in a thick haze of noisy public space, remind her of a gulf, there being something of value, at least, in the *aide mémoire*. He doesn't think as far into it but remains dimly aware of the difference that splinters between quick, or brooding, obsessive thoughts, and prayer. Such a voice that remains distant in the living room of her apartment where they have convened, post-dinner, not a happenstance, but no conniving tactic, no forced entry. The pamphlet she recommended over dinner is in her apartment, where she now feels more than comfortable on her side of the room, the plush chair in which she curls her body and reads or talks or taps at people on the phone. They appear to relish the ease of being together and the excitement of pre-ordained intimacy, potential belonging, and shared piety in the secular eco-system of their everyday lives. He lives the jittery calm of his thoughts on the sofa, far from God but for the hidden memory of a sermon, the shadow of an icon, the sensation of uncomfortable pews. Shall I light a candle? she asks, aware of implications and deserted

light. He appreciates the flickering brightness. Another glass of wine. Alcohol is fine for the modern Christian as long as it doesn't lead to the complete abandonment of scruples. He feels increasingly at ease with the rapid fire of thoughts, of wonderment and sensation, the sparkles of desire that dance along with faint, flickering shadows. He crosses his legs in the manner of an old southern gentleman, a confidant man, and she is reminded of another temperate, and tender, man who is himself secretly unsure what to do with himself in the presence of such a dress, on anyone but his daughter.

Her body is coiled in the chair not as a snake but in the manner of a child, we are all to become as little children, her shoes have slid to the floor. Her toes dance at the edge of a pillow, nearly tucked under her thighs.

Until she excuses herself to use the bathroom, smiles and drifts away from him. An interim of solitude. What he thinks and what he is capable of doing. The image of a demanding, incisive God whirling in his skull, but only the image, a simulacrum of the holiness that might grant him access to things unseen, buried in dream melt. The man must eventually return to the film of his mind; realist, earthy narrative that soon finds its protagonist in her bathroom self. Virtually nude on the toilet in the toilet of his thoughts. Her dress is above her waist, the bottom hem of which had carefully, but scarcely, obscured her legs to the knees in that comfortable looking but distant chair. He had struggled to avert his eyes. She is near nude in the next room, legs exposed, but together at the thighs, and he, as director, slowly parts them, slowly instructs the movement of her thighs. No, play it this way, he says with his director's voice, and adjusts his ball cap, invariably worn by American film directors, and moves in on them, a palm on each thigh flank, slowly slowly clearing the path to the hair curled like the body in the chair and the place where his sex could find congregation and from which his child could emerge if the Lord granted it. He spreads her legs and opens onto her body, steadies her, he's salivating in the film and she loves it, he mounts, vaguely cognizant of what's holy and, he's been told, what's not. And in this way he does battle in his thoughts. With latent, winning, imminent intentions.

Until she calls his name. Be out in a minute, she says. I have one more minute to see her as I see her, or to be a better person, he thinks, pull yourself together. Such an amount of time that might bring a still young woman of a particular religious orientation to contemplate virginal conception. In the bathroom. On a night like this.

How did that happen? she asks herself abstractly, alone in the bathroom. Why were gestures and penetrations left out? She is hardly nude there, having excused herself only to adjust makeup and hair, and to sit alone, slinky dress still wrinkle-free in the night and tightly hugging her chest, waist, thighs, to ponder what the night should be, its particular colors and tastes. It happened because the birth of a savior, the most erotic man imaginable, in her estimation, requires a spotless record from beginning to end, which means there is no end, He is alive, he may once again become flesh though the Spirit is more than enough for now. And then, how far shall I go tonight? What, in my inescapable sinfulness, do I need to be fulfilled, met, saved from sin, or from the doldrums of my existence? Is he, too, alive to my own mystery, a gift from God? Will he be mine to adore, the second savior of my life? What does he want? She takes the deep breath normally reserved for the launching of monumental episodes, a speech to the graduates, entering the doctor's office to receive the news, walking down the aisle, and considers the realism of birth, fluids and screaming. Even baby Jesus must have screamed.

He's waiting by the door. Leaning in. He's gotten up and now stands close enough to have heard her breathing in the bathroom. She appears, and it's the moment your life explodes, the stars go out. Makeup frozen on her face. Or it's merely the instant that leads into another instant, in which you might die, you might, or you just go on living. He waits like menace by the door. A tall, athletic detonator, but only in so far as, and as long as, the instant of her initial, freezing shock; his stare is intent and infiltrating. You frightened me, she says, unable to recoil. Nor does he move, beyond the kind of nervous, nuanced, barely there swaying that commonly animates a standing figure in repose. She glances down to avoid his eyes and sees, unexpectedly, that he's holding the pamphlet. She attempts to relocate her animate self, her self-composure. A weak smile, to accommodate this push-pull dynamic, candlelight still flickering. She finds solace in the pamphlet. You've been reading, she says. I have.

I'm not a good man, he tells her.

We're all guilty, she responds. She responds, the solemn, wary female.

They linger over tension slowly withering. Is there really a problem here? She asks the rhetorical question of herself. Though any quick-fire disruption, any benign social

fissure can bring it back, she also knows. All it takes is a little courage, so she meets and lingers on his eyes, too long, and the bad man is there. In the quickest flash of light irradiating an otherwise black dark room, his eyes in a flash full of greedy peril, his own, and hers. Now she recoils, not immobilized, now she's afraid again, afraid of their common, venomous libido, her face flush in the home that is hers, that's safe, her temple to the earthly incarnation. The red of her face and the sensation of everywhere inside her betraying a retreat from the man inside him, a demon that spurs him on guiltily, beguilingly. Such a moment between man and woman, it's happening in the safe confines of her home. Or it's merely an instant that leads to another. But she recognized evil. She knows it in herself. It's in everybody. Between them the air is thinner than before. Between them friction, endless miles of prohibition and personal moments studded in heresy. We're all guilty, she repeats; finally, something. He moves and dusts the floor with the tip of his shoes, a half moon on the carpet, the gesture of introverts and shrinking people, guilty children. I'd like to look at this with you, he says.

21st century salvation, hipster Christ, the sartorial splendor of energized youth ministers, knowing smiles in the congregation. It's all about the presentation. Hell is still the fire, rather than other people, or the mythos pointing directly toward psychology, or mass fascism. But the veneer of an updated tradition tells a compelling story, so she reads her favorite passages, the ones that speak to a contemporary woman, a man, she finds not only hope but deliverance in the message. Strength, resolve, FAITH, limited attention to the body, work but don't worship it, don't sin, don't be a fuck-up. This is in the pamphlet. Love all. Love the person but not the behavior. She becomes engrossed in the pamphlet, how it relates to love, and even more, in sharing it with him, him on the sofa, on his side of the room, the promise of their lowercase love and him shrinking into the scaffolding of a shared morality, remembering what's good and pristine in his life. He temporarily forgets their bodies. He only hears the words, and in pauses meets her own eyes without malevolence and sees into them, beyond the glistening blue, into her Christian depths. He looks into her, contemplates moving toward her to share the comfortable recliner, not a pew, hears the words, and then no, not now, not yet. He

thinks twice. He stays put to relish their unadulterated creation in the night and dreams, in some sideways compartment of the mind, of trophies.

Which is, surprisingly, a strange momentum coursing through her body, the thing they're co-creating, telling her that this geographical arrangement is not what she wants. Him there, me here. If her honesty is to prevail – and it is conquering at the base of her spine, in the course of reading, squirreling up and around the torso, it actually started in brain matter, and then down, into quivering genitals, legs, toes, her dress feels even tighter now – if she is honest with herself, she is becoming lost, not found. But lost in the eroticism of reading, thoughts of her Savior bleeding real blood, the elongated, mostly nude male body on the cross. With the tension broken, and her date's doe eyes, the familiar Christ-likeness, she is momentarily lost. Starts to give in to what the moment calls for. Woman and man, igniting, or violating sacred space. Calling for hope, deliver me from aloneness, Father. Deliver me to evil if that's what it takes. For there's the precipice, I feel it saturating me, the anticipation of new depth, another life, the union that is more than virginal Love, that makes you *feel* something, a different kind of devotion. Us here, advancing at flesh. Or there's nothing, banal life in my solitary home, work has been dehumanizing of late, money and groceries, endless, enslaving screens and he's still on the sofa. Emptiness, the thing she most wants to avoid, singular rather than unified thingness. He's still on the sofa and she continues to read, though her delivery of the words on the page is becoming clipped and unconvincing. She's preoccupied with blood and a sweating, suffering, gleaming torso. But he listens and savors, unaware.

"In seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy."

Her voice trails off, maybe at a period, or mid-sentence. She pauses. And when the hum of esoteric home electricity becomes audible, it's clear she has stopped reading. The tension slithers back in and nestles between them, air so thin, like vile propaganda, like the end of a date, or the beginning of iniquity. She feels suddenly emboldened. The woman facing the man.

Test me, she says finally.

What?

Tell me you want me.

Silent silence. She remains still and he manages to sway, stationary on the sofa.

Tell me you want me.

I have feelings for you but.

Tell me you want to see how dark my nipples are. Or say you want me to suck you and drink you as though from a cup of trembling.

Silence, and her nerves edge toward break and shatter. He repeats her name and breaks the sonic monopoly of electric hum in the apartment. He says the Christian name that resounds in the stillness of the room but has no meaning, just sound, no action. And receives her direct stare in its wake, accompanied by the clear impulse to move that lives on her surface, her only sentience or life force in the moment. Her old self named and identified in the home that is the living organism, an anechoic chamber in which friction is now molecular density around them and within.

She looks through him and collects the pieces of herself. Stands, floating, inelegant strides past the sofa, a tight-dressed heaving, a woman approaching the door, locking the door. His smirk is only half-real, half the truth and fully unknowing in execution, there on the sofa. He fantasizes of escape now. From what he cannot imagine.

She remains facing the only exit.

The earth is burning, she says. We no longer have winter here, just sporadic cold fronts. It means something.

The body is burning. The body burns. To deny is to consign to hell.

Wolfshonfenath

KARIM GHAHWAGI

"As I was walking among the fires of Hell, delighted with the enjoyments of Genius, which to Angels look like torment and insanity, I collected some of the Proverbs; thinking that as the sayings used in a nation mark its character, so the Proverbs of Hell show the nature of Infernal wisdom better than any description of buildings and garments."

William BLAKE,
The Marriage of Heaven and Hell



ON A BRIGHT and cobalt blue morning of the Last Month, Detective Isle Denmark rose to the sound of birdsong. He had trickled some leavings on a perch outside his bedroom windowsill the previous night, and he could see the undulating silhouettes of a throng of birds behind the curtains. His night's slumber had been dreamless, an anomaly, and he pondered its significance as he sipped his morning cup of coffee out in the kitchen.

Outside the windows in his back garden, the mist had started to thin. In the distance above the crown of trees the sun peeked between the snow encased summits of mountains. Golden beams of light smothered the shadows between the branches. For a brief moment he thought he had seen a pair of scintillating green eyes peering at him between the leaves, but then a gust of wind eased the foliage in a different direction, and there was no sign of the tiger. Taller than a man and ivory white, he had seen its phosphorous emerald green eyes watch him every morning from just beyond the edge of the mist saturated tree line.

There was a faint wrapping at the front door. Startled, he turned and looked out towards the hallway. He thought he heard the low rumble of thunder in the distance. The knocking grew more insistent, and he was certain that he had confused one sound for the other. When he opened the door, the skies were suddenly grey and it was raining heavily. A crack of thunder flashed a momentary bright silver exposure upon a black shape hovering underneath an umbrella. It was round like a pumpkin and tugged into a black coat and hat.

'Good lord this weather!', the man said and seemed to be in a hurry to seek shelter in the house. The man had bulging eyes, pin-pricked by a tiny pair of round copper

spectacles. 'Good morning Detective Denmark, my name is Albion Jerusalem, may I please come in?'

Uncertain of himself, uncertain of the tiger in his garden, uncertain of the ready-made cup of coffee that waited for him each morning on his kitchen counter, the detective stepped aside and let the man come into the hallway.

'Would you be so kind as to hold this?', Mr. Jerusalem said and handed the detective his umbrella. In a flash of lightening the detective could see that the handle of the umbrella was forged in brass and emblazoned with a serpentine thread of skulls. 'This weather is neither here nor there,' he said fussily and slipped out of his bulging black coat. 'And this?' He handed the detective his coat. The man was short and roomy around the hips, but his movements were dexterous and smooth like a feline's. He drew the door shut behind him with the heel of a muddied alligator shoe. 'Thank you. Now how about that cup of coffee? Lambeth is calling.'

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'So you must have some questions,' Mr. Jerusalem said once they had settled themselves comfortably around a table in the living room. A single tasseled lamp hanging over the table gave the otherwise grey gloom coming in through the rain swept windows some warmth and color.

'Not interested.'

'This is understandable,' Mr. Jerusalem said and sampled his cup of coffee which was to his satisfaction it seemed, for he smacked his lips loudly. 'You get visitors, things begin to happen.' He reached into the inner pocket of his green velvet jacket. A silver cigarette case emblazoned with an owl was soon opened, and the tip of a black cigarette was quickly timbered. He offered the clove to the Detective, who remained as he was, perched on his chair with arms crossed in front of him.

'I can explain, and I'll understand if you feel that the story is full of holes,' Mr. Jerusalem said and eased threads of smoke out of his mouth, ears and nostrils. 'Let me first assure you, that your dear wife Margarita is safe. We have received numerous reports that the Crimson Hectate has made landfall at New New Plymouth Rock, and I can assure you that arrangements are being made through sensitive back channels for the four of you to be reunited.'

Upon saying this Mr. Jerusalem drew on his cigarette, sat back and watched the Detective for any signs of a reaction. A gust of wind sent a whiplash of rain against the windows.

'I thought you'd be pleased...'

The house creaked, and the light blinked a single time above them.

Mr. Jerusalem sat up in his chair. 'You Mr. Denmark are the world's greatest living detective.'

'Antoine D'Anglerre is the world's greatest living detective. Any news concerning *his* whereabouts?'

'There is no news detective, from him or from America, because there still is no America. Since the disappearance of America and your dear wife Margarita are inexorably linked, we assumed that this new vital information would bring you back to the case. Now we do understand that there were some unforeseen circumstances-'

'*-unforeseen circumstances*.'

'Yes, involving your esteemed colleague Mr. Sweden- the Travel Writer.'

'He's not my colleague- I work alone.'

'Well, as your dear wife Margarita is inexorably linked to the disappearance of America, so is Mr. Sweden inexorably linked to you. Now Mr. Sweden has been unwell. He has been under some pressure, real or imagined to deliver a sequel to his last work. He seems to believe that *you* Mr. Denmark, are a literary character living in his imagination.'

'Curious.'

'Isn't it?' Mr. Jerusalem arched his eye-brows and squinted.

'Mr. Sweden is free to entertain any number of colorful convictions, but what does this have to do with me?'

'Yes,' Mr. Jerusalem said apprehensively, 'that does deserve an explanation. As I said Mr. Sweden is unwell. The Travel Writer's Union is most forthcoming in providing accommodations to its most gifted members, even when they are experiencing an unconventional lull in productivity. Up until recently, Mr. Sweden has therefore been committed to that drafty eastern annex known as the *Writer's Block*.'

The rain had stopped outside.

'Writer's block?'

'Not anymore!,' Mr. Jerusalem hastened to add with some excitement. 'Otherwise we wouldn't be having this conversation!' Mr. Jerusalem lit another cigarette. 'A fortunate coincidence released the poor travel writer from his anxious state. A book. Left in his cell. Erroneously attributed to Mr. Sweden.'

'Which book?'

'A book by Emanuel Swedenborg. It humored him to no end. The book seems to have spurred Mr. Sweden clear of his fallow state to new heights of creativity. He has been gripped by a new vision, a new voice, a renewed sense of direction! Released he is, from the Vales of Har!' Mr. Jerusalem's eyes were pulled wide like tea cups.

'Where is Margarita?'

'Yes,' Mr. Jerusalem said, his enthusiasm suddenly curbed somewhat. 'This is what we are trying to establish. We understand that Mr. Sweden has been revising and developing the mythology of his early writings, complicating somewhat the current state of affairs. We understand that Margarita, Beatrice and Enith-Armon, embodied in the Crimson Hectate, have made landfall somewhere in Europa.'

'Why don't you ask Mr. Sweden that question?'

'We would, if we could,' Mr. Jerusalem said and flicked the remainder of his cigarette into his mouth and swallowed. 'We have received reports that the Supreme Chancellor's Purple Guard have taken him away. Excerpts of his work in progress were leaked to the public (we suspect the Russians), and due to their revolutionary, destabilizing nature, the work has been considered seditious to the continued stability of the state.'

'May I please have one of those,' the detective said and gestured towards Mr. Jerusalem's cigarette case.

'By all means.'

The detective pulled a black cigarette to his mouth. Albion snapped the case back shut and lit the Detective's cigarette with the tip of his finger, an extended thumb. 'Thumbs up.'

'Not quite,' the detective said and blew a plume of smoke up into the sienna light of the overhead lamp, causing Mr. Jerusalem's round head to be all but obscured. 'Lots of things have happened while I have been in utero it seems…'

'There have been some consequences, yes…' the cloud of smoke said.

'Who is this Supreme Chancellor? The Purple Guard?'

'In his own words, he is Supreme, Fabulous', the cloud of smoke said. 'To the peoples of Europa he is the *Great Dictator*. To the Secretariat, no manner of book-keeping has satisfactorily quantified the nature of his persona. He is one person or he is three- or four. He is sometimes a person, and he is sometimes a place, sometimes both at the same time. He is the unrestrained Emanator. He is the builder of walls who fancies himself a poet.'

'And The Purple Guard?'

'The Purple Guard are the military wing of the D.S.V., the Supreme Chancellor's secret police.'

'And how did this come to be?'

'Soon my good detective you will see that with your own eyes,' Mr. Jerusalem said, and removed his spectacles. He held them up to the light and polished them with a polka dotted handkerchief he had pulled from his pocket. 'In Europa, you will be a marked man Mr. Denmark.' Mr. Jerusalem returned his tiny round spectacles to his pudgy nose. 'No, if you are to embark upon your journey you will need a partner.'

'I work alone remember.'

'Your partner will be key, literally and otherwise,' Mr. Jerusalem said with some pity in his voice. 'I suggest you employ his services for Margarita's sake and for yours. Find Mr. Sweden, and you'll find your dear Margarita.'

'I have couple of questions.'

'Please ask away,' Mr. Jerusalem said and looked at his pocket watch. It was made of brass and had a dog emblazoned on its rear.

'Where am I? What is this place?'

'You Mr. Denmark, have been confined to that drafty Eastern annex-'

'-How long?'

Mr. Jerusalem raised his eyes from his watch and looked at the Detective with some apprehension.

'I don't know if it is appropriate to discuss this at present.'

The detective remained silent and tilted his head ever so gently to one side.

'I think it is appropriate.'

'Oh I don't know…', Mr. Jerusalem said, uncertain about how next to proceed. 'At some point in time Detective, all events great or small, will shrink to be resigned to the footnotes of history, whereupon inevitably, somebody, will want them to disappear.'

'How long?'

A faint pink glow accompanied with a rumble emanated through the kitchen windows.

'Oh dear, look at the time.' Mr. Jerusalem said, and suddenly rose from the table. 'He's coming.' He rushed cat-like out towards the hallway.

'Who's coming?' The detective slowly rose from the table and looked out towards the kitchen windows. The red light strengthened in intensity.

Mr. Jerusalem hurried just as cat-like, back into the living room. He was holding his coat in one hand, his black Cavanagh fedora hat in the other. He threw them to the Detective. 'Here take these. You'll want to wear them wherever you go.' The rumble intensified outside the kitchen windows. The tea cups and shingles trembled.

'Who's coming?'

'Don't stand in his way. Don't try and stop him.'

'Who's coming?'

'Your partner.'

'My partner?'

'Mr. Cro.'

'I told you, I work alone.'

'Don't try explaining that to him. Here comes Mr. Cro and I gotta go!'

Mr. Jerusalem's round pudgy shape dissolved in the crimson light.

The detective threw Mr. Jerusalem's heavy coat and hat onto the nearby sofa, turned and moved with some apprehension towards the kitchen windows. Cutlery slid off shelves around him, glasses and plates shattered on the floor.

The clouds over the mountains he could see outside the trembling windows, had turned a blood red across the horizon. The wheeling clouds grew and swelled, tinting the ether with their timber. There was a looming shape, silhouetted against the infernal red light, stumbling drunkenly out in his back garden. The point where it had broken into the garden from the tree-line was rendered and flattened into a darkened tunnel. The shape, muscular and perhaps eight feet tall, swerved in one direction, then regained

some moment of equilibrium, before it stumbled towards the kitchen windows. The shape grew and grew with each labored step, the seven eyes in its darkened unintelligible head glowed an emerald green.

Oh well, the detective thought and started to step back from the kitchen windows.

The house shook and trembled to its foundations. Cracks spidered along the shaking walls, and widened into scurrying fissures. Paintings slipped from their perches and shattered onto the floor. The detective continued his backwards retreat as the red light pouring into the house was suddenly interrupted by the black shape standing just outside the kitchen windows. It suddenly crashed into the kitchen and took the entire wall of the house with it.

The detective dove behind the sofa, covering his head from flying glass and shrapnel.

Suddenly it went quiet.

A painting that had somehow weathered the tremors slid off its nail and crashed to the floor.

The detective peeked over the edge of the sofa and Mr. Jerusalem's scattered coat. Instead of the vast hulking shape he had just witnessed steamrolling the wall of his house, he saw a man, ordinary in size and shape, standing in the rubble of the kitchen floor. Red shafts of light washed onto his blackened outline. He was wearing a coat and a hat and smoking a pipe.

The detective slowly raised himself from behind the sofa.

Having noticed him, the man turned towards the detective.

'Detective Denmark I presume?'

'That depends on who's asking.'

'Forgive me', the man said, looking around the mess in the kitchen. 'I am Hannibal Cro. I understand we have work to do.' He gestured with the mouthpiece of his pipe. 'If you would be so kind Detective and step that way.'

When Detective Denmark turned towards the far corner of his living room, he could see two skeletons standing on either side of a tall closet. The skeletons were both wearing tuxedos and the sockets in their toothless skulls were jeweled with green and purple rubies. A chandelier swayed gently back and forth in the ceiling and threw flickering shadows across the swirling patterns of the wallpaper.

‘A gentleman cannot travel without his coat and hat,’ Mr. Cro said and pulled on his pipe. ‘It’s a chilly morning.’ Under his pork pie hat, the embers in his pipe illuminated the lines of his face. He had a long thin nose, that jutted to one side at an odd angle as if it had been broken and then hastily reset. His chin was dimpled and narrow. He wore a green tie, nestled between the flowered collar flaps of a top buttoned earthy brown shirt.

‘After you detective.’

The two skeletons pulled the mirrored doors of the closet open and a faint purple glow washed into the shattered remnants of the living room. The temperature seemed to drop in the room. The Detective found the coat and hat Mr. Jerusalem had left him, scattered on the sofa. He slipped into the coat and found that it was a perfect fit. He buttoned it, raising his collar against the chill air. He tipped the Cavanagh fedora onto his head. It too was orchestrated snugly in place.

Mr. Cro pulled on his pipe. ‘After you Detective Denmark,’ he said. ‘Let’s go to Europa.’

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Dr. Katerina Goethe sat with her eyes closed on the very back pew of St. Mary’s church and let the voices of the Reichenbach chorale swell into her being. The tenor alto, a young boy from the Tax Provinces in New Milan, was the ensemble’s most recent addition and youngest member, and though the doctor had heard the composition performed every Wednesday morning before she caught *Le Mistral Express* across the Ärmelkanal to New Albion, she marveled at the new boy’s sweet innocent voice. His timber was honeyed with soft vowels, the shrillest most difficult passages were tempered but never at the expense of overall harmony. In her mind the polyphony was as the augur had envisioned it. The heavenly voices of the Reichenbach chorale were suddenly interrupted by a coarse, impatient voice.

‘Identification papers.’

When Katerina opened her eyes there were two soldiers standing next to her. The insignia on their shoulders identified them as officers of the Supreme Chancellor’s Purple Guard.

‘Papers,’ the taller of the two guards said. ‘No papers, no person.’

Katerina obliged and hit a button on a little brass ladder she held in her mind. Suddenly the seer's whispered vision of St. Mary's church and the choir dissipated like mist around her, and Goethe was now sitting by the window in a rumbling train compartment of *Le Mistral Express*.

'Papers, papers,' the other Purple Guard said, and snapped his paws impatiently.

The train had started to slow. The windows darkened as they neared the Great Wall on the fortified banks of the English Channel. A de-saturated jigsaw of artillery, tanks and barbed wire dotted the base of the concrete and iron behemoth like insects. Searchlights emanating from spiked observation towers, a mile apart at the top of the wall, cut bright swathes of illumination into the purpled dawn. Hot air balloons tethered by rope to pylons on the top of the wall were gently buoyed by currents of wind. A banner with large red letters had been suspended between two of the balloons and said: *Greatness Emanates Through Endurance.*

'Katerina Goethe,' the taller guard said, and looked down at her identification papers. He scratched his furry baboon chin with a leather gloved hand. He seemed to be short sighted, for he held the paper only a few inches away from his red and blue nose. 'Says here you are a doctor.'

'A psychiatrist, yes', Goethe said, choosing her words carefully. 'I work for the Ministry of Well-Being. I am on official business.'

The other guard, the shorter canine, snorted over his shoulder. He gave the doctor a disparaging, impatient glance as his long pointed Doberman ears flickered through the holes of his helmet. 'Who needs psychiatrists,' he said dismissively.

The taller guard narrowed his eyes. 'Where are you going?'

A static filled voice emanating from an overhead speaker in the compartment made service announcements:

'*You are entering Security Zone Albinius 4. Report any suspicious activity immediately. Have your identity papers ready. Walled in we prosper securely.*

'Same end destination as everyone else on this train.'

'Yes that can be arranged,' the tall baboon said.

The windows continued to darken, and little fitted lights blinked on and cast the compartment in a green wavering glow. The train's brakes started to screech as it tunneled into the base of the Great Wall.

'I am to report to Detention Center 11C in Regent's Park,' Goethe said, speaking loudly over the infernal sound. Both soldiers steadied themselves as the compartment shook. The windows that had previously afforded any passenger a view of the Old Continent were blackened by the tunnel walls.

'Are you working for the Americans?,' the taller guard said with some disdain.

He steadied himself in the compartment doorway. '*Gaps*,' the short guard snorted and nearly lost his balance. A black boot squeaked as it slid on the floor and he quickly gripped the taller soldier's arm for leverage.

'I will reiterate,' Goethe said with some irritation. 'I am a Swiss psychiatrist who resides in Paris. Once a week I take this very train to London to work at Detention Center 11C in Regent's Park. There, by decree of the Center of Immigration, the Ministry of Well-Being, in accordance with decree 187- 31, issued by the Ministry of Information, it is my job to determine whether or not vetted American refugees are mentally fit for assimilation into the Great Kingdoms of Europa.'

'She calls the *Gaps* refugees,' the tall guard said over his shoulder, 'when they are all illegal immigrants and criminals.'

'All *Gaps* are terrorists,' the short guard snorted.

'What's in the bag,' the tall guard said gesturing with a black leather gloved hand. He hooked his index finger. 'Let me see. Come on.'

The train came to a halt with a loud screech, and then the lights suddenly went out. The compartment was thrown into complete darkness. Pipes hissed and ironworks groaned. The fizzling drippings of water and rattling chains echoed in the tunnel. The *Mistral Express* held still, in the bowels of the Great Wall, underneath a quarter mile of metal and concrete.

A voice, smooth and low pitched, silken as the hiss of the steam that was released by the locomotive's tempered engines, imbued the compartment. It seemed to come from several directions at once, the static filled speaker over their heads perhaps, and from somewhere just outside the compartment.

'*Ticketssss pleaaaase*.'

The green lights flickered back on.

The guards turned to look behind them. A window must have been left open out in the walkway for it was filled with gusts of locomotive steam. A shape, cast in the

meek green florescent light from a nearby compartment, was standing on a coiling stairway leading down from the train's second storey.

'*Tickets. Billettes.*'

The shape came down the remainder of the stairs and approached the compartment doorway. A broad smile hovered underneath the impenetrable shadow of a bronze rimmed visor. The upper lip was finely mustachioed by a pair of curved cat's tails. 'Ladies and gentlemen, the fires of our engines have been temporarily tamed by ceremony. May I please see your tickets.'

Goethe reached into her jacket pocket and handed the conductor her ticket.

'Seems like we are having quite a busy morning,' the conductor said as he punctured Katerina's ticket with a pair of bronze clippers and quietly hummed an anthem by Sir Hubert Parry under his breath. He wore a green blazer and sported a butterfly, speckled with the fragmented wings of moths. The wings were dotted with green eyes. 'With all the trouble back in London.' He returned the ticket to Goethe, who paused and looked at it before she returned it to her pocket. The conductor she thought, must have switched her ticket by accident, for a monthly European pass was stenciled in gold underneath her name.

'Could you please sign the ticket Mademoiselle Goethe, so that we can be in compliance and agreement?'

Puzzled, she thought it better to oblige and reached into her coat and brought out a pen. She signed the ticket simply with an *X*.

The conductor nodded, smiled toothily, returned the clippers to his jacket and turned to address the two soldiers.

'Gillespie! Rantallion!'

'Rantaliere,' the taller soldier corrected him.

'You are to report upstairs immediately,' the conductor said snappily, ignoring him.

'Where?' the taller soldier said, flummoxed by the mispronunciation of his name which had sequestered him since childhood.

'Upstairs.'

'Upstairs?'

'Would you rather be downstairs?' the conductor said, suddenly lowering his voice. 'We both know what happens down there…'

A security announcement started on the intercom. The voice was warbled and filled with static.

'*You are entering Security Zone Albinius 4. Report any suspicious activity immediately. Gillespie and Rantallion are to report upstairs immediately. Have your identity papers ready. Walled in we prosper securely.*'

The soldiers looked up at the compartment speakers. They thought that they had heard laughter intermingled with the static. They lowered their heads to the conductor who studied his pocket-watch. It was tethered to his shirt pocket by a chain and emblazoned with the outline of a tree. He looked back at the soldiers. 'Are you still here!?'

'Where are we supposed to go?' the shorter soldier asked exasperated.

'We are upon the very perimeter of the mundane shell yes!? Darkened is our tunnel by twenty-seven layers of opaqueness! North West lies Albion, East Mor Breizh. South Urizen. North Urthona. Tharmas West. Luvah East. And in every direction is man fallen! Perhaps you should be sent to Amerika with a torch and a map! And you can send a postcard back to his fabulousness *Himself* the Supreme Councilor saying irrevocably : *Mission Accomplished* : *The disappeared continent has returned*! Where do you think you must go!? Up the Wall! Up the Wall! You have been *summoned*!'

The train conductor's increasingly wavering voice seemed to bounce and echo strangely around the little compartment. It give gave both soldiers a wheeling feeling of consternation and distress. 'Where!?' the baboon implored, 'by whom have we been summoned?'

'Search within yourselves,' the conductor suddenly whispered, the pitch of European dialects which imbued his silky voice forked into something almost inaudible, 'as you would search within these tunnel walls, and I am certain you will find a ladder straight up to your commander-in-chief, and if you can't find the ladder, ask Sulam Yaakov for directions.' Suddenly his voice shifted, rising in volume and intensity. 'IF YOU ARE STILL ON THIS TRAIN WHEN IT PULLS OUT OF ALBINIOUS YOU WILL BE SHOT LIKE YOUR PREDECESSORS! SEE THIS!?,' the conductor said and produced a silver whistle from his pocket. 'RAUS! Gleichschaltung! GLEICHSCHALTUNG!'

At first both soldiers stood stunned in their boots. Dog and baboon then looked at each other, nodded vigorously coming to some mutually agreed-upon decision, then they rushed out of the compartment, one nearly falling atop of the other.

As the sound of boots receded outside the compartment, Goethe sat stunned in her seat. Uncertain of what to say or do next, she held up her ticket to the conductor, who stood readying himself to close the sliding door as if nothing had occurred.

'My apologies Mademoiselle,' he said cordially, 'I have a schedule to keep.'

'I understand, and I thank you Herr Conductor, but there must have been some kind of mistake,' Goethe said, 'my ticket is a month long European pass.'

'Were you expecting a ticket to Golgonooza perhaps?'

'Golgonooza?,' Katerina said puzzled, 'Where is that?'

'Soon everywhere,' the conductor said as an aside, 'It is our eighth stop Mademoiselle, and our final destination today.'

'If I am not mistaken, I thought London- our seventh stop, - was this train's final destination?'

'You are not mistaken Doctor Mademoiselle Goethe, you are a perceptive traveler' the conductor said holding still between the compartment doors and smiling. 'Today's schedule had to have a minor, last minute alteration, due to certain occurrences in London this morning. Nothing to worry about Mademoiselle, we will have you to your destination.'

'Pray tell,' Katerina said, her curiosity piqued, 'what has happened in London this morning?'

'Some able souls at London's Central Postal Service, Mademoiselle,' the conductor said, his broad smile still holding between the meager opening of the compartment's sliding doors, 'have done the extraordinary deed of composing a carefully worded complaint to the Ministry of Information. They feel that the sudden high propensity of undeliverable mail has them burdened beyond their means. They used the term *Wollstonecraft* to describe this phenomenon.'

'Are the postal workers protesting in the streets?' Katerina asked surprised, as there had been no reported public protests anywhere in Albion or in Europa in living memory, to her knowledge.

'Not a postal worker in sight on the streets of London today, Mademoiselle' the conductor said. 'The security forces are the source of the disruption this morning. They have closed parts of the city and are conducting an usually high number of military drills. They test fired a rocket into the Atlantic.'

Katerina shrugged, and looked out at the darkened, sooty walls of the mundane shell. 'When are the Supreme Chancellor's security forces not in a heightened state of alert Herr Conductor?' She turned back to him. 'We live in a perpetual state of fear and high vigilance- ever since Amerika disappeared. They are scared to be next.'

'Indeed Mademoiselle,' the conductor said, 'most perceptive of you.'

'May I ask Herr Conductor,' Katerina asked puzzled, 'what triggered the D.S.V?'

'You may Mademoiselle', the conductor said, looking at his clock, 'the postcard was sent directly into the Ministry of Information. The postcard called for an immediate investigation. As a rebuke, the postcard was of course stamped upon reception, initially ignored, and then immediately returned by courier without further comment. Yesterday morning, three days later, the courier returned with the postcard to the Ministry of Information. His clothes were haggard and torn. His face was pale, his hair disheveled. He had a wild look in his eyes, as if they had fallen upon some unknowable thing. He seemed unwilling to talk. When they looked at the postcard, they assumed that it had not been delivered, and if it had, the contents of the card were unchanged, or worse, similarly ignored. When the courier was further pressed, he still refused to talk, so the Ministry of Information sent him to *Chicago.*'

'*Chicago*?' Katerina asked puzzled, 'in Amerika?'

'*Chicago*,' the conductor said clarifying, 'a secret D.S.V. interrogation black site underneath the Royal Opera House on Bow Street- but don't tell anybody I told you that', he whispered as an aside.

Katerina nodded, her complexion loosing color.

'The courier was interrogated by the D.S.V.,' the Conductor went on, his smile never faltering in the compartment's low green light and blackened windows. 'But no matter how hard they pressed him, the courier wouldn't talk. Finally, this morning, after the D.S.V. had pressed the man and his family in every way possible, a single word finally came out of his mouth. Do you know what that word was Mademoiselle Goethe?'

'Let me guess,' Katerina said, her heart beating in her chest. 'That poor tortured innocent man said *Wollstonecraft*.'

'Most perceptive of you Mademoiselle,' the conductor said and looked at his pocket watch. 'Look at the time! The fires of our engines must be rekindled! To Albion we haste, out of this void between the stars!'

'Thank you Herr Conductor,' Katerina said, feeling the stub of her European ticket in her pocket.

'It is always a pleasure Mademoiselle.'

One of the conductor's eyes was green, Katerina realized, the other a bright orange. 'We have a lot of work to do,' he said, winked at her, and then he slammed the compartment door shut.

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The Albion Branch of the Supreme Chancellor's Excontinental Press empire sits on the corner of Broadwick and Marshall Street near a boot repair shop and a Maltese restaurant in Soho Nuevo. Standing eight and a half floors tall, the roof of the building is obscured by a colorful bouquet of hot air balloons tethered by ropes to the building. Like buoys in the ocean, the giant inflated domes sway gently back and forth in cool currents of wind sweeping the city from the north.

A balloon is released from its tether and begins to rise above the building. Its bulbous dome-like envelope is shaped into the Supreme Chancellor's head. Two men perched in its casket feed the swelling head with increasing amounts of propane, causing it to rise higher up into the sooty air. A knot of carabiners nestled underneath the swaying casket, lift a giant canvas sack off the roof of the building. It dangles at the end of a long rope, slowly rocking back and forth like a giant pendulum.

Less than two blocks away, another air balloon with a similar payload, holds still above Poland Street. The carabiners beneath the casket release their burden. Suddenly thousands of little sheets of paper rain down from the sky like confetti.

After a few unsuccessful attempts, Detective Denmark has managed to grab one of the paper fragments from the air. No larger than a tinderbox, the message written in black says: *Compliance crowns the mind with its truest victory.*

Around him the busy street seems unperturbed by the precipitation of paper. Pedestrians tugged in coats rush through the plebian downpour, the passage of their bodies causing the confetti to adopt new temporary trajectories before they fall and litter the ground. Little trolls, green skinned and single horned, weave in between the feet of rushing hoi-polloi and gather the confetti in their busy hands. Once hastily collected the messages are thumbed onto notice boards standing nearby. A sign above the boards reads: *The Supreme Chancellor's Daily Treats*.

Detective Denmark crumbles up the sheet of paper and throws it to Mr. Cro who catches it with one hand. Ever since they have stepped out of the mirrored closet in the backroom of a newspaper vendor on 28 Poland Street, he has said little. Like a scarecrow perched upon a pole set into the earth, his tall thin shape holds still in the ebbing tide of bodies that circle him like birds. Steam rises around him from a nearby gutter, momentarily obscuring his narrow silhouette. He seems to be reading the newspaper headlines pasted on the nearby wall. One reads: THE HEROIC FORCES OF THE NEW REPUBLIC MAKE GAINS IN TRIPOLI.[1] Another headline reads: IJIM NEW MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR[2]. He doesn't unfurl the crumbled piece of paper Mr. Denmark has thrown to him. Instead he looks away from the headlines and nods his head, gesturing to Mr. Denmark to look in the opposite direction. Over the heads of rushing pedestrians and red double-decker busses, and obscuring the row of buildings on the corner of Poland Street and Broadwick, is a picture of the Supreme Chancellor. Standing over twenty feet tall and illuminated by banks of spotlights, he is pictured wearing a purple military uniform, the chest bursting with a patchwork of military honors. In red letters above the image are stenciled the words. '*In achieving me you have achieved yourselves.*'

Loud motivational music is blaring out of speakers from somewhere. The din of trombones grows louder. When they both turn to the source of the sound, they can see a merry-go-round, nestled in shadow between two tall buildings. A weather-beaten sign ringed with flashing bulbs above the looping, never-ending chain of wide-eyed plastic stallions reads: *'Step Right UP! Hurry! Hurry!-ONLY 1 Potin!'* A pealing sticker on

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[1] The Walls Street Journal

[2] Good Housekeeping

the corner of the sign reads: *No Americans.* An old man is sitting in a rickety chair to one side of the merry-go-round, face obscured by his morning newspaper[3]. On the opposite side of the street, groups of dogs and baboons in military outfits march demonstrably in formation, their boots raised excessively high. An elephant draped in purple behind them is wheeling a 37mm pom-pom anti-aircraft autocanon down the street. Behind them a large red brick wall is covered with a row of identical posters. They each feature the image of a single large eye. Beneath the eye are the words: *If you are autonomous you will not be anonymous*.

Mr. Denmark turns to Mr. Cro who has pocketed the crumbled piece of paper. He draws on his pipe and gestures towards the merry-go-round. His tall and thin shape begins to glide over towards it, weaving between the crowds. Detective Denmark soon follows him out into the street, giving a long-legged dog on a penny-farthing bicycle a wide berth, without appearing to do so in any impolite way.

When they approach the old man sitting in his chair, they can see that the newspaper which obscures his face, has been punctured with a hole. About the size of a coin, the peephole is carefully positioned so that he can keep an eye on his surroundings. The perforation however has been set right upon the brow of the Supreme Chancellor, pictured underneath an editorial titled: *The Cradle of Genius*?

Noticing the two men, the eye rises over the edge of the newspaper headline.[4] A burst of trombones and violins play loudly from a pair of speakers nestled on the roof of the merry-go-round behind him. The clicking sound of cogwheels and creaking pipework undulates restlessly underneath the waltzing notes of music.

'Good morning gentlemen', the eye says, first hovering up to Mr. Cro, then settles itself upon Detective Denmark. The visage ensconced around the bulging socket is lined with furrows so deep that they appear to have dispensed with the other eye all together. 'Fancy a ride? Just 1 Potin each!'

'Good morning, that is most kind, but we are here on official business,' Mr. Cro says and reaches into his coat and shows the eye his badge. 'We are Krofut & Knapp.

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[3] The London Crimes

[4] A NATION WITHOUT BORDERS IS NOT A NATION

My name is Krofut and this here', he says gesturing towards Mr. Denmark, 'is my partner Mr. Knapp.' Mr. Cro urges the Detective to show the eye his badge. Unsure of himself, the detective begins to dig into his coat pockets. At first his pockets appear to be empty, then the tips of his fingers touch upon a crocodile skinned wallet. He opens the wallet, gives the badge a cursory glance, then holds it up in front of the bulging eye.

'We are from C.A.R.E.S,' Mr. Cro says, 'the Council for Amusement and Recreational Equipment Safety.'

'Yes I know who you are,' the bulging eye says irritated, all but ignoring Detective Denmark's badge, 'what's the problem?'

'We have received numerous complaints at our Head Office that your carrousel,' Mr. Cro says, and pauses, waiting for the shrill violins in the speakers behind them to temper, 'is *American*.'

The carrousel manager's bulging eye looks at both of them with a heady mixture of astonishment and disgust. 'What Scurrilous Nonsense is THIS!' He coughs, clears his throat, crumbles, then curls his newspaper into a bâton, and gestures with it threateningly. 'This merry-go-round has been in my family for three generations!' He slaps the paper demonstrably against his chest. 'It was purchased by my great grandfather Harry Krikorian in Liverpool! Do you know how many Americans I have reported to the DSV!? Do you?!' Once again the tip of the paper bâton is waved threateningly up into the air, then directed at Mr. Cro. 'Thousands! Thousands, I tell you! I've spoken to the other managers in Mayfair, Westminster and Lambeth Mr. Krofut, and I know they don't do anywhere near my numbers. How dare you suggest that this merry-go-round is American!' He scuffs, and accusingly fixes his bulging eye upon Mr. Cro, with sufficient amounts of brimstone to cook to vapor any supposition to the contrary.

Mr. Cro slowly nods his head. In the speakers overhead trombones in a metallic middle register carom off the nearby wall.

'We salute you for the great service you have done your dear country and the continent at large', Mr. Cro says, producing another document from his coat, 'but it clearly states in this document that your *carrousel* originates from the Satanic Mills of New Bethlehem, Pennsylvania by one Horace Elisha Scudder. Do you know where Pennsylvania is Mr. Krikorian?'

'Of course I do!'

'Then perhaps you would be so kind as to also share this information with the D.S.V., as they are quite anxious I am sure, for any new information pertaining to the general whereabouts of the American continent.'

'This is preposterous!'

'Indeed Mr. Krikorian, it would be, if it weren't true.'

'Yes, who would have thought,' Mr. Denmark says, adding his two Potins to the conversation.

Mr. Krikorian shakes his head confused. 'There must have been some kind of mistake!'

'No mistake,' Mr. Cro says, 'the American continent continues to be disappeared.'

'I am talking about my merry-go-round!'

'What you claim to be *your merry-go-round* is not *a merry-go-round*', Mr. Cro says emphatically, 'because it is a *carrousel*, if it were a *merry-go-round* it would turn in an *anti-clockwise direction*, but since your *carrousel* is turning in a *clockwise direction*, what you claim to be *a merry-go-round* is in fact a *carrousel*, and since it is a *carrousel*, it is *American*. And', Mr. Cro hastily adds, hardly catching his breath and pointing at the carrousel behind Mr. Krikorian, 'there is *white tiger* on your *carrousel*.'

Mr. Krikorian rises puffing from his chair. A leather pouch filled with change jingles heavily around his neck. 'What do you mean!'

'Over your shoulder.'

Mr. Krikorian turns to face his merry-go-round (which- is- really- a- carousel). At first his senses are divorced from the idea of a white tiger standing in place of one of his platform gallopers, after two additional revolutions of the carrousel's platform however, the white blur has congealed into a tiger with emerald green eyes. Taller than a man, its frame appears frozen in mid pounce, claws extended. A plastic saddle coils around its narrow midriff. It rides slowly up and down with the other horses.

Mr. Krikorian's frail body appears to stiffen with shock.

'This cannot be! Krofut & Knapp I swear by the Supreme *Himself* that I have never seen -'

But he doesn't manage to utter the final words of his astonishment, for an owl, its grey wings spread in flight, parades past him on the carrousel with the horses and the tiger. Soon with each dizzying revolution the equine presence continues to diminish,

for now, as the music begins to slip and warp out of true, the carousel manager sees a fox, then a lamb, then an old naked man, with long white hair and a beard, hunched on all fours. The old man's face, though rendered unclear by the blur of motion is crumbling with fear and despair. A saddle is coiled around his back.

An infernal scent of sulphur infuses the ether. Mr. Krikorian raises his eye to the roof of the carrousel, wondering if perhaps his wheel has been forged in the Satanic Mills of New Bethlehem. Spinning at the top of the carousel is a sooty red brick chimney, its corbels and flue liners forged in brass. A huge black gout of smoke rises up, up into the air in a fearful symmetry.

This seems to tip the merry-go-round-which-is-really-carousel attendant over the edge. He mumbles to himself, throws his paper bâton aside and reaches into his jacket. He pulls out a substantially proportioned gun. He begins to wave the barrel of his weapon up into the air. 'Why I have never!' He turns and points the gun towards Mr. Denmark and Mr. Cro who raise their hands innocently. 'Look!', Mr. Cro says, pointing over Mr. Krikorian's shoulder.

Mumbling and waving his weapon, Mr. Krikorian turns, and his jaw drops in astonishment. At the nexus of the blackened wheel, upon the lip of the chimney, small hands, then the soot covered face of a little boy appears.

The music blaring out of the speakers begins to change. At first it appears warped and drawn out of true, then a clear swell of violins from a Sir Hubert Parry anthem rises coiling within the black wheeling smoke up into the air. With just the soot covered head pocking out of the chimney, the little chimneysweeper begins to sing:

And did those feet in ancient time,
Walk upon England's mountains green

Aghast, Mr. Kirkorian lets off a round of his gun. There is a loud BANG! The whistling bullet ricochets off the edge of the spinning chimney and darts upwards, up into the air in the opposite direction. A moment later, a hot air balloon overhead catches fire then explodes.

The moment is preceded by a white flash, an almost inaudible moment of instantaneous combustion, then a ball of fire balloons up into the sky, where it curls upon itself in tendrils of black smoke.

The burning casket of the hot air balloon comes crashing down towards Poland Street. Pedestrians scream and scatter. The casket hits the side of a building then comes to an abrupt halt, as its carabiners are entangled upon a row of flag poles. There the casket remains burning, three floors above the pavement, curling and blackening. Above, the hot air balloon's two passengers seem surprised that they have managed to parachute free of the casket. Stunned or oblivious, they wave down at the panicked crowds as they float towards safety on the nearby rooftops, a message opportunistically stenciled on the insides of their chutes[5].

A shrill whistle fills the air. With weapons drawn, soldiers are running towards them, cutting through the traffic in the street, forcing vehicles to break forcibly, their horns blaring, cymbals crashing from the speakers on the merry-go-round, fragments of the *Supreme Chancellor's Daily Treats* rain down from the sky aflame like will-o'-wisps in the purpled dawn.

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[5] You need to work hard to earn an empire.



The Golden Life

John Howard

"He who binds to himself a joy
Does the winged life destroy;
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in Eternity's sun rise."

William BLAKE



EVERY WEEKDAY morning at the same time Harry Wilsham would set out for work. He held a position as a junior accounts clerk in the main office of one of the vast new factories that had been built facing on to the Great West Road. When he had accepted the job Wilsham had been assured that there were 'prospects' for the right sort of employees, but now there were times when the only attractive prospect seemed to be the one he could see from his desk rather than any advancement or fulfilment. The looming future seemed to be a solid wall instead of an opening door.

Although the Great West Road – a wide, almost completely straight motor boulevard – had only been constructed less than a decade earlier, the section where Wilsham's employers had established themselves was already well-known as the '*Golden Mile*'. The company had invested heavily in its magnificent new headquarters and manufacturing plant, and regularly stated that it intended to expand significantly during the coming years. Wilsham liked to think that the palatial building in which he worked could be taken for a luxurious private residence. In common with many of the others lining the road on either side, it stood behind a beautifully maintained lawn punctuated by dazzling flowerbeds. A main driveway led straight to the main entrance, placed in the centre of the low, wide main block. Footpaths leading to other entrances and around to the factory blocks cut through the expanses of grass and skirted the masses of flowers. To Wilsham the overall effect of the building was of an ocean liner in dry dock, with its rows of windows and sleek horizontal lines running from end to end. The great length of the façade was interrupted only by a number of small staircase towers, each topped by a flagpole, and all complemented the soaring main tower –

expertly placed off-centre – that drew the spectator's gaze ever upwards to where the company's name shone out against the white stucco during the day and pulsed with neon by night. And as if that had not been enough, the tower was capped by a gigantic three-dimensional version of the company's trademark symbol worked in glittering stainless steel. It caught the sun whenever it shone, and beams from hidden spotlights illuminated it during the hours of darkness. The neon lights and sculpture had rapidly entered motoring lore as prime landmarks for travellers entering or leaving London by that route.

When the weather permitted, Wilsham liked to walk all the way from the small terraced house in Acton where he still lived with his parents. It was not a great distance, and he liked exerting himself. As a child he had often accompanied his father on long walks on the western and south-western outskirts of London, sometimes wandering far afield to such places as Twickenham and Teddington, or Ealing and Perivale. The older man rarely walked there now, complaining that the fields and lanes he remembered had been swallowed up by new housing estates, shopping parades, and wide arterial roads.

Once, when they had been to watch football in the new stadium at Wembley, his father had reminisced about the unfinished tower that had formerly stood on the site. The young Wilsham's imagination had been captivated and set aflame by the thought of what might have been: a metal titan higher than the Eiffel Tower punching into the sky above the North Circular Road. But the boy's dreams were brought down to earth; before he was born the project had been aborted and the gigantic fragment blown up and swept away.

Yet from that memorable day onwards intimations of tremendous possibilities to come never quite deserted him. As Wilsham grew up he watched London transform. Again and again, in plain sight, the immense entity changed into something else – and in a fresh form. Slowly, Wilsham became convinced that the new structures of concrete, brick, and glass together with the sweeping thoroughfares and sprawling estates meant other transformations too. Spending a day in the City and West End or taking a walk along one of the main roads near his house became an exercise in exploration; turning the corner into an unfamiliar street an adventure. He kept his thoughts to himself – he would be able to tell when and with whom it was right to share. Wilsham knew that

whatever his parents' and friends' hopes and expectations were, a part of his own would surely be bound to the constant ebb and flow of possibility and opportunity embodied in what he saw as he looked around him each day – whether in the end never to be realised, or not as yet brought to birth from their creators' desires and diagrams. And still he knew this could not be all. Much seemed obscure, uncertain. There would be a day, as the way became clear or he apprehended it at last, when his awakening would be an embrace as well as an escape; a beginning as much as an attainment.

Each morning Wilsham would kiss his mother and leave the house, walking through the tangle of brick-built streets until he reached Turnham Park. It was only a few hundred yards from his part of Acton to Turnham Park, but it was a different world. The streets became wider and were lined with trees; the houses were much larger, sitting impassively alone or in pairs and surrounded by gardens and dewy lawns behind well-trimmed hedges and white-painted fences. When he reached The Green, Wilsham would decide whether to continue straight to the High Road and catch a bus the rest of the way, or wander on through the outer parts of the suburb until he emerged further down the main road in Gunnersbury, not far from where the Great West Road began. From there he could spy in the distance the slim, tapering white tower that rose high above the entrance to his place of work. On sunny mornings the device at its top shone and sparkled as if signalling to him.

But Wilsham no longer always paid attention to the far-off tower. Increasingly he felt closed-in, stifled. It was often too much of a struggle to recapture the old sense of impending adventure and the conviction that something novel could be awaiting him around every corner, if only he could perceive it. Every corner shop and every lamp-post in the little web of streets where he had lived for all his twenty-five years was familiar to him and gave out, on the surface at least, a sense of contentment and calm, even when money was short and employment precarious. The inhabitants of the district – people like him and his parents – were friendly and well-disposed towards Harry Wilsham. He went drinking and to the football with the same friends he had grown up with. But all of this was on the wrong side of a wall – and one that seemed to be getting higher.

There was one more reason – the most important – why Wilsham wished that he could feel other than he so frequently did: his fiancée Winifred. She lived directly across

the road and was considered an attractive girl, one who – to be honest – had the pick of any of the young men and need not have chosen Harry Wilsham. But she had. He knew he loved her, but so often he would glance at a newspaper or recall a cinema newsreel and think about all the uncertainty in the world. He often thought in vague terms about things he would like to do or try to discover, even as the words he wished to use to express clearly his agitated thoughts were not quite making themselves available to him. And so he kept them to himself. He felt there was too much he wanted to do and to find out, but didn't as yet even know what they were or would be; only that they were there and he would know one day. He knew all this was not really fair to Winifred – or to him.

The journeys to and from work – and particularly the walks in the early morning – were fast becoming the only times when Wilsham felt he could *think*; could be on his own with his thoughts and commitments and set them in front of the world around him and the people he spent his life with; could consider himself and dream of what it might still be possible to make of himself.

It was only lately that Wilsham had started to recognise that help might be presenting itself to him through the agency of a new 'ally'. When he did recognise it, the old dreams flooded back. The following Sunday he and Winifred had gone with friends on a picnic to Gladstone Park. They had all enjoyed themselves, as if there were nothing amiss for any of them. And yet at the same time Wilsham had successfully been able to detach himself and gaze out towards Wembley and imagine the view as if the great tower had been completed and still stood. No-one noticed that he had often been no more than a partial member of the party, and his purchase on the way home of the latest map of London and environs drew no comments.

The source of Wilsham's change was the third of the means available to him for travel to work: the Tube. It was the method he used least. This was mainly because he usually had to change trains and wait for the Piccadilly Line service; and his journey would still involve a lengthy walk from Osterley station. Recently, several stations along the line had been reconstructed or opened for the first time. When the new station buildings at Turnham Park were fully unveiled, what Wilsham had seen had woken within him a new dream of anticipation and release. Its strength had taken him by

surprise: he had resigned himself to having lost such things for good. The tall, narrow brick tower of the rebuilt station was topped by a strange and twisted form or finial, its shimmering copper surfaces already turning green. The curving rods and planes combined to suggest what seemed like a skeletal bird about to fly free of the earth and swoop off into the sky and beyond. The finial was soon a great deal in his thoughts; he relished seeing it every morning and evening. And at Osterley the new station was dominated by a concrete structure like an obelisk, which seemed to symbolise both futurity and stability. Now there were mornings when Wilsham preferred to travel by Tube.

Dawn was breaking one clear and frosty morning in January. Wilsham closed the front door behind him, adjusting his hat and scarf and taking care not to slip on the icy front step. Thrusting his hands deep into the pockets of his overcoat, he looked up, as he always did, at Winifred's window. The net curtain parted for a moment and he saw her wave to him before letting it drop back again. He smiled and nodded. Winifred was secure in the knowledge that she would see him that evening, as on most evenings. They would talk about when they would be able to afford to marry, and consider the sort of district where they would like to set up home together. They would go over the figures again and again. To raise their spirits Winifred would describe the china and cutlery she wanted to buy for best, and the latest improved models of radio sets, so he could listen in to broadcasts of football matches and concerts of music from up 'West'. Wilsham would smile at the phrase, but not say anything: although the West End lay to the east of them, that might not always be so.

As usual it took Wilsham only a few minutes to cover the short distance to the boundary where Acton changed into Turnham Park. The districts did not so much flow into each other as collide. Even the paving slabs and lamp-posts were of different types on either side. The street changed its name, widening abruptly and becoming a 'Way'. The glass cupola on the roof of the great brick house on the corner blazed in the first light of the rising sun. In the frigid air his breath billowed and rose towards a sky of such a deep blue that for a moment he wanted to leap and fight his way up into it. He reached The Green, all covered with a layer of frost smooth as icing, and decided to walk directly across it so he could leave the trail of his footprints behind him. They

would soon be obliterated by the sun as the long shadows retreated, but he would have made a mark, however brief. He didn't care about the shoes he'd laboriously polished the evening before, as on every evening when he took them off as soon as he got back from work.

The bare crowns of the trees around The Green were beginning to shine as the dawn light struck them. A train slid by on the railway embankment, scattering sparks. Wilsham looked up at the slender tower of the Tube station where, at the top, the bricks were beginning to glow a reddish-orange. The finial surmounting the tower shone with an inner radiance – the pale jade of spring buds and the first leaves of the hedges outside the houses lining the far side of The Green. The dawn had reached the red brick expanses of the vast cube of the ticket hall. Keeping the leaping, fluid form of the finial fixed in his mind, Wilsham turned away and walked on along Russell Avenue, heading towards a different tower – one he could not as yet see. He would spend the rest of the day in its shadow, not leaving it behind him until night had fallen once more.

When Wilsham left work the following Saturday the day seemed far gone even though it was only a little while past noon. The sky was low and grey; a steady breeze blew, but it was damp and mild. He had made no definite plans. He had turned down an invitation to watch Brentford F.C. play a match at home. The thought of a few pints before the game had appealed to him, and at first he almost decided to go. But as Wilsham watched his colleagues dart across the yawning gap of the Great West Road he was even more aware than ever that he now had the rest of the afternoon to himself, and no idea what he was going to do with it. Time stretched out all around him, as flat as Middlesex. As long as he was back on time for his dinner at Winifred's, the hours between now and then were entirely free.

He began to walk aimlessly along the Great West Road, following it in the direction of Osterley. As yet he couldn't see the Tube station with its tower and obelisk. On either side of the road were the offices and factories, car showrooms and warehouses that formed the Golden Mile of grand buildings of sheer white stucco or intricate brown brick, with their towers and gatehouses, staircases and driveways, their gaudy decoration and sculptured embellishments, the names of the companies and brands picked out in

modernistic lettering and illuminated symbols. The buildings opened out in front of him as he walked, looking like stage scene façades against the lowering sky and rushing clouds. Wilsham walked steadily, as if along a corridor. Buildings approached, opened out and drew level with him, and then slipped away behind. And still the Great West Road ran on before him, rolling out like a concrete carpet longer than the store of hours that lay in wait for him.

The tall brick bulk of a church loomed up, the rounded end of the chancel and its steep roofs towering over the houses surrounding it. The church seemed to have turned its back on the main road and its ceaseless traffic. The road was now bordered by houses, raw and new. Gardens were patches of bare earth and broken bricks. He reached Osterley station and stopped for a moment, gazing at the massed brickwork and the pale obelisk stabbing up into the tumbling grey sky, cleanly etched against it. He sighed deeply and continued walking. Soon the station had fallen behind; still he walked. A light drizzle had been falling for a while when he stopped and tried to work out where he was. It was dusk. He was not far from Hounslow Heath; he knew where to find the bus stop from which to catch a Chiswick and Hammersmith bus. It would pass along the High Road close to Turnham Park station and home.

It was fully dark when Wilsham climbed down from the bus. The High Road bustled with activity and the pavements were rippling lakes of reflected yellow light. The Tube station was lit up from within, the soft glow radiating from the great windows and entrances. Its bulk rose into the night, outlined against the dull orange cloud scudding overhead. It reminded him of a giant radio set warming up and coming to life; the safe comforting glow of dials and valves and piercing smell of burning dust from inside keeping darkness at bay. The finial seemed to radiate light from within itself, although he did not know how this could really be. Perhaps there were built-in lamps or something. But poised on its tall brick column, as if ready to soar up through the low layer of cloud and gathering fog and into space, it rested, as if awaiting only the signal of release.

By the end of spring the arrangements for the wedding had been settled. But Wilsham's unvoiced anxieties for his and Winifred's future had not been calmed. He started to pay greater attention to articles on international politics in the newspapers and to

cinema newsreels. All the talk was of Britain rearming; and the events on the Continent in March, when Germany had unilaterally remilitarised the Rhineland, seemed to him to indicate that great forces were preparing to draw a set of heavy curtains across the European – and possibly wider – stage.

On the day the wedding date had been finally fixed, Alf Wilsham took his son to the Royal Oak for a small celebration. To begin with he had merely hinted that now Harry was about to assume at last all the responsibilities of manhood and of providing for a wife and family there were very probably things he might want to know more about. Much to the relief of his father the younger man had gently let it be understood that he need harbour no concerns.

Going to the pub together developed into a weekly ritual. Wilsham was somewhat surprised and, at first, not a little embarrassed at the new attention his father was paying him. The two men had always got on extremely well when in each other's company at home, and that had been sufficient for them. Wilsham soon found his father's new approval – or, rather, augmented approval – of him to be enjoyable and something he wished to ensure would continue after his marriage. The older Wilsham would buy the first round (and allow his son to treat him in return) and talk about his own young adulthood and entry into the real world of family life. He told Harry that even if he had seen the Great War coming – which in his view hardly anyone had – he was still glad that he had been married with a young son by the time war came and knew his duty to go and fight. "What if you had been killed?" Harry had asked. "Uncle Reg was. How would we have coped then? Or if you'd been gassed and not able to get your old job back?" Alf Wilsham put his empty glass down. "But I wasn't, was I," he said. "If we could tell the future we'd never get up in the morning. Anyway, you should worry. There won't be another war. You've got a better job than I've got, and you're going to have a lovely wife. Win is a great girl. Both me and your mother have always thought so. Your future is made. Now, your round I think Harry boy."

Wilsham had agreed to the suggestion, made by Winifred's widowed mother, that he move across the street to her house and set up home there. It would only be a temporary arrangement. Winifred was pleased, as it would mean that she would not have so many things to worry about, and they would be able to save a great deal more of their wages and put the money towards a nice new house further out from Acton.

"Out past where you work, Harry," Winifred had said. "There are lots of nice new houses, nice and big, with big gardens and lots of fresh air. And you can get there so fast and comfortable on the Tube."

As summer advanced Wilsham walked to work through a Turnham Park transformed. Although he still left home at the same time – early, to allow plenty of time for his journey – the sun was already high in the sky. The heavy foliage of the trees, moving slightly in the warm and dusty breeze, was welcome as he strolled along the gently curving streets.

One morning he was up and about before dawn. It had been announced that the ledgers and files filling the office were to undergo a thorough audit, and Mr Passington had intimated to him that a few hours of unpaid work outside of normal office hours would not go unnoticed – or, eventually, unrewarded. Preferring to start early rather than finish late, Wilsham had agreed to be ready at his desk much earlier than his usual time.

As he crossed The Green, leaving a trail of footprints in the dew, he looked up at the finial crowning the brick tower of the Tube station. The first full rays of the sun were iridescent on the highest point of the sinuous form. It occurred to him that the obelisk standing over Osterley station would also be catching the early sun, its white concrete bright against the paling silver sky. Now a feeling of expectancy welled up within him. It was like the way he felt when turning on the radio for a broadcast he had particularly been waiting for, or when the curtain rose on a film he and Winifred had been looking forward to, and she was gripping his hand tightly as the opening music swelled up into the vast darkened spaces of the cinema auditorium.

As more of the soaring finial caught the rising sun, it trembled and flickered as if it were about to launch away. All at once, to Wilsham it symbolised the step he was about to take. It was the way through and in to it: a gateway. And if he got on the Tube and travelled to Osterley, he could come out under the obelisk there, another gateway, and join the world. Wilsham walked through the entrance under the tower and bought his ticket. Soon the sleek train drew in.

As the train accelerated Wilsham remembered the long walk he had taken the previous winter, out along the Great West Road beyond Osterley. He thought of the

view out of the window by his desk: the broad, smooth, bright avenue, an artery leading away from the city which would be almost empty at this hour. If he were walking that way along it he would be casting his shadow where he could see it. He would have to wait for that: this morning he would be going towards the sun as he walked towards the crop of towers that had sprouted up on either side of the road. The Golden Mile would already be reverberating with all the activities of the new day.

The train clattered on, the carriage rocking gently from side to side. He remembered more of Winifred's plans for their new house, as yet unbought and unlocated. (Perhaps he was getting closer, even now.) "I like the name Shangri-La, don't you Harry? You know, like in that book. It'll be our nice place." Wilsham visualised the sort of house she meant. He shuddered at the thought of the half-timbered gable above the bay window at the front, identical with that of the house next to it. But he could not be clear why he should take against a house like that just now. Unless… Great West Road… The name represented for him the lure and joy of travelling…away…from…out of…over a frontier…into a new country…change…adventure…finding a place…sharing it with someone; the chance to find…to share himself. The swaying carriage was his life: comfortable and yet confined; mapped out and yet with no true certainty. There could always be a crash; something disastrous might occur at any time.

The train slid out of Boston Manor station. Osterley station was the next stop: his stop. He had embarked on this journey, entering through one gateway under its strange sign, and now another awaited him, just up ahead. It was approaching fast; in a couple more minutes he would pass under it and return to – well, everything as it had become.

He stirred in his seat. Outside the window rooftops and trees were now fully bathed in the glare of the sun. As the train began to slow, he stood up and then sat down again. "Make up your mind, mate," a voice growled, before laughing. Wilsham blushed. Perhaps he should have walked after all, approached from the other side.

As the platform smeared itself along the window Wilsham knew what he wanted to do and where he was about to go. Even as he settled into his decision he was still not at all sure how he would reach his destination; but he knew that it need not be so very far away.

Nocturnal Gardens

Ramon Lasalle

"It is always awkward, even for the most insignificant traveller, to arrive at a town just when, in a state of the highest but most diverse expectation – some with cannons drawn up and fuses lit, with fireworks and illuminated placards in readiness, some with the town hall ceremoniously decorated, reception committee booted, speakers prepared, some with urgent systematic pen dripping and notebook opened – everyone is awaiting the arrival incognito of the promised one."

Kierkegaard, Preface to Concluding Unscientific Postscript



I

THE BUILDING, located in the older and less hospitable quarter of the city, protruded toward the heavens like a glass mountain or an inverted and frozen waterfall. The reflection of the sun from the surfaces of its myriad windows produced a dull, metallic sheen. The sunlight, locked in the black-mirror facade, seemed to emerge from the edifice itself, as if its heat and brilliance had been artificially produced by a machine within the building's interior. There were endless meeting rooms inside, as well as small, cramped cabinets and claustrophobic cells. Its tenants moved from one place to another with great rapidity, as if they were pursued by time itself. A reunion of sorts was taking place inside of one of the meeting rooms, a strange and ritualized spectacle in which the complex details relating to a business transaction were discussed. The proceedings were facilitated by graphs, projections, estimates, strategies, and balance sheets. At the large oval table, each of those present presented his vision of the process in a rhythmic and bombastic manner, following a very well defined cadence in accordance with a certain rite. The people that sat around the table exchanged views and counterpoints, sometimes shouting, sometimes murmuring, producing meaningless phrases involving terms such as "profitability", "intervals", "proactivity", "installment", and "accumulation". There existed an anomaly within this small group of very serious people, an employee who was unable to focus his attention entirely on the ritual at hand. His name was lost in the unremitting echos of the city that devours its inhabitants, but we can call him, for convenience, Uriel; a name like so many others in his time. Uriel's mind was dominated by a nightmare that assailed him over the course of several successive nights, making sleep impossible. It was unusual for him to experience such turbulent dreams. His sleep had always tended to be tranquil, even death-like; his nights undisturbed by the slightest perturbation. His sleeping mind was like an empty screen, impervious to the vexations of the soul. At least this was so until very recently. The nightmare that now menaced him had a convoluted structure. It was divided into three sections which were spread out over many successive nights. It seemed even to proceed, if more subtly, throughout his waking hours. There were times at which some detail would give Uriel the hope that the burden of his nightmare was coming to an end, or that the odious vision that returned upon him every night had been replaced by something slightly less malefic. Each time this hope arose, it was quickly

revealed to be an illusion. The consistency of his nocturnal malady, though it sometimes occurred with minor variations, was relentless. The overpowering phenomena persisted for a long time, resulting in constant insomnia and a fear of closing his eyes or even resting his head upon a pillow. He did, however, observe a strange inconsistency in the gory narrative of his nightmare, though he could not quite determine the nature of this inconsistency. His unfortunate condition decreed the premature closure of his career as an oneirocritic genealogist.

But let's leave Uriel aside for now. Let us leave his interpretive despair, his quest for dreamless sleep, and the rites of his reunion in the meeting room. Let us now enter the space inhabited by the dreams themselves, and by those curious parasites that suck the nectar from our minds which indeed comprise our very life-force.

II

At the time that his frenzied dream activity began, Uriel was subject to an essential misunderstanding: he believed that the dream that brought him so much trouble was in fact three different dreams. But, as we shall see below, he later perceived this error, which finally led to a proper understanding of what was happening to him. Before that point, however, he had to face a terrible ordeal. The nightmare began with the enormous face of a black cat. The vision, appearing against a backdrop of pungent darkness, occupied his entire perspective as the mists attendant to the intermediate state between dream and waking dissolved. So quickly did the image appear that he immediately became cognizant that he was dreaming. The narrative swiftly progressed. He was holding the cat on its back within his left hand, the beast gazing back at him with a certain indifference. The cat did not seem to mind the uncomfortable position in which it was held. In Uriel's right hand was a rather sharp but otherwise ordinary dagger. At first he imagined, from the darkness of the scene, that they were located in an underground cell. As his surroundings began to congeal, he realized that they were in an open square, yet the night was so black, without moon or stars, and illuminated only by the dull lights of the surrounding city, that it gave the impression of a cave lodged in the heart of the Earth. There was, of course, a motive implied in the two items that Uriel held in his hands. This motive was present in the dreamer's mind as little more than a suggestion. He watched the beast, inexplicably still, as he began to make use of the dagger. The whole scene, despite its horrible violence, was entirely silent. Not even the sound of the blade piercing the animal's soft skin was audible. Uriel spent a few moments in quiet contemplation of the deed that he'd performed. He closed his eyes, which immediately filled with tears. Precisely at that moment, the nightmare fell apart with a violent awakening.

After the initial shock, Uriel would invariable seek to regain his sense of self. He'd fetch a glass

of iced water, and take some time to recover from the abrupt transition. At that moment, at least on the first few nights in which the dream occurred, he sought to reconcile himself with sleep. On subsequent nights, the first awakening was accompanied by a certainty that a troubled night lay before him and that sleep would be scarce. This certainty never prevented him from harboring false hopes: he would lay on his back upon the bed, filled with fear and seeking the simple peace of oblivion. A shallow measure of sleep would come, and soon he would be entangled in the second section of his nightmare. This time the scenery took the form of a menagerie, a small-scale hall populated with wild animals, particularly medium-sized felines and birds of prey. Uriel was shocked into a state of recognition as he observed that he was wearing a tunic of dirty gold and that he was accompanied by two acolytes, or guardians, or jailers, each of which carried a halberd in one hand. As he inspected the animals more closely in their narrow prisons, he perceived, with the astonishing clarity so often found in dreams, that the animals before him did not belong to the fauna of our planet. Claws, teeths, beaks, fur, plumage, wings, tails – tentacles, perhaps? – abounded in unusual settings, producing a wide range of bizarre grotesqueries. His passive inspection of that rich bestiary did not last for long. Overpowered by the compulsion of the nightmare, he took one of the halberds from the hands of his companions and proceeded to the slaughter. The scent of anger, fear, impotence and hatred permeated the place. Nauseated, Uriel tried to eliminate the animals and put an end to the massacre as fast as he could, but he found that size of the menagerie was so vast as to be nearly endless. Blood flowed like a river in dense swirls that reached the height of his knees. Uriel's tears were intermingled with the blood of the sacrificed beasts until his entire field of vision was overwhelmed by an arterial shade of red. At that moment, he would awake at last, though his egress from the dream state brought him little relief. The nausea persisted for a long time after, along with a trademark metallic taste in his mouth that he could only equate, as mad as it seemed, with that of vital fluids.

At this point, he would typically deem it be best to abandon every effort to sleep. He would light a cigarette and browse the Internet, or flip through the channels of the television in order to distract himself from the dread inspired by the images from the nightmare. At length, and in spite of his best efforts, weariness would soon overtake him. His vigilance would quickly break down, and he would slip back into unconsciousness. Uriel would then enter the third phase of the dream, this time with a change of scene and several new characters. A repulsive old woman stood before him. She was naked and had long grey hair, her skin immaculately white. They resided in a forest illuminated with pale, yellow light. It was impossible to know whether the dream was taking place in the early morning or during the late afternoon. Judging by the dry weather and the auburn leaves scattered on the ground, it must have been autumn. Uriel's

assistants from the previous dreams were nowhere to be found. He was surprised to find that he, too, was without clothes. The older woman was swiftly approaching, like an animal blinded by age, or a predator attracted by the odor of its prey. At the moment of the climax of his terror, Uriel would become aware that he had undergone a transformation. He was smaller, far smaller than was usual for him, and more fragile. It was as if time had reversed for him in the blink of an eye. He'd regressed back to an infantile form, as vulnerable and helpless as a newborn baby, yet he'd retained the mind of an adult. A piercing pain arose as the old woman grabbed him by the head, pressing the tender flesh with her withered fingers. The horrible woman clutched a hammer and a nail in her free hand, both of which were stained with blood. With a remarkable swiftness and dexterity, the crone nailed the infant form of Uriel onto a huge, corroded, raw stone slab that had suddenly appeared before them. A torrent of blood gushed from the wound, though Uriel felt no pain. The old woman then lowered herself to the ground and began to lick the stream of blood. When she raised her head again, her face had changed; the wrinkled, repulsive body was now crowned with a youthful face of extraordinary beauty. The shock of this new discovery burst the floodgates of suffering in Uriel's miniaturized body. His chest was besieged by a terrible pain, which immediately passed as he woke with a start. After this third shock, he lost all hope of attaining even the slightest bit of rest. Consulting the clock, he began his preparations for a new day's work. The blissful sleep of previous days was little more than a distant memory. His nightmares had become an unceasing concern. He made tremendous efforts to remain awake, for the even slightest nap would project him back into his private hell. He was summoned to the ritualized meeting during the second week of his struggle. An illuminating thought was bestowed upon him as he watched his colleagues, who in his eyes were as puppets performing asynchronous and uncoordinated motions. The insight came as he considered his problems and the unhappiness they'd brought into his life. It struck him with the force of a major revelation.

III

Uriel's epiphany continued to take form within his mind as he struggled to participate in his ritualistic business meeting. The images that arose before him when he succumbed to sleep did not consist of separate dreams, so it occurred to him, but were rather a single, unified narrative, consisting of elements that formed a sequence whose obsessive return was regulated by a particular principle. That is, the nightmare was a long story divided into three smaller parts. He had simply never paid attention to the moments of transition, nor had he allowed himself to witness the end of the sequence. If he avoided the sudden awakening brought on by his response to the dreams – the terror, the

nausea, the disconcerting numbness in his limbs – he could reach the end of the story and thus perceive the whole as if it were a single, continuous film. It was, of course, an absurd idea, for the dream has its own logic, its own will, and was not subject to the schemes of the waking mind. Yet, as unsound as the idea was, it seemed perfectly valid to him in his exhausted state. Upon returning from his work, he lay down on his bed and slipped directly into the first of his troubled dream narratives. He was able, for the first time, to overcome his revulsion at the moment that the cat was sacrificed. As usual, he tightly closed his eyes before the hideous scene that he, with the help of the dagger, had himself created, but this time the violent awakening did not take place.

When he opened his eyes again, he found himself walking down a wide avenue in a tremendous city that was entirely unknown to him. Ruined houses and buildings passed by him. A vast, luxurious building collapsed beside him with a tremendous roar. He came to realize, as he walked, always accompanied by his two companions, that these ruins were inhabited by hordes of wretched ghosts who took refuge in their shadowy niches and dark corners. Without warning, this broad avenue disappeared, giving way to a well-lit corridor within an unfamiliar mansion. The walls of the long passage were decorated with enormous pictures depicting scenes of immense cruelty. The violent displays took place upon foreign battlefields, hunting expeditions, upon the sidewalks of great cities, in the fields, and in the intimacy of the homes of the victims themselves. One painting, in particular attracted Uriel's attention. A suggestive title, "Sharp Domestic Fun", was visible upon a copper plaque at the bottom of the frame. But he hardly had a chance to focus on the details before he found himself inside of the painting, standing before the now-familiar menagerie. The massacre, which formed the climax of the second part of the dream, unfolded promptly. Uriel was trapped in a hellish cycle of violence in which new cages appeared as quickly as the old ones were emptied. Not knowing what to do, he fell into despair at his inability to make the dream narrative advance. Despondance gave way to sudden inspiration: he turned his halberd on his two companions, mortally wounding them. They offered not the slightest resistance, falling dead beneath the weapon's initial blows. Within an instant, the dream progressed to the autumnal forest. The old and repulsive crone stood very close. She became aware of Uriel's presence by way of her sharp and animalistic nose. The nightmare ran its course, Uriel transforming again into a baby, and soon he was snatched up and nailed to the stone. He was reminded of Odin, and of Jesus Christ, as blood burst forth in a continuous stream from the wound in his chest. He witnessed the old woman's transformation into a young lady of astounding beauty after partaking of his blood and his suffering. He realized that his life-force fed not only the witch that tortured him, but also the entire populace of his dream world. He could sense that the ghosts of the city which he'd met in the second

segment of his dream were now human, and were possessed of intelligence, cunning, and treachery. At that moment, he ceased to be a baby. He was no longer impaled to the stone. Set free, he stared at the woman before him for some time before they both came together and engaged in a brutal and tumultuous coupling. The violent act sowed the soil with their carnal fluids, mingled with the blood from his wound. So ecstatic was his pleasure, and so intense their lust for one another, that they immediately returned to their licentious act. He understood that their discharge had produced the spring forest, in the same way that it given birth to the complex fauna of the menagerie. The whole of civilization flourished in the same manner, as did Justice and Science. On the one hand, he knew that he could not long remain in this natural state, for the newly civilized society would not stand for such a bestial display. On the other hand, he was afraid that if he left this place he might never again find the savage witch, whose thighs had led him to the exaltation of the absolute.

Uriel realized that he would have to bind the woman in place if he wanted to take advantage of everything this new world had to offer. Ropes appeared within his hands, which he put to use quickly and skillfully. He tied her wrists and ankles together, joining them with a single cord, which made escape virtually impossible. He held another piece of rope in the woman's mouth so that her screams would not be heard by passers by out of the woods. She continually chewed on this gag, as a horse does with the bridle. Certain that she would not escape unaided, Uriel then began to explore the civilization that had flourished in the wake of their abominable acts. He committed the location of his captive partner to memory, for he knew that the desire to return to her would soon arise within his loins. He would enjoy an endless series of illicit delights with his secret treasure, who would be powerless to resist his forced acts of love. In the meantime, he immersed himself in the exploration of the world that he'd helped birth. He observed the many victories of its advanced mechanics, including the flying machine. Through the science of navigation, the powers of this new world had managed to colonize everything that could possibly be colonized. Innumerable religions had formed, represented by symbols, idols, gods, clergy, theology, temples and calendars, all of which were lost to history as new religions rose to prominence. The knowledge stored in the universities could feasibly achieve absolute and total happiness for everything that lived based on a handful of mathematical equations. He came to know the luxuries found in the dwelling places of the populace, the opulence of their cities, the intense pleasure of the distractions to their senses. Years passed before Uriel again remembered his prisoner. He was reminded of the woman as his wanderings brought him to a region near the woods. He sought for her, but she was no longer in her place of bondage. As she'd aged, she'd grown in cunning, and had escaped the ropes and flown far from that place. However, the dream world could not sustain itself without the product of their lust. Uriel was certain that it

would collapse without her. Indeed, the local populace had already degenerated into a ghostly and squalid race. Only two among them, Prudentia and Godliness, were able to survive, having maintained their roughly human forms. They could have conquered Uriel, the unlucky demiurge, and drained him of his precious blood, but for the fact that they were civilized and found the prospect of such violence to be distasteful. They preferred to find solace in the rites of the most popular among the religions at that time, enacting slightly less brutal alternatives to the rites of ravishment and bloodshed. So the three of them wandered through the hideous ruin of that world, all wearing tunics of faded gold, for no other type of clothing remained. Uriel followed these last two remnants of the glorious society that had spawned from his seed, until at length he killed them both in a moment of inspired passion, thus giving rise to the entire cycle once more. The sequence then repeated itself again, and still once more, perpetuating itself for the duration of several lifetimes. A natural history of atrocity emerged from each completion of the cycle, they became as beads in an endless chaplet, a circuit of horror and suffering that subsisted entirely on itself, a closed system of perfect conservation that glistened like a jewel in the eternal void.

IV

Uriel was never seen again in the office in which he worked. It is necessary to emphasize that not a single person took note of his absence. The world and its infinitude of minor miseries and victories continued to revolve unscathed.



Great Pale North

D.P. Watt

"I KNOW more than Apollo,
For oft, when he lies sleeping,
I see the stars, At mortal wars
In the wounded welkin weeping,"

Tom o' BEDLAM



DO YOU remember when we walked together; through the darkness; the darkness that was neither nothing, nor something, where time had not yet become the dream of servitude or the lust for dominion; that other place where all the distances of space had not even writhed as an embryonic dream in our abundant imaginings; where sleep did not exist, nor waking, for there was nothing to perceive but the presence of each other, the warmth of our proximity and the relentless reciprocity of our love.

Then we walked without direction, or cause, content only in our drifting meandering about each other—*content* with the dance of our shining void.

ꝏ

Do you remember when we walked together and with a flourish you stripped yourself of your dark, black skin and cast it out into the endlessness, draping across the edges of infinity like a shroud. Still we walked on, enveloped within you—beside you; you with me, and I with you, but you above me too, and I below.

ꝏ

Do you remember when we walked together and I sensed your arms reach out into the majesty of that ceaseless darkness and with a flick of each of your fingers galaxies sputtered from desolate nothing into bright, explosive immensity, showered with points of light too innumerable to fathom. That moment of passion, that gift of matter, took your nails and turned them into stars and then our feet found the ground of a billion

planets, with their lands of restless dust, or clouds of broiling gas, seas of bubbling magma or flows of slow, icy emptiness.

ꕥ

Do you remember when we walked together and you looked longingly into the dark that had accompanied us on a thousand nights. With a delicate cup of your fingers you plucked your silvery eyes from their sockets and cast them into the heavens and as they splintered into tiny fragments moons appeared, casting light from all the suns that they waltzed in opposition to. We would walk in perpetual light—you blind—as I led you further, and further, and further into forever.

ꕥ

Do you remember when we walked together and you turned to me with your slow, delicate gestures. I knew what you were asking of me as you forced your chest forward and pulled your arms back as though to fall backwards into oblivion. I thrust my arms deep inside you and clawed out your heart. I threw it to the ground in horror and disgust at my terrible crime—my love, my only companion, how could I have done this to you! You smiled and where the bloody heart lay, with each dying beat of it, a great branch reached from the dead ground and up sprung a fine Ash tree that quivered with the first embers of existence. As its leaves appeared so too did time and the whole universe began its shuddering creep towards its ending.

ꕥ

Do you remember when we walked together about the twisted roots of that fine Ash tree and we wondered at the torture of its branches and the brittle flecks of its bark and chuckled at the whorls of its intricate self-absorption. Then you hung your head in sorrow at the sadness of your craft. I hacked off your head with a slash of my arm, and scooped out your brains with a whisk of my fingers, kneading the grey soup into the eager, dry ground. I nursed it with tears and dribbles of laughter. I plucked from your gaping mouth two teeth that I hammered into the trunk of that fine Ash tree.

In a year and a day it had blossomed and its fruits were a wolf and a child. The wolf prowled about us spitting fire from its bloody maw, the child crawled about us giggling and gurgling. It kissed the wolf with its lips so cold and blue. The wolf howled into the

empty voids of the cosmos and the skies became flame. It burrowed into the earth, deeper and deeper, until its hard limbs became rock and through it ran the lava of its anger. The child disintegrated into rivers of ice that crawled across the surface of the lands until they had settled at the north and south and then the world began to spin as the waltz between angry fire and tranquil ice raged for eternity.

ꕥ

Do you remember when we walked together and with the grace and gift of a billion years of compassion you unravelled your veins, uncoiled your arteries and tore their tumult into the torrent of life-giving flows that began the slow decay of planets into silt. I see, as though it were yesterday, your empty eye sockets—hollow vortices of forgetting, sensing the origins of suffering, as each gentle ember of your splendour transformed into crystal, and clarity; blood became bounty.

ꕥ

Do you remember when we walked together across the flat earths, where the horizon reached out forever across vast empty lands; I reached inside you and snapped your ribs apart and drove them into the hard ground beneath us. Great cracks appeared around us and vast piles of rock surged into the pleading skies, settling back into immense mountains. Beat. Beat. Beat. Your heart quivered still beneath the roots of the tree and with each beat valleys and oceans were filled, the sound of your being roared through the planets, and everything sounded as though it were the thunder of drums and the tremor of cymbals.

ꕥ

Do you remember when we walked together and your bright belly flared, so heavy and laden with immortality. I knelt and listened there and heard the call of a million aching, striving things and tore away your heaving stomach, that then broke the air into a thousand storms of hail, and sleet, and rain, and fire. My feverish fingers unleashed your thrashing liver and pounding kidneys which sank into the fallow ground, disintegrating into a burst of dark mayhem that fed the grey dust into rich red clays; your black bowels, teased from their tight coils, became the abundant soils and your

delicate lungs, pulverised between my quivering palms, the silted loams of a million lost rivers.

ꕥ

Do you remember when we walked together and your red hair flared wild against the glowing dawns. It writhed and tore in the solar winds and then burrowed through all the lands sprouting ferns and grasses as tall and wild as trees, their greens, browns and yellows a mighty flaring of colour in the sterile vastness. Then you knelt down and ran your fingers through the earth and wild flowers of purple and blue, red and orange filled the fields with the beauty of your sacrifice. All was a tumult of life. Aeons of struggle began.

ꕥ

Do you remember when we walked in the ruins of our great, pale world; a world that is only the splendour of your absconded body; the perpetual mystery of your vanished existence, in the convulsion of coital ecstasy or the agony of perpetual death. I was lost to you, with whom I had walked *so* long, *so* far—I was lost and yet everywhere you were to be found. One day, amidst the unending seas of salted sands and dead grey earth, at the end of time, I will find you. When I am locked again into the folds of your everlasting unravelling we will meet again, and *walk* again, and *talk* again, and *laugh* again; you, my terrible friend, my wondrous foe; I remember, you were my father and I your daughter; I remember, I was your mother and you my son—I remember, when we walked together in the ruins of our great, pale world.

The Living Rapture

Jonathan Wood

"Cities like brides expect the April sun –
Cities worn down by Time's slow pressure die,
And pass, laden with many a century
Into the deep mists of oblivion."

From Cities like Brides, The Blessed Pastures
Wilfred Rowland Childe



BEHOLD! Imagine the panoply of Christ and his beloved Father, Ancient beard – wise and love mask, life mask, love-borne Arch everlasting that embraces and cups the world in its inverted vessica; the vessel on the perfect sea - the beloved Universe in the salve of everlasting divinity. The trumpets blast beyond the ever-reaching collapsing beauty of our own thought, your own understanding! Because you cannot understand. And with Christ upon high comes his avenging army of skeleton beauties, the Angel of Death and all her beloved daughters in the life-death glory love tumult of the ages! The savage beauty of her sword-scythe is yet at a distance, but I long for it, in my mind, in the comforting prison of my mind; in my rapture.

This is the Vision and the Vanishing Point. This is the centre of the canvas in my mind. If my mind were a triptych, it would not be enough and no amount of herald artists could trumpet it to life. The triptych is but one blink of an artist's eye. It is but a sketch; an artist's colour wash in its trinity. The mental palette will not allow me sleep and rest and the comfort of a quiet and peaceful mind, for still they come and still I welcome them in the last shoring-up of my flesh-life, tone love, idle rapture into certain blissful unknowingness. The inner blossoms are golden pollenated explosions of colour-love against the walls of my vision; the dead stalks give way to new growth and all is beautiful.

All is beautiful.

But Time is shaping now my vision,
I have forsaken sight
Of the ancient parting skies

Forging the Instruments of God
That I once so loved,
And the blood ruby sun sinks
Back into Infinity's palette
And the Earth retains her secrets
Yet to see;
In my garden
Once so dense with the
Company of angels
I grow desolate and arid with experience.
There is the sterility of quietude
in the air
Of my imaginings
And I cannot distinguish between
My enemies and my friends
And the Sacred Ones
Are all gone

The chatter of angels
Is the rarest prize
To remember

I have spoken with those that I should not dare speak to and I have also dealt with those that I called ancient friends and beckoned of them to drink from the well beneath the tree and they did so and now I am alone, truly alone in the indelible smear of ochre and in the infinity of the living rapture that I have hidden within myself. What was once a blessed doorway for me is now closed and grilled and crumbling with ore.

And I was once tempted.

The Tree was there but you cannot offer of the fruit of the tree without the fruit dying inside of one. You cannot refuse me the internal truth that I know to be so, for you will never witness it as you would expect to witness it. It cannot be, just as the man cannot look directly at the sun and remain un-blinded, but yet closer to God.

And even before I awaken,
The fatality of church bells
Peels away the skin of my mind,
mutating
In my head,
In my imaginings,
In the divine chaos - peace of my understanding,
All that I yet do not understand –
Peeling away the soul of my skin
And the skin of my soul
With their archaic tones and cadences
Ancient,
Sonorous messages,
And choruses divine,
Driving the breeze through
The shining cornfields of my mind
With their clarion calls to the Almighty
And the vast cohorts...
They come, they come in starry rain
Spouting from the spume,
I am not an ordinary man
But I will end my years in peace,
I must...
This is my wish and it is my death,
It is my rapture.

The breeze
Behaves
As if it
Were tidal
Setting the entire golden field
In shining sway

And bringing with it
Purest
Form

The memory is a surging sea and it has carried me to the shore, arriving at low tide. The worms are breathing through the salt bubble, mud-molten delta.

And now the visions have all gone; dispersed back into Heaven's eternal tide. Perhaps they came to me too early and stayed far too long. I can hear the memory of birds singing faintly and that is compensation enough.

There is now only the currency and visitation of departure and despair in my head, knocking at my spiritual door with the lamp lit above, failing. If I could truly push my aged face into the interior of my last canvas, so that it did not break out the other side, but rather became subsumed into the subject of its endeavours like the visage of some demonic idol, then I would truly be at peace. I would be then a light bringer. The death mask would then become the artefact, in mask-life and mask-death in the permanence of the subjective slumber gaze. But it is not to be. It never was, to be. Some say that I have indeed caught this dimension of myself, but only I know the truth of it. I know that others have caught it and in my expression there is only the sorrow of a child grown old with tears and with imaginings beyond the imagination's most distant shore, where silence caresses pebbles, where tidal shingle is drawn back without a sound until it glistens like rare jewels laid out for the King of Glory to peruse.

I *was* once the light bringer.
And if
I was once
the light bringer
And you had
witnessed
My coming
And the
Source
Of my

Light,
Would you
Have
Rejoiced
Or taken
Flight?

The endless
Streets
Remain
Endless

I grow fainter now as the inky water colours dry and soak deeper into the paper and the oils harden and crack with premature age. A figure brought to life and brushed into the background has more presence that I. A figure that bends, searching in the mud for gold.

London
Grows
Smaller
As
Heaven approaches
And the
Light
Fades

I take comfort in the solitary sojourns that I am compelled to take along the Thames side, watching the golden threads turn egg shell-bleak into wizened brackishness. I study the surface broken by the watery voice-kisses of the tidal surge upon the steps that lead down into its blackness of souls long gone and minds that have stood there before me in the pain and suffering of the everyday. I make sketches in my mind.

The contemplation of suicide is upon the air like a malign current that whispers with its hollow but enticing angelic tones into my ear and the ears of those around me. It is a strangely beloved whisper perfectly in tune with the licking of the waters and the sheen of the stone and the breaking of the weather. The weather will break. The voices of children gone before are upon the air, rolling up their sleeves, impelling themselves into the mud with a smack. The mud chutes are yawning and fecund and fertile with future fates and the gulls listen stock-still on the jetties for the smack and slap of mud and the engulfment of the body and the soul into the primordial urban mud, the City's eternal canvas.

Beloved angels!
Pretty faces
And
Pretty limbs
Lie
Undiscovered
In the
Cluttered
Chutes
And
Muddy
throats of
London town
Where Childhood's
Vision
Is
Blinded from birth
with
Snail trails of tears
Silvering the walls
Above and below
the waterline

There is infinite truth in tears,
Silver tears

You must meet me in the middle of the City above the sacred river and care with me to sojourn into my imaginings and watch the whole unhallowed army in retreat, within those confines, waiting to be put to sleep for the night. I cannot tell you how much I must have the company that I desire. It does me no good now to be abandoned like a baby, like a cherub youngster, the eternal infant at the golden door, succumbing. The clank of the door is heard but once and it turns from gold to iron and crumbling ore once more. The emanation is just but an imagining to be repeated again and again and again. The light is fading.

And still the void-faced voices come.

The Living Rapture that I have mentioned is my greatest canvas for it has not yet been unveiled save in the exhibition of my imaginings. I exhibit all in my imaginings – there is no difference between my imagination and my reality; there never has been, and so do things become acute and alive and burning with childish fire and juvenile spirits that stay with me still, even though I am now old. When I was young, there was the infant understanding of divine beauty; it was unconditional, but this could not last forever and it has not. The special spiritual friends were unconditional in their attention then.

Unconditional love.

They would come
Unannounced
Save for
The
Beauteous laughter
And the current
Of
Joy
As if the
Earth were new

And
Each season was Spring
And in the trees
The voices of
God's
Offspring holy
Like a thousand babbling
Rivers

Unconditional. The fountains were of joy and day - fire and the sun was a vast exultant juvenile fiery hymn in its shimmer and its darling blaze. I can weep tears that are not bitter. I have never wept tears that are bitter. My tears flow back to the source to be collected in jars of the finest Blue John.

But I do digress as is my wont. Let me tell you that I am thus surrounded in this old prison! Gold into iron into crumbling ore. In my mind, there is paint being removed and delicately reversed back into its eternal palette. My mind won't rest in these scrapings.

I expect you can imagine it; well imagine it, and don't dream it, for no good will come of it, no good at all. This glistening canvas is still wet with the beloved wasted wanting of my soul, still raw with the deepest most divine passionate truth that I could capture. The parasite sings its song in my head and yet it is but a ghost. Ghosts arrive still at my gate like forgotten friends; ghosts act without thinking in the distraction of their dust-light existence. They are a deliverance from the gravity and granite of my visions, from the certainty of the Life amidst the angels and the stars and the trammel. They arrive unannounced as is their wont.

A ghost cannot sing,
Can it?
I am a ghost
In thought
And deed ...
The parasite bites me

Still
In the mirror
In my mind
inside
Me

In this song, I am departing like a soul between the lower and the upper hand of that which discovered me resting in my own palm. I am departing now and my palm is empty. The canvas is drying perfectly after the rivers of deep red and gold have congealed from out of my art and out of my once diadem mind. My diadem mind was blissful like a procession down the Strand. A very throng at diadem time making way for the Beloved.

But I am content in my cell and there is no further light to bring. Contentment is a rare state, for it breeds detachment and contemplation and unawareness in its deceptive calm. There is bliss in the knowledge of unawareness.

Having now stepped back into the shadows of a small and rotten building like this one, having stamped into crimson bolter, the last flailing remnants of my own self and my own soul, it is right for me to stand and reflect in this detached contemplation; countless thousands are not countless and subtle individuals are not subtle, and stopping time to reflect especially upon something less than nothing is not for me to embrace or caress. The quality of silence has proved itself to be now, as ever it was and ever shall be, unbending, unswerving, beyond the shrill tin throats of the subtlest of imaginings, of the sacred throngs. For there is no way now to dream and neither should there be. The quality of silence is my best companion now.

And after all these blessed years, carried twice as many because of *them*, I can do nought but adorn the City of London with the all-powerful, all-reaching, all consuming blinding smile of Love, the Love smile of a miniscule component like me, a ghost parasite that will yet tear down mortar and daub and the walls of the prisons, to filter in affection through the curtain beyond human vanity, to shine the lantern stolen from your window, ever searching, ever illuminating, ever wanting to daub and speak the songs of purest poetry onto the walls; dappling the canvasses and throngs through the streets fecund with arid leaves and with despair and with the airy certainty of another

day. The crunch of autumn leaves is but the one certainty we have, signifying age and the pursuit of change and the reflective retirement but to Beloved Death, glorious in the chains of office and the reflected glory of the sun. There is beauty in bone. It is the colour palette of eternity; one minute it is there and the next it is gone and thank God for it in its ample fading into infinity. We give thanks to God in our country, in our Nation. I give thanks for the light beyond the understanding of our dreams; the secret sacred palette of our imaginings. The secrets that lie within the palette and the canvas; the fire - air stories brought to life – myth.

And I know
there came
To this country
A gentleman
From desolate
Sands
With face and eyes
And voices
So beautiful,
The mask-life
And
Voice-life
And
In his hand,
The
Golden thread
And
The
Sculpted
Carven
Staff of Life,
His back
Disappearing

Beyond the hills
And in the caves
Carven
Cavern
Craven

And pray, please cast an open ear to the ground for the dull thud footsteps that pump intermittently down, ever down through the cracked canvas-old arteries of this City. I can see the future way in swirls of chaotic expression and thought divine beyond my understanding. The civilised young man with etchings in his knapsack is leaving his home in the stretching long-distant suburbs. We can only breathe who we are and in so breathing, we make our lives complete. I am but who I am.

God's
face
Is
Hidden
Beneath
The
Firmament,
We tread
Upon
The face
Of
God
And yet
The face
Remains
Dappled in moon-illumined puddles
Fragmented
in perfection
In its permanence

In its everlastingness
Even after we are gone

And the grim clanking tools of censure and sterility will creep upon you in the night and caress your soul in the fatal words of love and words of justice and will promise salutations and empathy and stability, if you would only just stop writing, only terminate the obsessive fever of your etching and your creating and making great arcs with the charcoal and the fiery beauty of the paints. Why only yesterday, I painted and the paint is now congealed into peaks upon the canvas and I cannot yet see beyond these peaks to the vision within. The way is barred by clouds. There is silence within the vision as if the time has come and the sky within the vision is now charcoal grey. The quality of silence has proved itself this day to me and on many previous days that chill me to my core and in deepest summer, too. And when it arrives, the Nation will deserve nothing more than what they will get and they will be gently massaged by the Clerk in the Night in his coat tails and in his face you will recognise the acceptable face of unacceptable facelessness. There will be no need of vision. No need at all.

One won't even have to attempt to exist anymore.

It will be done for you.

You can lie back and it will be done for you.

Think not and come to no harm.

The embers of my paintings are no longer glowing; they are withdrawing into the past, where fatal image replaces the beauty of vision, where cold stellar night replaces a glimpse into the living rapture. In daylight like the sacred sleeping parasite that I once held so dear, my mind will lie dormant, like the notion of an enveloping all-consuming Shakespearean fire prepared in the grate of someone rich; unlit, extinct of distinction, where all that is required is to imagine the eloquent conflagration. To imagine, is but to live. Breathe ignition through the power of words and it will break you down through its immortal flood into the crucible of elemental fire!

Lying.

And yet at night the first shades of void-faced darkness filter within, like the subtle shades of the liar or the voluminous hair of the cousin that you might have once kissed upon the lips. The fire is in the grate and is now lit and the small whispers and juvenile

tongues of delicate flame do so emerge and force the familiar hiss of freshly moist and constructed kindling and wood to crackle in anticipation of the imploding collapsing coal burdening its back. I hold myself back into myself, day after day after day, awaiting the divine collapse. I was once a living fire. The King of Fire.

The living rapture! The burden.

Alive at night like the Wanderer of the Streets after People hours, when the nation returns to its bed in line after line after line. And within my own secret, the sacred pocket of the night in my imagining, my nocturnal eye and ear to the wall of nothingness sounds, there comes a final blinding vision, along the hiding place of my own merely subtle sight. I close my eyes and there is a golden chasm unfolding and revealing, a rifting fire which is in my millisecond glimpse of my mind, with that dread dense sense of impending anticipation as it grows ever closer and then back to the vision of the blinding molten chasm. Take much heed for it shall return from below not above, although very much the same thing. Beware the letters printed on the walls. The clarion news caught in amber like the fly forever. The words on the drapes get bigger and I cannot swallow them anymore.

Carven
Cavern
Craven

And if words are so very important as they surely are, then we have already witnessed a second coming of Christ in our land; already! The followers turn the other cheek, the epistles, the revealing of Judas and the subtle indignation and worship of one man. The man in the box waiting to be revealed; he walked the streets last night. He made those of you Fishers of Men, showed through his clever, clever, chip, chipped away frieze of words, each interlocking like a sacred handshake that comes from out of the clouds at will – more than fifty of them at one turn, so I saw. The equation of the mystery, the mystery itself is practicable and is possible. I have searched for and seen the equations upon the walls.

He is now in the wilderness where I have been for some time, polishing my art. Neither one side or the other do I take, but live on in my blessed pocket of Space between Space itself.

Between Space itself.

And that blinding light comes again with pointed stars on each corner. It is angular and it is prescient and it is physical as if it were a sculpture and not an one's imagining. I wake to see it; I sleep and see it, but I do not dream it. In my existence in this City, I search to see it; that which is in front of me, walking ahead and behind me and above and below me.

Above and below me.

I receive that blinding chasm light which springs, nay emanates from off the page like the centre of an arc, an ARCH, that I spell, one single letter at a time; in the very centre of the very middle of this intense work. When I work. When I work at it. Symbols of images and images of symbols compete in the complete map divine of the Cosmic One, all lines and boxes and letters and then on the reverse of the letters, the words that impel me to sit and gaze. The intense vision of blinding exultation, the ever - realising light upon the paltry surface of this one canvas.

The Unity that I desire.

And there was one particular letter, a subtle daemonic conjuration, something very old, perhaps from Solomon or before, direct from God, and the feeling of intense and wilful understanding grew and it grows; simple words, unheard of words and unseen of too. Have you heard of unheard - of words? Have you seen things unseen?

There are pages and words ripped unceremoniously from the purest contagion of Power and Spirit, from the subtlest Mystery, making me drop indeed the page and thus forever after my visions, subtle visions within my dear small head are confirmed. My ability is confirmed. My skin and my imaginings are confirmed. They are aflame like the infant Sun that warps and blazes as if it were God's comet - head on fire.

the purest
contagion
of Power
and Spirit

For that is where it is most important. Even better if you can communicate it to others, but if like me, you have a mind crushed inward by something more evil than

shyness, a kind of desperately orchestrated confusion, then you will know how hard it is to keep one's head above the waters of desolation.

I am, rather a servant.

There *are* true prophets and yet I have described the vision of the Cosmic One; First-hand Ancient experience. This year has aged me fast my fellows; like the noose tightened round a young tree's trunk; its influence constricting and contracting and squeezing us voiding into a blackout of intractable darkness and serpent-swirling demons. Those who now court the approval of demons shall walk in an endless fiery line towards something called Truth, for only once will they have suffered by themselves and by themselves will they know the full choking quality of the life-down-dirt crossroads of London, watching the lines of sacred greybeard tramps and vagabonds with festering limbs; flaming solid words hanging from their pockets like smelter. I watch the boys by the darkened wall with river mud between their toes and I wonder how much of their bodies they have already given and I know the city will collapse itself.

I will collapse myself into my art, into the canvas. Into Essence.

Each day, the mural features of the face of London becomes that bit duller, made so by each one of us with the smoke and grime. But the decay will become as just so much cutting away – the City norm, which will make London the false city for writers and for poor chisellers who cannot spell or paint, like me, bound to wander down Holborn and north again to Kings Cross. There are no blinding lights except within my head, blinding the power of this small scraping of diary and imagining. There are no dreams to be had in London. It is now dangerous to even begin to write or compose the sign of the Idol of the Head. But it will be done, for I have seen it. At the Jerusalem, they drink and I drink until the nights close in. We depart. There is base divinity and baser redemption in Porter.

And our nation will, by blatant cynicism and vanity and by the concepts of Life, Light, Liberty and Love bring forth the powerful design of craven destruction. This new year heralds the end of the romance for this land. Our gift is craven destruction. The chains are forged in an everlasting smelter.

We have spoken and bellowed forth molten words of sterility and certain impermanence.

It is already happened. The face of Nature smiles – a male face thus born out of Time, out of Space, kissing the nose of the Sun, our Father who art in Heaven.

Oh lord, our Father, Lord of the green lea pastures, you will impel us to search out what is under the stones of the street, against the walls and behind them. The long search for a way out into the refreshing air of youthful morning. Ever closer you draw us and we think you are to the door, the departing gate, but you go one step backwards, stopped by shadows in the street, like us. There is something out there waiting; the land is now a-blush at year's end with scarlet gleams and resignation.

I am ever looking, ever watching, ever waiting .....

I have learned how to recognise and deal with the decoy visions, released by the energy of certain spirits *or* indeed not by spirits. I would not call them spirits, for they are the divinities of my imaginings. Decoy visions, when I doubt myself and my own integrity and my own mind. I doubt myself so daily like a prayer. I doubt myself in my faith. There are two faces for every spirit.

Put a shell to your ear and see if you can hear the sea. Put your ear to a brick wall and hear the voices of sadness in their prisons. In their hell. Put an ear to my canvas and be lost forever. There is an eternity of experience and despair that I can barely articulate.

And I have committed an act of massive barbarism on myself, for there is no more now to give. The artist is the savage, cutting away at the interior world of his soul until there is nothing but bone to see and rock-spits splintering into ash. My human reflections are no more caught but in the eddying dust. Better now not to cast your reflection through 'heavier than air' light, for you will see yourself as you truly are. Reflect upon that. I am. Trust now and perhaps do well to reflect upon the seduction of words and images, that fall to pieces and then reseed themselves into the night's pastures new, into the emerging cloud.

The Living Rapture. I am the painting. The figure is indistinct save for all his surroundings and all that remains sacred. The sacred do not care for artists. Something becomes distinct and frames my face as if set in Time beyond our knowledge.

Rapture. Imaginings. The deluge comes at the appointed hour. The slipstream beckons and engulfs. The fibres tighten.

I was tempted.

If the rope remains coiled, then the serpent will sleep. If I dream that the serpent is uncoiling or uncoiled, then the serpent will awake and bite me. If I *imagine* rather than dream that the serpent is uncoiling then it is too late for me and the serpent's head is poised; the bite has happened without me knowing and is already septic, the toxic beauty of the strange drug already searching for sanctuary and depth in my contracting veins, in the stained-glass window of my soul, in the darkened streets that smudge with running monochromes of morning gloom and sepia coal dust tears that seek and gain the mouth and the tongue and stain the everlasting record of my soul.

I have to die to live and so the stool is somehow kicked away and my body becomes the puppet without its master, performing for the last time in the sure and certain hope of eternal black quietness and the quietude of the longest country lane of them all that leads to the farm that is one's final resting place, with the sound of the cows eating in the fields nearby and the sight of London, like a dim-gleamed jewel, far away, far away. The memory of the joyous 'greybeard' caper up these country lanes is in my blood and that is ebbing like the gold Thames tide, down, far down and ever down into the congruence with the seas and the ghosts of the invaders seeking the glint of their Roman coins and their shining Norse blades, in the trail and wake of Gods. The breeze off the marshes brings with it the skeletal remains of ancient voices caught in the vegetation for all time, suddenly released, eddying and winnowing, traveling back up to the source.

I can feel the brackish water in my ears and up my nostrils. I am free from them. I sink and let myself be carried by the undercurrents until there is no more than a murmur and the chance of being found on the furthest shore somewhere. And in the London streets, the paving stones and cobbles sing as they have always done for me.

God's
Face
Is
Hidden
Beneath
The
Firmament,
We tread

Upon
The face
Of
God

And I am found, my skin-less bleeding tones of deepest scarlet and ochre, like the raked embers of a fire about to exhaust itself. My skin tones flow and ebb into the congruence of the waters. I am naked with the tissue of my soul in scatters in the soil, within the moment, within the gasp, within the stare of my skull. I imagine that I stare at myself as if I am perched within my own hand and that somehow I am on fire, in that I mean that my true being is aflame and that I have no power to extinguish anything; not me, not the truth, not the chord of my life as has been. For that would be to turn against myself and beseech the skies to blacken and that would be thus wrong. There is no death.

My imaginings,
My visions
All have names
Are nameless
Are legion
In the
Four cornered
Continent
Of the
Universe divine
Where the Mystery is
Pumped
As
Gaseous
Contagion
Where we are
Companionless
But

Companioned
By
Those
We cannot
See
Who are
Our
Suns and Divine
Daughters
Of the
Masque of Time,
The Living
Rapture
That
Into flood
We go
Into
Our
Nation
At the
Edge
Of Time
Where words
Become solid
Fire and the
Resurrection
Of Eternity
Is
Complete

the purest
contagion

of Power
and Spirit
is upon us

Go in peace
Aflame
In
Fatal
Glory
Beloved
Of
The
Universe
Scarlet
At the
Eternal
Crossroads
Where all roads meet
This is the Vision
And
The Vanishing Point

Out of the clouds comes the Mystery Divine and I am ready and my finest canvas is unveiled. The black curtain falls from the corner of the frame and there is a general gasp, for I am not alone, either in the room or in the panoply within the canvas.

He is come ...
With face and eyes
And voices
So beautiful

The Torso in Shadow

Adam S. Cantwell

"TAKE THIS TORCH,' she said, 'and burn. Burn everything on the earth and in the sky. And break the fennel and put out its flame when you have finished burning, for nothing should be passed on."

Marcel Schwob, THE BOOK OF MONELLE



THE TRAIN STOOD motionless in the tunnel. After a period of inactivity, news filtered down and the other commuters grew agitated. There was talk, appeals to absent authority, recrimination and complaint. Some were silent and watchful. Men and women began to formulate their own vague claims and I looked to the doors. Many pairs of eyes followed as I twisted the twin levers in opposite directions and stepped out between carriages into gray darkness and dead carbon-fragrant air. There were, nearly drowned in hydraulic hisses, faint echoes of voices from inside; the track lamps' glow reflected from the brushed aluminum cladding of the gravid train. Each wheeled car in place between predecessor and follower, no choice but to go in sequence. I understood what was happening in the wider world as well as anyone. Another breach in the smooth functioning of the commonwealth, the fruit of neglect and much more. Continuing on my way by other means, I resumed the mingled threads of thought: how my responsibilities were indeed my own, how I was beholden to a constellation of dependencies and correspondences... it was strangely natural to think of these now in the signal-haunted dark, whereas I usually fled the reckoning. The huge moiré of coincidence, of overlap with the obligations and avowals of others, and with the body politic, loomed over me, but I knew it would serve no one if I were to let myself become hypnotized by this vast thing, branch and root... still it would be a lie to say that the image of this sublunary universe did not hover above my thoughts, and emotions, and actions that day. Souls cried out in the streets, no matter the nature or magnitude of the general disruption. What had buried itself might again seep up—but to what end to fight, for what prize? For comfort, or to demonstrate mere allegiance? To fight one

must forge weapons, none more necessary or lethal than the combative spirit, and where was this in me? Did I understand the elements in the alloy? Who in my city, my family did? Where were strong words still spoken and their terrible import comprehended? Still there was that in me that was tensed as a bowstring, and that which was rigid and poised to be driven forth, to strike and to penetrate. Above my shoulders left and right tiny blue lamps floated out into an advancing dark. I put out my hand, not knowing what I'd touch, hoping to find a boundary. A kind of path or rut was under my feet, running alongside the steel rails. Another line lay adjacent, just beyond a screen of pillars, then another beyond that in a series of dim galleries. I was headed uptown though my home was downtown. Called forth to the heart of trouble, attending to the voices that whisper in momentous events as well as in the quiet chambers of the city. Walking the night path, not knowing where the exit lay, each step was effortful as if I climbed a mountain. The rats moved boldly on uneven ground, over blocks and bolts, conduits and fittings. Nameless debris lay in heaps, scattered by my steps. The more I hesitated in my soul, temporized with new demands beneath the streets, the stronger was my stride. I stretched my arms into nothingness and it was like I swam forward to interpose the active principle of my body between the unknown and the seat of my motivation, wherever it finally lay in those black regions behind my brow. The gallery to my right closed off, I entered a single track tunnel and the row of blue lights was the only sign of a world outside the roiling heavens in heart and head. I felt myself pitching downward in blue-starred vertigo, my chest and its contents were a train that I myself drove and necessarily led where the uncertain track leads. There are niches, bays in the black walls, refuge for track workers should the need arise. These I passed. I could not run but still my progress was headlong. I felt I was swimming, prowling, I became something else, some altered creature, born as a prodigy on the day of disaster (if that's what it was, if any day was ever anything but the moment of crisis.) The sounds of the system hung indescribable and heavy in the sooty air. In the remote reaches, a long rumble trailing into distance that seemed proximity. The rails would sing again soon, or else, on the surface, terrible new ways were being forged, old edifices cleared away. In the persistent grayness I became conscious of an acute oppression of feeling, a difficulty in mastering my emotions; hope and dread strangely merged… Fear had been all around me like an invisible medium in which I breathed or swam, for so long, that

now it buoyed me up. The traces of buried watercourses, unseen stream beds filled with rubble, prehistoric middens, all radiated from my head like pencil-lines smirching the clay-white of rag paper. I'd reached the point in my uptown progress at which I should resurface. I issued from the bedrock through a rift in the pavement. A gritty suspension hovered low in the streets, a haze smelling of seawater; up above Broadway high in another realm the peak of the Chrysler building reflected an oblique sun. There in a basin formed by office buildings and apartment blocks is the cracked shell of a church. The conventional elements of its symbolic architecture—transept, narthex, all the rest—are jumbled, in my unbeliever's apprehension. (Each soul's path was a narrow course between and through many teratologies, bottomless temptations, towering despairs, sweeping riverine ignorances…) I pause and behold. The roof is partially gone. A huge gray sleeping figure occupies the great ruptured space—knees pulled up, one foot draped over the last pew, white-gray robes gathered and heaped and rising in a series of soft colorless hills, the arms, thicker than great steel pipes of water mains, delicately folded on the altar, cradling the great head; foreshortened, the soft-featured sexless countenance is in repose. The hair of its head lay all about in stiff locks like tongues of yellow-white flame, one spilled out so as to lick at the base of the Crucifix. Behind me the horns and sirens echo in the maze; I take a few steps with eyes locked still on the sleeping giant's momentous features, in suspense as to what signal they might betray. But it was time to move, the city was jungle, the masks presented as faces, the shafts of klieg light were channels into the rock, chimneys no sooner sunk into the earth than choked with soot. Up here the contrails flung out like roads across the Atlantic for insubstantial caravans, or the oily furrows left by a ballpoint pen when the ink runs dry. Orange fire in the evening eyes of Brooklyn tenements, in their jumble and grid thrown down at the verge of the western water. My forebears and cities I've lived in and imagined, great rivers I've crossed in the sky or not at all. In my war machine I flew over the seaboard laid out like a patchwork of industry, art and agriculture, all of a speculative, metaphysical, and symbolic nature. Huge frames like printing presses or looms the size of rural counties. Crop dusters and other small craft trail mile-long skeins to weave a giant veil for the nakedness of a valley. Grids of shallow pits and low prominences in sinister chessboard configurations; spaces where the land is folded perilously on itself, great promenades and ballets of earth movers and TNT detonations,

a great gulf into which a hundred tangled bridges dangled, a zone of pure black loam which glowed, even through the fuselage, with a strange bracing heat… colored mists issuing in varying patterns from rifts and gulfs, there to resolve in the lower atmosphere into the image of the foreshortened face of the woman asleep on the platform bench… choruses of shifting sands, great cranes and derricks trailing forests of vines, sigils of all the major and minor extractive faiths. If I but dipped my wing in martial salute to the dawn, the whole patchwork of river, plain and industry and oversize ritual pitched up and around, threatened to spill from the the commodious bowl of the world, but this allowed sight of the other plains beyond and between, and the gardens, so I fed fire to my engine and rode the pencil of white fire into the coal-blue empyrean and renounced again my claim to the common things of the world, the pleasures of conversation… I felt like a blow now, as I hadn't before, how this undercut and sold out the others in my sad cohort. I'd changed now, or had I? I could step out upon the wing to be torn by the winds and scattered over the fallow and fertile lands—the option is always open to us to return to our constituent atoms, to turn aside from the path we've set, to rise in flame. To ride that train to the city, at the busy terminus of the earth and of history, and never to bear public witness, to shake silently with fear and revelation, a cracked vessel on a ship going down to glory—this was an omission without recovery, and now I'd smuggle recrimination to the heart of the sun because I knew what I was: the townspeople, the minotaur, the skeptic, the million, the acid-bitten plate, the exegete, the scarred earth, the body of cloud, the bellows of the blacksmith, the sparrow's beak, the avidity of the idiot, the long portamento, the flight, the neglected ritual. In the tunnel, after leaving the train I'd had a conversation with a woman I encountered there. "It-it's so cold down here, my train stopped-do you know the way out? I figured I was so close to West Fourth but now—did I get turned around?" She had a little device and she shone its light respectfully into the space between us, so as not to dazzle my eyes. She was somewhat strangely attired. "I-I've just come back to the city, I was upstate at an ashram—" I must have smiled or chuckled, or encouraged her in some way, though I wasn't conscious of it—"they don't let you stay there forever," she laughed modestly. "But do you know what's going on up there?" I told her I did not know, and alluded to what I suspected. "Or it may be it's only a problem with the trains," I offered. "We really shouldn't be down here," she said, "I heard booms." Another huge dull sound

from above. “We need to get out of here.” “It’s not a good idea to be down here.” “Jesus, people might need help up there.” “Keep on the way I was going I think, there’s nothing back there.” We walked the dark tracks for a time, one behind the other. “Wait, I’m sorry, do we-have we met?” “I was just thinking, your voice does sound familiar.” We define ourselves by the fights we take up, by the enemies we choose. “Hold on, are you Peter’s wife?” It was true, we knew each other from the neighborhood. The tenor changed, we remembered the controversy. It was a subject that wouldn’t be glossed over, so there in the darkness of the pit we revived the premises, principles, the arguments for and against, the many grievances and the mitigating factors. Hearing these matters recounted here, deep underground, did much to undermine my certainty, such as it had been, that my positions had been fully justified, or right; I realized how deep was my habit of delegating responsibility and judgement to others, particularly to women. What was this lacuna in my life of decision and discernment, was it a place where I lacked or a place of overlap and mingling with others? Or both? What access does any of us have to the self-without-others? Even our dreams arise out of atoms and synapses materially knitted out of the bodies of our antecedents. This conflict with ourselves takes many masks and still does not nearly exhaust the universe of possible conflicts. Is it a beacon of weakness for those who take the mantle of the beast or of the implacable one in order to destroy us? But the same snares slow them. The same fate brings them to ground at last. The constellations of the pores of my skin, reaching out in the dark tunnel to the Sun. There must always be a wall, looming ceiling and hard-packed floor, what is the use of sensing its particulars? One makes contact with it, adjusts course, and continues on. Always making, and relating the stories of making, and of parentage and ancestry. A burgeoning lineage and genealogy that leapt from my mind, miles at a time, wherever I glanced. Massed clouds on the horizon are no more than an axis around which turns the infinity of circumstances, in analogy to a massed army, in likeness, both limit possibilities, nothing focusses the neverending work of the Universe or its contemplation. My heavy ceremonial collar, my huge wings, the walnut-like organ behind the face with which one senses the approach of a big war. The lost works of the bare-chested true founders of the line, the toilers, their purposeful argot—the lost testament where the hems of their garments brushed the newborn dust! Up, breaching atmosphere, burrowing in blackness, through columns of celestial thighs, to the tunnels

of the sun and the provincial firmament beyond. Blunt things that day: the attack of an organ, the push of sound from nowhere, the approach of the train, the stormfront of the air, the brown brows of the columns in the gloom, the backs of rats in that aspect where they might be insects, not mammals—pushing aside air and other lesser media, making their imposition on the world. The living darkness when senses are smashed and the one that remains is the moral, but what is the moral when we lack the language to name it, when it's been washed away by the long-delayed flood from our pride's afterbirth? My shoulders moving through a deluge of darkness, bearing the load that only shifts, to join the effort with those who only contend among themselves… "for our contention is not with the blood and the flesh, but with dominion, with authority, with the blind world-rulers of this life, with the spirit of evil in things heavenly." The dream where I stood on a darkened platform, in a red-lit gallery, watching through interstices of columns and stairways an ever-passing train, some cars lit, some dark, some packed, others sparsely populated or empty. A smudge of faces. On it hammered in the night—then I remembered it was a kind of train that ran on a miles-long, twisting and plunging track that was also a loop, and that the full length of the train was only barely less than that of the track. I became, in the dream, suddenly conscious of myself in a public place, of the slouching posture which I quickly corrected, of what I was doing or wasn't doing with my hands—then I glanced toward the track and for an instant saw the gap, the prow of the head car of the endless train punching through the equivocal dark, its headlights reflecting from the rear of the last car and thrown out in crazy headlong rays—then the gap was gone like a memory and I knew I might stand for hours or nights on the cold damp concrete-floored landing and in my imperfect vigilance never again chance to see it, the unexpected end and immediate rude resumption of eternal night-travel… the strange blunt nose or face of the train, the strange figures cast in chromium, a headless bird or some winged animal or deity, the banded and bossed metal that strove and failed to convey domination through the meticulousness of its design. *The Cur and the Caravel*… In my nightmare there was an animal like this train, endlessly running its burrow, or curling into a ball like a pangolin but with translucent ruddy flesh, blind, now nosing, now rolling in a crooked listing path—it did not fill its tunnel like a serpent but it trailed a brown silence or reticence or horror behind it like the train of a gown or like a stench, and just as the miasma dissipated,

here came the thing again… I was able to apprehend the shape and course of its burrow all at once by means of some perception other than the visual, by some topological dream-sense of memory. That reputed galvanic touch or smell possessed by sharks, by which they feel the presence of prey in the skin of the face… Only by the perfection of the *counterfeit* of the five senses was the existence of another sense, of other senses, finally evidenced— suggesting a law by which each new sense might be isolated. There are two principles here: the senses are *cumulative,* and there is a *hierarchy* of the senses. With five senses glutted and hoodwinked flawlessly, there was found to be a terrible *lack*, a lacuna or absence which was fatal to the perfect spectacle of a manufactured world, and which in turn revealed the last sense, or, it was soon intuited, the beginning of a spectrum of higher senses. Some called it the very signature of the Demiurge… Who among us will step out onto the tightrope over the chasm that this new sense points to, and who will retreat to perfect the machines? Who will proceed only far enough to master so as to counterfeit, and who will commit to the hazardous journey without end? The very height and depth of our greatness, which is our perception and our genius for subterfuge, confers responsibility, grants its wisdom… The white dust hangs mountainous over Manhattan, in milky vapor all about Venus, like motes of dust in Mercury's path, sticking to the skin, molecules and spermiculi in suspension, tented fingers' shelter, tenements' monument to wonder steaming upriver, up the Hudson and East River, white furrows of foam scar the placid waters then subside… the scars of the Human seaming the dusty roads to the sun.

The Synarchy of Woven Bones

DEATHSPELL OMEGA

"THE GODS exist; that's the devil of it."

Jean COCTEAU



O Father! Iatros! Witness thou anon!
Mists above, Exhalations below,
I shall forevermore be betwixt all things,
preventing communion;
shielding off the weakening beams of salvation
shining upon the mournful gloom of Earth;
a dreadful interval, sly foundation of ruin,
and breathe warring winds, racking hail
where just this Morn thrice beloved concord was…

Hearken this hideous peal as they drink the water
of Styx, for all things shall become my prey;
the water of Acheron, as they silence fragile weeping
with horrent arms; the water of Cocytus,
to laugh at the laments of the Holy Dead;
yon boiling water of Phlegeton, cataracts
of fire alike, and the water of Lethe
for what shall remain, even in memories,
but a livid seat of ever renewing desolation?

Hearken thunder from below, like growling gods
who erupt to be released and bare their fangs.
A long shudder shakes the world as,
rising upon the bleak horizon, swell into lifeless life
the Commandments that shall sanctify the reign
of the Specter that gnaws upon Man like
hounds chew on bones and offal.

The Synarchy of Molten Bones shall consist
of Men of worth and Men of ill intent
in abandoned yet equal numbers,
for their insurgent wills harbor
the seed of transgression alike.

This seed shall bloom with noxious flowers,
borne out of the mordant steel of scythes.
Justice will die first,
to the hammering sound of tears watering the Earth,
as aught hope remains to reverse course.

In secretest conveyance, I say
forfeit all tongues to Death as hitherto
they maintained the memory of the prime Architect
and welcome instead, with yells and hysteria,
the language, mockery of the Logos,
that tastes bitter ashes alike
and mimics exploding hiss.
By repetition, incantation and privation of the psyche
thou shalt summon words that to the mind are bane
and forevermore close your soul to the heavenly stars.
You may lament aloud:
dawn shall henceforth rise within a suffocating tomb.

Among all carnage present and past
only one grave matters,
hollow and hopelessly out of reach,
the Grave of Singularity,
over which weeps the Mother of All,
saddened unto Death.

The further the abasement of Man, the more
he thinks of himself as angelic throng, just and saintly!
Thou shalt celebrate the unquestionable perfection
of this world without end,
in which Life faces dissolution,
with ceaseless Prayers, degenerate Song
and obsequious discipline,
for thy flesh is nothing
but a receptacle for Law ironclad,
ever since thy volition sunk
into the deepest of Abysses!

THOU SHALT ACCEPT thy Revelation
as your beginning and your end,
all other things you are to abjure with spite!
What thy Lord commands with repulsive voice
tolerates neither addition nor love, nor faith.
Only prevenient submission and servitude
to the utmost limits of the fearful self!
Thou shalt reap lush reward
for taking that solemn oath…
thy heart shall breed the larvae of plagues
and depletion will complement dearth
in thy hapless pursuit of a merciful void.
See? Thy faith is not void of wonders!

O Father! Intros! Witness thou anon!
The rotten splendor of what once was thy realm,
now shivering at the black threshold of the grave,
deprived of the compass of duality,
hence wretched and drowning in tenfold confusion.
Death, adorned with refined rags,
parades endlessly in a mimicry of Life,
as innumerable crowds flagellate themselves
in delirious adoration.
The malformed progeny of Sin and Virtue
reeks of such outrage to the Universe
that even Titans flee submerged with nausea,
lacking the strength to face this crime,
which contains all crimes as one!

THOU SHALT PRECIPITATE History,
those days of yonder,
and the solemn roots of the human race
into the furnace fraught with fire unquenchable.
The names of all things thou shalt feed to the undying worm
and rejoice at the mumblings of a once potent tongue.

The haughty strides of Time thou shalt put to halt
and mangle Past and Future with ghastly wounds.
While for these deeds thou hast borne universal reproach,
laugh at their vain designs, for scarce the sun hath
finished his journey, nothing remains but
the dread tribunal of an everlasting Present.

Forge a bond in glowing iron the manacle
Faith with raging Madness, another
reeking of nitre, to chain Truth with Fear.
Lo and behold, the first of many harvests of corpses is thine!

Famished for breath,
an angular neck and eyes aghast,
the effulgence of Horror in this New World is without peers.
Thou shalt celebrate the conception and rise
of the New Man, to whom all he eats or drinks
is propagated malediction,
a Man pregnant with infernal flame,
standing on the devastation
of all things past.

Cease your weeping, Nicodemus.
For All is Well. And All is Full of Hell.



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