

Anthology Complex

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Volume 1 - Composition 2

(1:2 / 2 / II)

Part 6

Chapter 51

WHITE LIGHTS

1:2:6:51

HOW did you get here? That's what you ask yourself as you lay wide awake on a hotel's bed. You look around the room and notice how poorly organized every aspect of the hotel room is, and then that's when you realize you haven't slept in three weeks. Ms. Nosleep, sent by Mr. Nosleep to keep you company because he couldn't make the trip. It doesn't matter how far away you go, these kinds of things will always catch up with you.

You get up off the bed and stand there for a while wondering if life is simply just a joke. You can't fall asleep, so that kind of makes you mad, and when you can fall asleep, you don't like waking up. This makes you think of Newton's first law.

You walk into the bathroom and realize that this room is very well organized, unlike the other. You stand in front of the mirror, you've done this every morning that you've been here. You stare long enough until you convince yourself that the person in the mirror is actually someone else. For a moment it feels like you're actually looking at another person on the other side of that mirror, and then you realize that it's just you and you laugh. Some mornings the laugh lasts for a few seconds, others, a few minutes.

You go to the toilet and urinate, flushing the toilet while you are urinating so that you don't have to do it later. When you're done, you go to turn off the light and realize that flipping the switch up turns off the light. Some switches were weird like that, usually because there was another switch that controlled the same light somewhere nearby! A sneeze. Sometimes when you're thinking and you sneeze, you sneeze the word you are currently thinking right out of your mouth. In this case, you sneezed out "nearby."

You walk out of the bathroom and grab your coat, then you leave the room and nod at Sally as you exit the hotel. You realize you are staying at a hotel located in the downtown area of the city. Tall buildings, people, cars, noise, you could almost suffocate from it.

You look down and see snow on the ground. The year's first snow which must have came overnight which you would have seen falling had you looked out of the hotel window, but you didn't. It doesn't matter though, chances are the snow will melt in a few hours and it will be as if it never happened at all. The first snow never takes.

You walk a few yards up to one of those little news box things that house newspapers and take out a newspaper. You laugh because you're reading about a small town west of where you are now that has a high crime rate. Go to the ends of the Earth and nothing will change.

Where are you going? That's what you ask yourself as you walk away from the hotel. You know that you're not lost or confused, yet you feel like it. Sometimes you feel like you can't find that starting and finishing point, and because of that you don't know where

you are in the race. You probably don't even know if you're running in the correct direction. The one thing you do know and understand is that "joy can be shared with others while grief must be endured alone."

On your walk, someone asks you if you know the time. You don't have any devices that tell you the current time, so you say no and apologize. If you liked to joke around with strangers, you would have said "No, but it must be seven o'clock somewhere." It's funny how the composition of a sentence can completely change its meaning. "Is it seven o'clock?" "It is seven o'clock." Alter one little thing and you get a different result. The world is a funny place.

Now you're walking down some stairs that lead to a subway. You pay the fare and begin to wait like everyone else who is standing on the platform. On the other side you can hear someone playing a guitar and singing, so you start to walk in that direction. You find that it is a young black male performing for loose change.

You stand there and listen for a while, and then you hear the subway coming. You put your hands in your pocket and take out a five dollar bill and place it in the man's hat. He thanks you, you nod, and you make your way to the subway car along with everyone else.

Who are you? That's what you ask yourself as you sit down. Not too long later you notice that your thumb is red. The superficial cut had healed but is being irritated once again.

You sit down and notice a fairly attractive male sitting across from you. As the subway car begins to move you start to think about the fallacy of composition. He may be attractive physically, but that doesn't necessarily mean that all aspects of this man will be attractive themselves. He may end up having a repulsive personality or some repulsive habits. Sometimes your mind makes that poor assumption and you end up spending the rest of your life with someone you don't really love.

That is to say, that philosophy infers that someone is not simply all bad because they steal from others. There may be other parts in the machine that are good.

The subject of composition makes you think of your notebooks and the way they are written and ordered. The way your dreams tell you a story but also how you have the dreams in no particular order. The randomness of it all causes you to challenge fate and when you lose control, you'll reap the harvest you have sown, and as the fear grows, the bad blood slows and turns to stone. The composition complex.

Eventually the subway reaches the end of the line and by this time there are only a few people left in the car. You allow a woman and her child to get off before you, and after you step onto the platform, you watch them as they walk away. You think about how that child knows nothing yet about violence, sex and drugs. Murder, masturbation and addiction. And as you're thinking these things, you wonder if there is an older person

around somewhere looking at you, and if they're thinking about how you don't know about certain things, but will learn about them as you age.

On the other side of the platform is another subway car that is going in the direction you just came from, so you get on it to get back to the hotel.

Why are you doing this? That's what you ask yourself on the trip back. On this subway car there are new faces, but of course there are considering not too many people go about their day wasting it. This time, it's the female who is sitting next to you that is fairly attractive, but you know better than to assume that she is perfect.

Like you, she stares in front of her, occasionally looking out the window to see who is getting on the train. You start to wonder what she is thinking about, you pretty much do that with almost everyone. The anthropology complex.

Now you're beginning to wonder if it's what a person spends their entire day thinking about that defines them, or at least helps to define them. You start to wonder what Joe would think about if he was left in a small empty room with no light.

In your previous life you were a carpenter. You would help build things that people lived in, worked in, learned in. Your associates and friends told you that you were one of a kind, a great carpenter, and it was probably because you paid so much attention to detail. Because you lived and breathed carpentry. What you would later find out is that this did not only apply to carpentry, that you were easily passionate about anything you wanted to be passionate about. When others would call it a blessing, you called it a curse.

Before you realized it was a curse, you had many hopes and dreams and knew that you could excel in anything as long as you were to put your mind to it, but you would later learn that dreams were for children. It has been said that it is man's nature to confuse genius with insanity.

The attractive woman stands up and waits for the subway car to come to a complete stop, and then you watch her as she walks away. You assume that you'll never see her again, and your assumption is correct. A few stops later, a very unattractive couple of a male and a female board the other side of the subway car. You think about your thoughts, and then you ask yourself, "Who are you to deem them unattractive?" You've heard the phrase "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" many times before.

Eventually your stop comes and you must get off to return to your hotel room. You walk up the flight of stairs that lead back into the city and find that it has begun to snow again. You begin walking and pass by a newsstand and overhear one man talking with another man. One of the men is trying to purchase a newspaper but is about a quarter short, and the man who is selling the newspapers will not give him a break. If everyone was able to buy a newspaper from this man a quarter under the regular price, his entire profitable system would go under, so he understands that he has to be strict. It's like when

people litter; it eventually adds up.

Where have you come from? That's what you ask yourself as you watch all these cars drive by you and pass under a green light. You stand there, waiting for the light on the other side of the street to tell you that you are now allowed to walk across.

You continue to walk, and with each step you find that darkness falls. Eventually the Moon comes out, but even though it is night, you notice that the night is not completely dark. You realize that because it has snowed, there will be a little bit more light in the night than usual.

After a while you think to yourself that there are too many people in the downtown area of the city. You start to think about how all these people are part of a system and how they have to play their role. You start to think about how the chair a person sits in will shape and mold them into who they need to be.

A man who has recently been elected to be the president of the United States has strong feelings about truly changing how the country works. That's partly why the people elected him. However, two years into his term, he finds that his ideas and beliefs have changed, not because of his own free will, but because the chair he has become accustomed to sitting in has shaped and molded him into the person he needs to be to do his job.

In many ways, this city and its people are the same. In this part of the city, things are always moving and people are always working. It might be safe to say that the people here will be the same way. That these people will always be in a hurry, scrambling around because this is what life is.

In the part of the city where crime rules the land, you might find that in order to survive, you must be able to think like a criminal. A woman, instead of carrying around a purse, adapts to her environment by purchasing a small wallet. These types of things are beyond good and evil.

These thoughts get you to think of a dream you had one time, where a man tells you a story about his life. How when he was younger he wanted to change the world and make it a better place, but in his attempts, he became more and more bitter and eventually realized why the world was the way it was. This same man, in the same dream, he tells you that somewhere along the way, you might find out who you truly are.

You get back to the hotel and find that Sally has gone home for the day. You go up to your hotel room and notice that it's more organized than the way you left it. It's not so bad living in a place where others do all the cleaning for you, even if it will cost you a lot of money. Seeing your hotel room look the way it looks gets you to believe that even if a person is fairly attractive but has a repulsive personality, that it is possible for that person to change and begin to develop an attractive personality. Of course, it's also possible for

that same person to look more and more ugly each day.

When did you get here? That's what you ask yourself as you look out of your window to watch the snow fall. You've seen the seasons change so many times, but you can never tell at exactly which time it made the change.

People with low latent inhibition have a harder time ignoring useless information than others. There is a student in your class who is normally an indifferent individual. This student doesn't really have a strong opinion on anything and just wants to get through class.

Often times, your teacher has you proofread and critique the other students' essays before they are turned in for a final grade. The teacher assigns a new topic every two weeks; they are usually topics concerning social conflicts. Topics like racism and religion to name a couple.

The class isn't too populated, so many times you end up getting this student's essay to revise. Throughout the duration of the semester, you notice changes in this student's handwriting. You notice how the first essay you revised for this student had sloppy handwriting, and as the year progressed, the handwriting became slightly more and more neat. Mostly noticeable only if you are looking for it.

What may have caused this change you still do not know, but you assume a couple of ideas. The student perhaps became more differentiated and started to form opinions on certain subjects. Or, maybe some of the subjects were more sensitive to the student than others. Regardless of the answer, where you made this detection in change, many others would more than likely have ignored it. Being able to make these detections is the reason why you can see someone's suffering, no matter how slight it is. Seeing so much suffering in the world clots your blood.

You need to know why the world is the way it is, and why people are the way they are. How some people can just sit and watch as the world turns to shit. So now, after you've asked one of the hotel employees for a pen, you're writing on the back of some flyers you found.

You write down "good," "indifferent" and "bad," because you believe each person in the world, depending on their experiences in life, have a certain amount of percent in these three categories that add up to one hundred percent. That is to say, someone is fifty percent "good," twenty percent "indifferent" and thirty percent "bad," all depending on what they have gone through in life. You already know that the base of your formula is logically incorrect, but you continue any way to see where it will lead you.

Because "good" and "bad" experiences will essentially drive this formula, it's important to understand that different people react differently to a "good" or "bad" experience. If someone is used to "bad" experiences, when a "good" experience comes

along, its numerical value will be greater than that of a "bad" experience because it will have a bigger impact, the numerical value of the impact being calculated by finding the difference between "good" and "bad" experiences.

The question for this part of the formula is, if someone has one hundred "bad" experiences and twenty-five "good" experiences, will that person in question generally have a pessimistic view on life? Is it possible, because this person has so few "good" experiences and because the impact of the "good" experiences will overshadow the "bad" experiences that this person's view on life could be optimistic and beyond something that mere numbers can explain? Or, is it logical to assume that because the difference between "good" and "bad" experiences is so large, the "good" experiences will simply fall short to a dominant and greater numerical value, thus resulting in a personality that often sees a half-empty glass?

DICTUM MEUM PACTUM

1:2:6:52

WHY do people get so tired? That's what you ask yourself as you stand in front of a hotel mirror. When you can't sleep, you start to notice the smallest things. Every thing becomes magnified. You start to notice things like the bathroom door having no lock. If you weren't suffering from insomnia and you were getting regular sleep, you probably wouldn't give it a second thought.

You leave the bathroom and go to a window that overlooks the city to find that the snow is beginning to disappear. For a moment, you close your eyes, then you open them. You look downwards towards the traffic, and then you close your eyes again, but this time for a longer amount of time. You can keep your eyes closed forever, but that doesn't mean you will eventually fall asleep.

After you open your eyes, you go to the bed and you start to look at a complex formula for determining or identifying who someone is. You're looking at all these numbers and equations and definitions and ideas, and while parts of it makes sense, as a whole, it seems like it was written by someone who was enduring mania.

Impact ratios, experience evaluators, inductive reasoning. Now you're starting to wonder how many hours of the night you spent working on all these pages. You look down at a certain page that expresses the idea of "Fisheye Mathematics," and then suddenly the door to your hotel room opens.

In walks an employee of the hotel, and the two of you stare at each other for a brief moment. You know that she can tell that you are tired and bothered. "I come back later," she says as she smiles and begins to leave. You tell her that it's okay, that it won't bother you. She pauses, and then she smiles as she enters the room with her cart to restock whatever it is that needs to be restocked. "I will be quick," she assures you.

What is it with people and smiling at strangers? It must be some psychological fragment. They probably don't even realize that they're doing it.

You look back down at your work as she enters the bathroom. All of this makes sense to you, but you can't help but feel that you are bias towards it considering you are the one who wrote it.

About a minute later she comes back out and she makes her way towards the door to leave. "Have a nice day," she says to you. "Let me ask you something," you reply. She looks back, and you tell her to come look at the page you were reading. She walks over and looks down at the page you point to. "Does it make sense to you? Can you determine someone's perceptual efficiency based on the levels of their open and close mindedness?"

She looks at you as she scratches her hair with what seems to be a smile that is broken

into pieces. "I don't understand," she says. You give her an example, "Let's say a person who is 'x' race kills someone else who is 'y' race in a place where most murders are generally racially driven. Consider that the community knows who the killer is and who the victim is, most of them will probably assume that the murder was racially motivated, right?" She agrees.

You continue, "But aren't there so many more factors to consider besides just race? Can we just assume the obvious without any real thought?" She pauses, she is trying to think of something to say. "Maybe answer is sometime that simple?," she proposes. In your mind, you can't help but notice her English and you laugh a little inside, but the fact of the matter is, she's right. A writer's greatest trick is inserting a random piece of useless information into their text and have scholars study and interpret the useless information in such high regard when in reality it's nothing.

They go around claiming to know the reason why the useless information was presented at that exact time in that exact location and they have no idea that their foundation is crooked. The simple minded individual cannot understand and perceive such things like the scholar can, but that simple minded individual has no idea that he or she had it right when they felt that the useless piece of information had no real substance. Instead, they agree with the scholar to validate themselves.

You thank the employee and reach into your pocket to tip her for her time. You pull out a five dollar bill, but it drops as you go to hand it to her. You pick it up, and looking at the backside as you pick it up you notice a small figure in the Lincoln Memorial. You stare at it because this is the first time you've ever really noticed it.

Why do people want to remember everything? That's what you ask yourself as you stare at the bill. The employee attempts to gain your attention in a subtle way, and you apologize as you hand her the tip. "Thanks for your input." She smiles and then walks away. The world is an insightful place.

Time goes by and you find yourself sitting on the edge of a bed. You get up slowly and stare out of the window as you walk towards it. All of the snow is completely gone. You start to admire the dark blue setting that occurs when day changes into night.

You hear a sound in the bathroom and your psychological reflex causes you to turn your head towards the bathroom door and as you're looking at the door, in the corner of your eye, you see a flash of someone sleeping on the bed. However, when you actually look at the bed, there is no one there. Your mind playing tricks on you with sounds and visions of illusion.

You hear people talking about daydreams all the time, but you've never heard anyone talk about nightmares. After a while of being accompanied by Ms. Nosleep, you might find that your nightmares and reality will sometimes overlap. You start to have

hallucinations and sometimes they'll drive you crazy.

There was a woman who stated that the problem with trying to touch someone who you suspect to be a hallucination is that whether the person is real or not, when you touch them, your hand won't simply go through them, they will simply respond to your touch because your distorted mind will make them respond that way.

After you turn your head away from looking at the bed you begin to stare out of the window once more. You start to remember a day where a therapist told you that the anthology complex was a very common psychological state. "In other words, it is a common complex," this is what he says to you.

He explains how many people throughout the entire world often see themselves in fictional thoughts, particularly fictional thoughts that seem as if they were impossible to ever collide with their own real world. "None of us will probably ever see world peace, so instead we make a movie about it," you remember these words that he has said to you clearly.

Why do people lie to themselves? That's what you ask yourself as you grab your coat and head for the door. On your way out you nod at Sallie and soon find your hand on a door handle to the door that allows you to exit the hotel. You walk a few yards to one of those little news box things and you pull out a newspaper. Soon after, you find yourself reading an article about a newly discovered planet that may be able to sustain life.

You zip up your coat as you notice how the wind is becoming stronger. You never did like getting sick. A few minutes into your journey to nowhere, you pass by a clothing store that has both male and female mannequins standing behind the front window. You've never seen a fat mannequin. That's what you think to yourself.

The human mind can be so fragile at times. Marketing professionals know this and they take complete advantage of it. You see an extremely attractive person wearing an article of clothing and for a brief second you see yourself. You decide to purchase it. What if you were to one day see an extremely unattractive person wearing the same article of clothing? Do you still make the purchase? You might start to wonder what the mainframe of the human mind is composed of.

On the other hand, there are times when the human mind is tough. So many people out there living shit lives, and even though they know this, they choose to endure the shitfilled life. They can kill themselves at any time, but instead they choose to continue living a life they don't want to because they know there are others around that need them. In the end though, whether you have a fragile mind or a tough mind, the fact remains that you're just another brick in the wall.

As you stand there, observing the mannequins, you watch as three young females and three young males enter the store, giggling and talking as they enter. You think to

yourself about how they are all just bricks in the wall. Shortly after you continue your journey.

About six or seven minutes later you come across a war veteran who asks the people who are passing by him for their loose change. You read his sign, then you walk over to him and place a five dollar bill in his cup. He looks up at you and he thanks you, a donation worthy of God's blessing which he quickly approves right after thanking you. However, you're not done with him yet; you often find yourself giving money to the homeless and then engaging in discussion with them. This wasn't the first time and it won't be the last.

You ask the war veteran a few questions and you end up learning he had to make a choice when he was younger. When he was younger, he got into a bar fight with a few others and was jailed the same night. In order to avoid further jail time or possible prison time, which probably came under certain circumstances, they give him the option of joining the war and fighting for his country.

He avoids the little box and is sent off to war and he quickly learns about the trade. He tells you about how his own military put their soldiers at risk in order to kill more of the enemies. They were basically, at times, decoys. The enemy reacts to their ground presence, upper management decides to drop gas on the entire area, both sides lose men. He shows you how he can barely stand up because of the effect it had on him physically.

Sometime into the discussion you ask him if he's hungry and he says yes. You come back with food and you both sit and eat. There is a therapeutic silence for a while, one that actually touches your soul, rather than one that just kills time, but unfortunately it quickly fades away.

Why do people suffer? That's what you ask yourself as the silence ends and you find yourself shaking his hand and bidding him farewell. You can tell he enjoyed telling you about his life, and he tells you where he will be the next day just in case you want to drop by, but you know you will never see him again. You've found that creating friendships with the homeless is unacceptable to you personally because you cannot help them forever. You've tried before, you really did, but it only made things worse in the end.

You both head in separate directions, and as you turn a street corner you catch a glimpse of a couple arguing inside a car. You notice how they are both wearing the city's baseball team's jersey uniform. You wonder if they both recently came from a game in which the team they supported suffered a humiliating loss.

The windows are rolled up, so as you pass by you can't hear what exactly they are arguing about, but their actions make you think about Maria. There are some solutions that can eat through metal but can't eat through plastic. Certain solutions, when combined with each other, become corrosive, however, alone they are not.

You look at this couple and you see corrosion. You see two people who are not meant to be together, but you have however heard of the stories of the couples who fight this corrosion and somehow make it out onto the other side. There are also those who are not meant to dwell within certain societies. Usually these people end up in little boxes we like to call prison cells.

We rid one solution of the other to make the corrosion go away, and at the end of the day, the solution of the prisoners will become isolated so that they may only meddle within themselves. A way to avoid societal corrosion. This is a common solution to crime.

These thoughts make you wonder about the early days of the prison systems. How the pioneers knew and understood the destructive nature of mankind and how they knew they would have to think of something to aid the situations that would arise.

What is the criminal's psychology? That's what you ask yourself as you take a street that will lead you back to the hotel. You start to remember the first time you descended into madness. How everyone looked like a mindless zombie to you, giving in to their most basic primal needs. How each and every one of them had no idea that they had an unidentified entity living inside of them that made them do the things they did and never becoming truly aware of this beast.

Now you're thinking about how after you ascended out of the madness, about a year later, you wanted it back. You start thinking about how even though it was one of the more darker moments of your life, it ironically shed the most light on the nouns of your life. It was the first time you ever actually felt alive, and all you wanted was to have it back again if it was even only for a day.

You enter the hotel and nod at Sally, then make your way to your room. You enter and notice it's been cleaned again. You take off your coat and lay down on the bed and close your eyes hoping that you'll eventually fall asleep, but you never do. Instead, you find yourself waving your right arm to knock a basketball out of the way. Sometimes when you have your eyes closed and you're trying to sleep you imagine things in your mind, and sometimes what you involuntarily imagine is a basketball coming straight at your head, and even though you're only imagining it, in real life, you move your arm up to protect yourself. Thoughts try to break through to reality so many times and in so many forms.

Hours go by and it's been long since you opened your eyes in defeat. You notice how you have been going from subject to subject in your mind to keep yourself entertained, and right now you're on the subject of knowledge awareness. You've found that the more you learn about something, the more there is to learn about it. Cavemen probably didn't know much about certain things, so in their minds they probably were never aware that

there was, at an exponential amount, more to know than they already knew.

In contrast, if they continued to learn things about whatever it is they were learning about, as time progressed, they would realize the amount of information on this one subject was much larger than their initial assumptions. This is probably why technology increases more rapidly as time goes on.

When you were younger, you were raped by your father. Just kidding, no you weren't. No offense to anyone who comes across these pages who was an actual victim to such a crime. Satan appears in front of you, but it's only his head and it's only an hallucination.

He doesn't say anything, he just looks at you. You stare into the eyes of Satan and then you ask him if he knows what sand tastes like. He doesn't reply and he simply continues to look at you. A big head floating in the middle of the room. You desperately need to sleep.

After Satan disappears, you remember the dream you had about him where he tells you about how religion started. How he was able to cause diversity within the project by manipulating it, by spreading false stories. One part of the project will believe one story, other parts will believe other stories, and when they find that their stories clash, there will be blood. They will fight amongst themselves, and when God sees this, he will become ashamed.

Going on from dream to dream, now you're remembering a similar dream you had of God telling you about his days as a middle-aged man, about how he had written a book of stories for the project. He has watched his project evolve for years and had been taking notes the entire time.

Eventually he began to record and document the lives of some of the lifeforms in the project. He recorded both the good and the bad things they did. In another dream, I saw that later on in his life when he and Satan are both old and dying, after not seeing each other for what may have been an entire lifetime, God gives Satan this book.

Chapter 53

INSOMNIAC MANIAC

1:2:6:53

WHAT do bacteria dream about? That's what you ask yourself as you try to depress yourself to sleep. You lay there on a relatively unfamiliar bed in a familiar life trying to fulfill the one action that may save your life.

Your eyes are closed, they have been for hours, but you're still awake. Suddenly your hotel room door opens, but you don't get up. You don't even open your eyes. You hear the person walk in, and you soon realize it's the same woman from before with the funny English. You can tell because she is kind of short and you remember the sound of her short strides. The sound of distance.

As usual, she finishes quickly and makes her way out of the room. You start to think more about her and what she does outside of her employment; if she has a family, children, if she likes her job, what her hobbies are. What makes her get up in the morning. Things of the like.

Minutes later you find yourself sitting on the edge of a bed staring out of a window. Another dark blue setting, except this time it occurs when night changes into day. The world is a beautiful place.

You get up and go to the bathroom to urinate. After you're done you stand in front of the mirror and begin talking to Ms. Nosleep. You ask her why she won't leave. Why she won't just let you sleep even if it's only for a few minutes. She doesn't ever reply.

The next thing you know you're putting on your coat and heading for the hotel's exit door. Of course, you don't forget to nod at Sally as you leave.

You're outside and it's a little bit windy. It's not too windy, but the wind itself is a bitter cold and you hate that. You pick a direction and begin walking towards it. You notice that not too many people have started their day yet. Guess no one ever told them about the early bird.

You walk by a sandwich shop and decide to go in. You look at the selection of sandwiches and you pick one, and the employee grabs the sandwich with a tool made for grabbing food so that the customer is not wary as if you just grabbed it with your bare hands. The thing is, while you don't know where his hands have been, you also don't know where this tool has been, which almost defeats its purpose.

You pay the employee and he gives you your change, then you walk out. As you're leaving you see a sign on the sandwich shop that tells you that it's open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. You find that to be strange.

How does an idea put on paper influence so many people? That's what you ask yourself as you shove a couple of dollar bills into your pocket. After a few yards of

walking you see and hear an ambulance speed by. The good thing about sleep is that if you were in pain, or depressed or even just angry, it all goes away once you fall asleep. It's all completely gone. That is unless those things come to you in your dreams.

They follow you every where you go and you just can't seem to shake them, so when the dream becomes a nightmare you wake up and those same damn feelings follow you back into reality. Knowing yourself, you'll find a pen and a composition notebook laying next to you on that bed so that you can write down the dream and nightmare you just had.

At that point the pen becomes your best friend and the only person who truly understands is the notebook that it writes on. Like the lure of the siren's song; never what it seems to be, yet who among us can resist?

After the ambulance passes by, across the street you see a woman sitting on a bench nearly half asleep. You wonder if she is perhaps homeless, and if so, how she got there. These questions are then overshadowed by another question; how could she possibly completely fall asleep in these weather conditions?

You know that the path you walk on ends in self-destruction and is filled with tragedy, and in many ways it mirrors a woman trying to fall asleep outside in a bitter cold wind. Your life isn't tragic because you never had a chance or because you couldn't fight and conquer something that was bigger than you, it's tragic because you had the means to become anything or anyone you wanted to be, but instead you chose to be as useless as the homeless people you frequent.

Who watches over us? That's what you ask yourself as you cross the carless street. When you get to the other side you begin to walk towards sleeping beauty, and as you walk pass her, you throw in a couple of dollar bills into a bag she is sleeping next to.

Robin Hood objected to high taxes and was declared an outlaw. He led a group of outlaws named "Merry Men," and their motto was something along the lines of "to rob the rich to pay the poor." To this day there are "Robin Hoods" and "Merry Men" and they come in many different forms. Some who do the traditional thievery, others who try to uncorrupt government systems, the few who try to better the world by technology. The one thing that all of these people have in common is the fact that they remember where they have come from because, in the words of a historical figure, a society is only as strong as its weakest blood cells, and in turn, can be defined by how the capable of this society treats its weak.

After a while of walking, more and more people come out to play and the streets become drenched in activity. You turn a corner and in the distance you see a group of people who you assume to be homeless or at least have complicated residential arrangements.

Not too long after spotting them you see a man walk up to this group and hands one

of the men from the group a bag of some sort which you assume to be drugs because of the speed of the action and the low levels of emotion.

You've found that some of the people who dwell in the house of misery often use drugs and alcohol to rid or at least numb their pains. After a while, they build a tolerance to drugs and alcohol and when they no longer work the pain becomes so bad that they have to find other means to fight back. Sometimes the new means to fighting back either results in their redemption or their demise. It's a two-way street, really, and at the end of the day you can find yourself on either side.

You yourself are sure that if you should one day meet your demise, it will be because you suffered from years of anger. All that bad blood, black blood, boiled blood. All the people who make you physically sick, the people you can't stand, the people who if you were given the chance to, you'd kill. Maybe not for any righteous or moral reason, maybe simply because you need to let out some of that pressure from your skull. That rage. The problem is, even though you may be letting some of that anger out, as soon as you open that door, or that window, you'd be creating an opportunity for more of it to come in.

Now the man who was given the bag departs from his buddies and begins to walk towards you. After he passes you, you have an impulse to follow him, so you do. Mainly because, in general terms, all you touch and all you see is all your life will ever be.

It's not too long until you see him hand the bag over to a cop behind a store. The two talk for a minute or two, and then the bagman starts to walk towards the way he came from. You, on the other hand, do not decide to go back. You stand there in the distance watching the cop car, and wondering what the cop is doing inside of it. Time goes by and the cop car is still sitting there. Surely the cop wouldn't be doing illegal activities on company time inside a company vehicle.

More time goes by, and finally the cop starts the engine to his vehicle and begins to drive into a street. He puts on his sirens and makes a right turn, chances are he got a call for duty.

As you watch him drive away, someone comes up behind you and asks you what you are doing. Because you haven't gotten any sleep for almost about a month, and because you were sort of in a paranoid state because you were watching someone else, as soon as this person began to speak you received a surge of adrenaline throughout your circulatory system.

You look at this person angrily and then immediately begin to walk away. You look back a few times to make sure this person isn't following you. You walk far enough and your feet start to hurt so you decide to stop. The downtown area of the city is now packed with walking feet.

A few minutes later you see a dirty middle-aged man with a backpack stop in your

vicinity. He takes off his backpack and reaches inside and takes out a bag of crumbled bread. He starts to walk near the street and that's when you realize he is walking towards a group of pigeons. When he finally gets to them, he empties the bag near them and they begin to feast. The actions of people can be so ironic.

In a world where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, probably because of something along the lines of a certain law of motion, it is intriguing to see that those who have nothing continue to give. You can only hope that when their well has dried up, there will be someone there to now give to them.

You reach into both pockets but can find nothing. You reach into both back pockets, still nothing. Now you're checking your coat pockets and you find a bill. You walk up to the birdman and hand him the bill. He takes the money, but he looks at you strangely. It reminds you that some people don't want to be helped, but it also makes you wonder if he is looking at you strangely because help is foreign to some. That they've gone through their entire life and no one has ever lifted a finger for them.

Why are you so physically unsubscribed? That's what you ask yourself as you begin to walk towards the hotel. There was a time when you struggled with the complex so horribly that you almost resorted to burning all of your composition notebooks. You didn't go through with it because the obsession was so strong, and sitting in that dark room all alone made you realize that none of us are as far away from sociopathy as we think.

You realized that burning all of that fiction meant destroying who you were. All the people you could have become. You realized that all these people were psychological fragments, bit and pieces, of a whole you, and to burn them all would mean giving up on your dreams. Literally and philosophically.

Even though it may seem like those who have nothing are at a disadvantage, they at least have nothing to lose, and those who have everything, well you get the idea. So you build up your hopes and dreams, where you want to go and what you want to do when you get there, but along the way, the hopes and the dreams you have that keep you going, they end up dragging you down until it gets to the point that you just want to be free of them.

What defines you? That's what you ask yourself as you turn the corner and walk down the street that will eventually lead you to your destination. Not too long later you catch a glimpse of a lady who was also looking at you. Strangers passing in the street, by chance two separate glances meet.

You simply walk past each other, maybe perhaps because it wasn't meant to be, or if you don't believe in fate, because it just didn't happen, but afterwards you start to wonder what the rest of your life would entail had either of you stopped and said "hello." Maybe

we have free will because we have no choice.

You get to the hotel, and then you get to your hotel room. You take off your coat and lay on the bed, only to be defeated once more. “Ms. Nosleep, no matter how hard I try, I cannot die. It's only a matter of time, before I stop believing this lie.”

Slowly it becomes darker and darker outside. You pretty much suffer from jet lag everyday and often times, you find yourself sleeping with the other side of the world. Not at this moment, I guess. I being you.

You get up and instead of going to the window you go to the balcony. When you're outside, you look to your right; it's no longer a fisheye view. Not much to see but a few buildings. Now you're looking to your left, and in the distance you see a building with an electrical sign that says “25 OR 6 TO 4.”

Why do bad things happen to good people? That's what you ask yourself as you gaze at the city's lights. The answer to that question is probably the same answer to the question “Why do bad people sometimes do good things?”

You go back into the room and take out your answers to the human identity. If you can't sleep, you might as well do something to keep your mind off of the fact that you can't sleep. Reading some of your notes, you find an equation that is largely determined by a person's fears. Many people are afraid of death, but when you do the math and you really get down to the bottom of it, chances are, mathematically speaking, you will not die on any given day.

On another page, you find a few notes that deal with a person's writing. Their thoughts on paper. How one identified individual would use negative contractions but would never use positive contractions. In his writing, he might say “I am happy,” but he would never say “I'm happy.” He might say “Aren't you happy?,” but he would never say “Are you not happy?” What would influence a person to write like that? Which criteria would you need to apply to figure it out? The idea behind holistic education, or at least one of the ideas, is that we can find identity and purpose in life through our interactions with society. Can you find out who you are and find your place in the world by comparing and contrasting yourself to others? Everyone knows that light needs to be casted to make a shadow.

You stand up and you gaze upon your work. Your theories on man. You think about how much you hate your mind, then you go to a drawer and open it. You take out a box of matches as if you had known they would be there waiting for you, then you set fire to all the papers that lay on the bed as if you had known this is what you planned to do.

A few seconds go by and the fire begins to build slowly as you watch over it, but you soon come to your senses and attempt to put it out. You find yourself striking the fire with a large piece of cloth, but it's not working as well as you thought it might. Maybe

that's what you wanted. Maybe you want the whole damn thing to burn down. You start to strike harder, and with each strike you let more and more anger out. You're getting good at this.

You manage to put out the fire before any kind of detectors can go off, but there are a couple of casualties; your work and the blankets you tried to sleep in. There are times when you think you've gone full circle but you're just not quite there yet. You sit on the edge of the bed, hoping that the smell of smoke would soon go away, and you laugh a little as you think about how much the bill for staying at this hotel for this long will amount to. You know that it won't be a problem though, because of your financial situation.

You get up and go back to the drawer and place the matchbox back where it had come from, and as you go to place it down, you notice that there are five little circle-brown things with a profile view of the sixteenth president of the United States of America. You laugh again, and then decide that it's time to go back home.

Chapter 54

BASED ON A TRUE DREAM

1:2:6:54

LYNNE, who has just returned home and whose body is in the process of healing several bruises, leaves her apartment and goes down the hall to the door of the narrator slash storyteller. She knocks softly, but there is no answer. Then she knocks a bit harder, but there is still no answer, so she goes back home, hoping that the next time she knocks, there will be a reply. Unfortunately for her, there will not be a reply the next time because the storytelling narrator is staying at a hotel in the downtown area of the city.

After she gets home, she goes to her children's room to check on them and finds that they are both watching a television show in cooperation, a sight that is rare among the both of them. She then goes to her own room, sits on the edge of her bed, and then takes off her prosthetic foot. Not too long after, she lays down and feels a sort of satisfaction because she had recently put into motion a restraining order against her ex-husband. Much credit should go to Emily, her mother, who convinced her to do such a thing.

Lynne eventually falls asleep, but only for a short while, and when she gets back up she makes lunch for Sarah and David. As they all eat, she thinks about how good it will be for them to finally go back to school in their usual manner, and not from a long ride from their grandmother's home.

As the two children begin to put their finishing bites into their sandwiches, their mother asks them both if they would like to go out and buy a new video game for their video game console. Before she can finish, however, the children begin shouting positively to her question.

The family prepares themselves and then goes out to the nearest department store and when they arrive they proceed to shop. Lynne buys a few things that she needs, and she buys both Sarah and David each a video game of their choosing. As the family finishes their shopping and exits the department store, they walk across a parking lot and there is a loss of light that occurs when day changes into night.

Finally, they get home and the children go immediately to their room to play their new video games. Lynne, on the other hand, leaves the apartment for a brief moment to check if the narrational storyteller had come back home. Again, there is no reply to her knocks, and she begins to wonder if the story narrator is staying at the home she was previously shown. As she starts to go towards her home, Lynne notices someone walking out of Joe's apartment. She does not know it yet, but it is her new neighbor.

Days go by, and each of those days, once or twice a day, Lynne checks to see if the narrative storyteller has return. Each time she is denied a reply, she grows more and more anxious because she misses this person and wants to tell this person about how she is in

the process of winning the war with Sylvio.

More days go by, and right now it is morning. Lynne is getting her children ready for school. After they are done, the family goes outside and for the first time since winter had arrived, they see snow on the ground. Sarah and David run to their bus stop and after the bus picks them up, Lynne waves to them as they are taken away.

Lynne enters her apartment building and on her way home she knocks on her friend's door, but there is no answer. She wonders if they will ever see each other again.

Four days go by and we find the family grocery shopping. They buy what they need and promptly return. The three get out of the car and begin to walk towards their apartment building. At the door, Lynne stops, and so do her children. They all look down at a bunch of dead flowers that cannot survive through winter. How sad the story of lost. Soonafter, in the corner of her eye, Sarah sees her mother's flower friend and begins to point.

Lynne and David look up and in the direction that she is pointing, and they too see this person. Lynne's eyes get wider and her heart begins to beat faster. She had smiled many times before, but you have never seen a smile this big. Of course, because of her smile, this other person begins to smile.

“Hi,” Lynne says, to which the narrator replies, “Hey.” After a short conversation about how tired a certain someone looks, the storyteller takes the grocery bags from the children and helps the family bring the groceries upstairs to their home. The narrator stays in their home for a short while and then leaves. Before the leave, Lynne and Sarah give the narrator a hug; at this time, David is in his room playing his recently acquired video game. As the door closes, Lynne decides that she will tell the narrator what had happened between her and Silvio the following day.

I'm standing in front of my door now, and I know that when I open it, it will look the same way I left it. As I open the door and peer inside, there is an entity that is full of darkness that roams inside the apartment. That is, until I turn the lights on. Then it goes away.

I go and sit down on my favorite couch, but moments later realize that I am still far away from being able to finally fall asleep. That's not surprising considering that my problem may be emotional and not geological.

I turn on the television that stands before me and I am immediately greeted with a film. Two guys fighting in a dark empty parking lot for fun.

The movie easily catches my interest, but seeing as how I am trying to fall asleep, it's not helping me achieve my goal. I've used television as a medium to fall asleep so many times before, but it seems every thing is against me right now. About thirty minutes later there is a knock on my door. Knowing it's Lynne, and because I don't want to get up, I

simply shout “Come in.”

Lynne opens the door slowly and says “Hi” once more. She stands there in front of the door just smiling, and I'm wondering what she may want. “What's up?,” I ask her. She starts to tell me about how she is just glad that I'm here, and how much she missed me, and then she asks me what I'm watching.

I tell her what the movie is about so far and she asks me if I would mind if she sat down and watched with me. I probably love her, but I hate when people try to force their way in.

I tell her that I wouldn't mind, so now she's sitting down next to me, trying to enjoy a movie that probably makes no sense to her. We don't say much to each other, we just watch, and that's probably why she falls asleep towards the end of the movie. Lynne falling asleep on my couch, I know that I have been here before.

Instead of carrying her back to her apartment, I simply go check on her children and find that they are sleeping in their beds. I close the door behind me as I leave her apartment and go back to mine. I will let her stay here tonight because I know that with what's going on between her and Silvio, this is where she wants to be. Safe and protected.

I go to sit back down next to her so that I can continue watching television, and the moment I sit down, her head slides down the couch and lands on my shoulders. I swear to God that nothing can wake her up. For the next few minutes I find myself watching commercials, and when they start to get boring I begin to observe Lynne and the way she sleeps. It's not anything unusual, but watching her sleep is calming to my soul. That's when I start to think about what life would be like if we were to some day be together.

Enough time passes by, and I pull my head back and lay it on the couch so I can stare at the ceiling, and eventually, thoughts of Lynne and her bright spirited passion finally, after such a long time, put me to sleep.

Spider enters a building, takes a few turns and then walks up a flight of stairs until he is greeted by a door. On the other side of the door is a man who can only be identified as a ghost, at least through the eyes of Frank Mainor and Tim Ryan.

Spider opens the door and walks in, and the ghost tells him to take a seat. In the background, Spider notices a couple of worker bees who excel in mathematics, proven by their competence in counting currency.

“You stayin' out of trouble, ain't killin' no cops?,” the ghost says in a friendly manner. Spider had recently murdered a police officer while he was in the line of duty; the “he” refers to both Spider and the police officer he killed. When they can, partners Frank and Tim sometimes try to solve the murder because the cop who was murdered was a dear friend. That's not to say, however, that the entire police department doesn't dedicate their time as well, and that's also not to say that Frank and Tim are the ones responsible for

solving this murder. This murder belongs to a Clark Winston of the police force.

“Look I know it was bullshit havin' you sit on Jamaal's friend but you can't just be droppin' cops like that. You also can't be droppin' my name like that in the streets.” The ghost refers to the incident when Spider and his crew were being robbed at gun point, and in the process, Spider tells the thieves that Omar would get payback, Omar being the ghost.

Omar wouldn't care about anyone spilling out his name or his identity being revealed if he didn't have a lot of family living in the city, but he does, so it has always been an objective of his to not reveal who is peddling these drugs in this part of the city, especially at a time when the crime rate is so high and the people running the city are looking for the specific cause.

This event, the spilling of the ghost's name, will eventually come back around, but not in the way that Omar fears. Instead, the name will be discovered by Mya Jackson and she will be the reason why Frank and Tim will be able to make first contact with their ghost.

Back downstairs, Rock is sitting down at a table conversing with a few others, but at the same time thinking about how he is slipping away from this organization. Thinking about how he doesn't want to do this anymore. Thinking about Jamal's death and how it was an inside job.

For a second, Rock fights with the anger he feels towards the evil he sees in the people around him, and for even less time than that, he wonders if this place could ever change, but he knows that Heaven's walls are much too high to hear the trouble down below.

After a while of sleeping, I wake up because of a loud booming sound that comes from underneath. Tao's apartment. I notice that the clock reads six a.m., then notice that Lynne is still asleep at my side.

I get up, and while I'm getting up I can hear Tao yelling out profanity through the floor. I lay Lynne out flat on the couch and make my way to Tao's apartment. I knock on his door and when he answers I ask him what happened. He tells me that his fish tank fell and was now in several places. I ask him how it fell exactly, and he tells me about how the table it was on had weak legs. Something about this feels familiar.

I make my way in and see exactly what he's talking about. Water everywhere, creeping into the carpet and wooden floor. Broken pieces of glass finding residence in that same carpet, others lost out in the open on that wood. I don't see the fish though, but I'm sure that's because Tao has already put them in a safe place.

I ask Tao how he had been doing, considering I hadn't seen or talked to him in a while, and he gives me the answer that you get from most people. I offer to help, but he tells me he can handle it, so I leave soon afterwards.

Making my way to the top of the stairs of the second floor, I look down the hallway and stare at Lynne's door. I decide to check on David and Sarah and find that like their mother, they are sound asleep. I get closer to them, walk up so that I am only a foot away from their bodies and I can't help but think that I may know these two people for the rest of my life. I'll watch them grow, watch them change, maybe even watch them decide who they want to become.

When they hit a rough time, people will tell them that everything will be all right, but that's a lie. People will tell them that everything happens for a reason, and that's another lie. The truth is none of us know if everything will really be okay, or if God or some higher power or the universe itself has a plan for us all. Someone I knew told me that we should never lie to children because when they get older, they will understand that peace is a dream that is impossible to obtain, and they will know that you lied to them years ago.

I open the door to my apartment and as I walk in I look over towards Lynne. She is still laying down, but she is awake, simply staring directly in front of her. I start to think about what she may have dreamed of. If she remembers what it was about.

"How are they?," she asks me. "Your kids?," I reply. She says yes, and I tell her that they are sleeping, then I ask her how she knew that I had gone to check on them. She smiles and says "I know what kind of person you are." A lot of people think they do.

Some studies have investigated oxytocin's role in the behaviors of humans and it is often associated with "pair bonding," and because of this it is often referred to as the "love hormone." Not being able to secrete oxytocin may be why some people don't feel things when the world tells them they should. Words like sociopathy and psychopathy may come to mind. I have to put on this mask for Lynne because she has no idea how misanthropic I am. How nihilistic.

After some time, Lynne leaves so that her children can wake up and find her at home making breakfast. As for me, I leave my apartment and walk up the stairs to the third floor and soon find myself standing in front of Mary's door, wanting to know how she and her newborn son are doing.

Her sister opens the door, and she remembers me just like I remember her. She invites me in and I immediately see Mary sitting down on her couch in the living room. It appears to be only the two of them.

It's hard to describe Mary's reaction when she realized I was there, maybe because we had both always been a little judgmental of the other and we both secretly knew it, but it felt like she was looking at an old friend when I saw her eyes.

Mary tells me about how she is doing okay, and how Anthony is doing even better. The three of us go into the smaller room, the room where if you were in my apartment

instead of her's, there would be a lot of notebooks, and we all stare down at a sleeping Anthony. Babies may not know a lot, but I suppose even they must dream. I wouldn't be surprised if theirs were more imaginative than an adult's.

After about a minute of standing over Anthony's body and talking about him, he wakes up and begins to stare right at me. I stare right back at him and we both feel the stranger in one another. Mary's sister notices this and hands me one of his toys, an airplane, so I fly it up right above him. I never knew that a toy airplane could be so amusing until I saw how hysterical Anthony became. Until I saw how he couldn't control his laughter.

Seeing him like this reminded me of the dream I had where Roach told me that all the things we do when we are not searching or waiting, all the little things that appear to be meaningless, how much they bring us closer to sharing a part of our soul with others. Something about this makes me want to go see how Joe is doing, but I probably actually want to see Kathleen, to see if she is doing okay.

For the last few seconds that I will be seeing Anthony today, I wonder if He really has the little bitty baby in His hand. By the time I leave I realize that Mary's sister is at her house because Mary needed someone to help her, and I guess because it will make up for lost time.

As I'm walking down the flight of stairs I catch a glimpse of David walking down the other flight of stairs and I ask him how he's doing. "Fine, just going to check the mail," he tells me. This reminds me that I too need to check my mail, seeing as I've been away for so long. After a quick visit to my apartment I go downstairs and do the deed, and the only interesting piece of mail I find is a letter from Derek. I step outside and begin to read it.

"sup, whats goin on? i wrote a short story but i gotta admit i stole the idea from one of your stories. let me know what you think, what i should change or add or take out... as for me, i been okay, kinda moving up (not a look out anymore) and hopefully i can put together enough cash soon so i can get outta here. hit me back."

I write often because of the complex, but very rarely do I ever read, however after reading Derek's short story, I immediately realized how gifted he is and why storytelling can be so important in our world.

In his story, there are a group of red turtles and a group of yellow turtles who live in the same proximity and normally get along. One day, one of the red turtles decides that the yellow turtles are inferior, and from this you can gather that Derek is developing a problematic racial theme, something he is all too familiar with.

That red turtle, it gets all the other red turtles to also agree that the yellow turtles are inferior and that they should either be killed off or put to work for them. The only thing

the red turtle has to say to convince the other red turtles of the yellow turtles' inferiority is the fact that they are different.

So one day, there is a slaughter. The yellow turtles have all been killed and the red turtles now rule the land. A very long time passes by, and the red turtles who inhabited the yellow turtles' land slowly begin to turn yellow due to concerns of adaptation, and after an even longer period of time, once again there are red and yellow turtles who share a piece of land.

It sounds to me like Derek is trying to show the purposelessness in differentiating each other from one another, because in reality, we may all be the same.

There was a man who had a dream. In fact, he titled one of his speeches "I Have A Dream." In his dream, he saw a world where people weren't judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. In his dream, he saw the equality of all men.

The question that begs to be asked is if we are all indeed actually equal. This debate must first define the scope of what "equal" means. We are not equal, in the sense that you may be more athletic than me. If you are more athletic than me, then I think it would be safe to say you are better than me in that department, and therefore we are not equal. We aren't the same.

However, on the flip side, we are all equal in the sense that I could have been born as you, and you could have been born as me. Because we all have the possibility to be each other, this makes us equal, or at least should make us equal. Throughout my life, I've found that there are parts of the people you know inside yourself, small or large.

I put the letter and story back in the envelope and begin to walk back inside, and that's when I notice that the winter had killed Lynne's flowers. How fast life goes by. Something could be there for such a long time and when it's gone, no matter how long it had been there, you'll feel like it was taken away too quickly.

I return to my apartment and visit the room that houses the composition notebooks. I put Derek's short story inside a random notebook, and then I slide my hand across my small library. I think about how I've read them all so many times. Truth is, even though I'm the one who wrote them, I'm sure I've missed some things, just like you have. Maybe you are reading them a second or third time through, but even still, you will manage to miss some things. I know I always did.

CHILDREN OF THE FREE WORLD

1:2:6:55

MARIA leaves her desk and walks back outside through the harsh and bitter snowstorm to her car. She had forgotten a few papers that she would need to be able to complete some of the day's tasks. After she gets the papers, and as she is closing her car door, another car pulls up and out walks the narrator.

"Great weather," the narrator says sarcastically to Maria. She laughs and asks this person if they work here. This person says yes, that they were just hired about a week ago. Maria, being the friendly person that she is, introduces herself and shows this person into Max's Carpentry and sacrifices some of her time to showing this person around.

Later that day, after the narrator's first day of work, the narrator drives back to a hospital to accompany a dying father who doesn't want company. There they both sit in silence, not one word ever being spoken. Seeing something like this might make you believe that there are places in the world where facial expression is the only language.

After a while, the storyteller gets up to leave and go home. A long drive home down a long stretch of highway cornered by darkness. "Once you completely deny any idea, it may be time to question your profession as a scientist." Some words the storyteller's father had said long before.

After the drive home, the storyteller parks right in front of a home and sits there quietly in the car. Not too long goes by until the storyteller begins to nod off. Flashbacks are a lot like dreams.

Last night, I had a nightmare. A disturbingly ugly man named Sid sits on a chair before me. I feel like I'm going to kill him, but I'm not suppose to. "Okay, uncuff me," he says softly. I go to uncuff him and he quickly says "You see, that's your first mistake. You know me but you can never trust me." Like me, Sid is a serial killer, and people like us can never be trusted because of the way we perceive things.

Sid has gone on for years killing people at random. "I've killed hundreds," that's what he told me when I first met him. Now, he is trying to teach me.

"Defense is usually harder than offense. In a foot chase, I feel there is always more stress on the person who is trying to get away. So there is one solution, be the chaser, or don't get into a foot chase at all." Sid always has something to say.

Through dream memory, while having that dream, I remembered the first time Sid and I actually murdered someone together. Windy night, sadly dancing trees. The door says open and we walk right in. I stay near the door and watch Sid as he walks towards the old man. Why Sid wants this particular man dead, there is no reason, and that is the true essence of random. No circumstances, no fate, just very bad fucking luck. Odds that

look down at you and laugh.

Sid's favorite method of murder is using a child-sized baseball bat. He is not a small person, nor does he like irony. I'm guessing one day he picked up the nearest weapon to him and killed someone in the heat of the moment, and from then on, he decided he would kill like that.

The old man doesn't really beg for his life much, maybe he wants to die, but it wouldn't have mattered how much or how little he begged, Sid doesn't like to waste much time.

I'm standing there, watching Sid go to work on this old man. With each hit, my mind and body becomes more and more calm. After a while, the hand that was shaking stops shaking, and the heart that was beating furiously almost stops beating altogether. I had killed before, but not the way Sid killed this man. Messy, bloody, seemingly full of passion, yet no emotion in his eyes. That is Sid's greatest talent, deception. There are many words that an unreliable narrator might use in a novel. "Seemingly," "probably," "maybe." Just like you have to watch out for these words, you have to watch out for Sid's deceit because the person you think he may be, he probably isn't.

After the old man is dead, Sid cuts off his fingers and uses each of them multiple times on the wall, causing many fingerprints. Finally, after many of the old man's fingerprints are on the wall, he chooses a spot at random to put his own left index finger fingerprint. I ask him why he did that, and he tells me that it's just for fun. Maybe to see if the detectives that will be here in the morning will actually check every single one of these thirty fingerprints. Even though Sid says you should never be the one doing the running away, apparently he had a hard time following his own advice.

The next morning, the detective in charge of the old-man slaying case will indeed have all thirty fingerprints checked. Not because she is a dedicated detective, but because she, along with another now retired detective, have been hunting the "Bat-man" for a very long time with no success.

Unfortunately for these two, Sid's profile is nowhere to be found on any government database because legally, he has never committed a crime, and this renders the one fingerprint that is different from the others useless when the detective searches for a match. Sid knows this, and that is the only reason why he put his fingerprint on the wall in the first place. A message to the police, telling them that they will never know who he truly is.

After we leave the old man, Sid says to me, "The definition of a serial killer is a person who murders two or more people, committing each murder as a separate event, so what do you call someone who has murdered over five hundred people, committing each of the murders as a separate event?" "I don't know, what?," I ask. He looks at me and

laughs, then says, “A serial killer.” I always thought Sid had a very indefinable sense of humor.

After I wake up, I sit on the edge of the bed, remembering a time when I'm hitting a brick wall with a metal bat. Eventually the wall turns into a small animal, and I keep hitting it. It changes once more, into something I have never seen before, and then into a human head. All through the changing, there is one thing that stays constant, my desire for destruction, to let my anger out.

How I got there, I don't know, but it makes you wonder if an evil entity waits for safe passage and opportunity to enter the human soul. Maybe at second fifty-four, bat swing eighty-nine, with an angle of thirty-two degrees, evil enters my composition and has an influence on who I am.

Or, maybe it's not evil. Maybe it's goodwill. There is someone who will tell you that the triumph of evil is due to the inaction of good men, but the good man who decides to act, what if his action gets him killed. Is the halt of evil worth your existence? It's a free world and it's up to all of us individually to decide whether action or inaction is the correct response. Regardless, however, the rich will get richer, people will buy and sell goods, and there will never be communism here.

I get up and find my way to the kitchen where I find something to drink, and then I visit the room. I think you know which one.

Like so many times before, I choose a notebook at random and take it down, and then I flip to a random page, a page that tells me about old friends. Friends that some of us are better off not knowing, but it has been said before, that the devil you know is better than the devil you don't.

In this dream, I am standing in front of God and Satan's tombstones. Messages engraved on both of them. “In the light, you will find the road.” “In the darkness, can you hear me call.” I probably don't have to tell you which message belongs to which. Many times I've found the two to be very definable, to carry a static demeanor.

In the same dream, but at a later time, I am shown by Child God and Child Satan a blueprint for the make up of all life, something they had been working on for God knows how long.

After they show me their work, they leave. Sometime later, God comes back, but he is older and not nearly as excited about the project as he used to be when he was younger. I ask him where Satan is, and he tells me that he is no longer a part of this project.

God then begins to explain to me about how he had decided to give the life in his project free will. He tells me because of this decision, he had to develop a filter system; when a life had ended, if it was good, it would go to Heaven, and if it was bad, it would go to Hell. In Heaven, God would welcome those who were good, and he would explain

every thing to them. Every thing about the project. In Hell, Satan would welcome those who were bad, and he too would explain these things that such a life form could not understand without guidance.

Before Satan was removed from the project, he asked God, now that the life forms would have free will, if God would send those who did not live as he wished to his kingdom down below for correction, and God agreed, for even God knew that such a project would have errors.

Each time I wake up after having a dream about God and Satan and the beginnings of the universe, I sit up and ask myself if any of this could be true. If this is how it all started. Of course it probably isn't, but seeing God and Satan can be fact when it is contained within the dream world, just as things of our world are fact when contained within its own.

As I walk towards the door to leave the room I catch a glimpse of the metal baseball bat, the single entity that has kept me from becoming one of the many things I was suppose to be. I pick it up and hold it, and then ask myself, "When does passion become obsession?" Because of some of the things I've seen in both my dreams and in reality, I cannot simply go back to where I came from, who I used to be when I was younger and when my mind was normal. I'm in Stasis.

Kathleen sits among eleven other individuals as she listens to them speak about their trials with diabetes. She's been coming to this support group for weeks now and it may truly be the only thing that is keeping her together.

Loneliness, one of the major themes of her life, it has no place here. It is not welcomed and it is discouraged. That's why a few minutes from now Kathleen will be given the chance to speak and she will take it. She will tell the others about how she, much like most of the people in the room and even the world, is afraid of dying alone.

She'll tell them about how she has no one left. No one to love and no one to love her. Then she'll go home to her cold and empty house. She'll do what is required of her to manage her diabetes, and then maybe she'll turn on the radio, or perhaps the television. She'll lie down on her bed, listening to the voices, or maybe the music. Eventually she'll fall asleep, and probably, in her dreams, she'll find her son.

While I'm still in Stasis, just before I leave, above me I start to hear faint crying. The crying rises exponentially and now Anthony is crying like a real baby. I look up at the ceiling, and I can hear Mary opening the door, on her way to comfort her newborn, but nothing she tries works. The crying goes on and on and eventually I find myself looking through kitchen cabinets for a spray that is designed to kill roaches and ants.

As I'm looking for this spray, I hear a knock on my door, and I also realize that Anthony has finally stopped crying. The knock is soft, so I immediately know that it's

Lynne. I look through the peephole. Unobtainable fisheye logic. My assumption was wrong, sort of. On the other side, it is Sarah, and she stands there waiting for an answer.

I open the door and look down at her and smile, and then she begins to speak. She asks me if I would like to come over for dinner later today, and it quickly becomes obvious to me who is pulling the strings.

After I tell her that I would like to come over for dinner, she hands me a list of items that Lynne says she will need for the dinner. I laugh a little inside, and I feel like the two of them made me set up my own trap and lured me into it. Sarah also tells me that all the items on the list are at the Chase Mart, so it shouldn't be too big of a bother. Before Sarah goes back home, I tell her to tell her mother that she is very clever.

I go to the Chase Mart, a place where I thought I may never have the pleasure of returning to, and I gather all the needed items on the list, and then I go to checkout. When I get to the register I ask the clerk if I've ever met him before, a joke that only you and I would ever understand, and he responds with a confused "no."

I get back to the apartment building and knock on the door of the Parkers' residence, and it is Lynne who eventually answers. I hold up the bag to her and we both laugh as she takes it from me. "Thank you," she says softly. She begins to reach into her pocket and she takes out some money and hands it to me. I tell her that since I will be eating her food later, that she can keep the money and call it even. She agrees and I then ask her what time she wants me over, and she says "at six o'clock." I tell her that I'll see her then and she closes the door. By the smell of her apartment I can tell she has already started the cooking.

On my way back, as I go to open my door, I see a face I've never seen before coming up the stairs. Rudely, I continue to stare at him as he walks towards me. "Hi, I just moved in... Haven't seen you around." I tell him that I was staying in the city for a few weeks.

Somehow, the two of us end up talking about the city's football team, and I can already tell that I like him. It's not until the conversation ends that I learn that his name is Jack Booth and that he now lives right across the hall from me.

I go back home and go back into the kitchen, and after about a minute I find the bug spray. If you go too long without any sleep, chances are your mind will begin to create fictional matter; it's happen to me too many times before. You're up one night trying to figure out when you last had any decent sleep, and then all of a sudden you see a company of ants coming out of your wall. They aren't real, but that doesn't matter, contained within your mind, they are.

So now, because of past fictional matter, whenever I see bugs in my apartment, these ideas run through my mind for a second. Of course since I've been getting decent sleep, the fly that I am about to kill is definitely real. It's definitely alive, and it can definitely

die. It definitely has parents and I'm sure it's been through some rough times. Kind of sounds like a person. I almost feel sorry for it.

I start to walk towards the bathroom, where the fly is hiding out, and on my way there I glance at the instructions on the spray can. Julia would always say that writing is never about just putting words down, even if they are just instructions placed on the back of a bottle of shampoo. Sometimes you will have to debate whether to use “you'll” or “you will” because your decision may affect the composition of the rest of the sentence.

Around the same time she told me this, she got me to agree to watch her favorite movie with her, and at the end of it all, she looks at me and tells me that this movie is why she loves writing. “How can you watch this and not want to create something yourself?,” she says. Julia Dream. Her tone suggested that it was more of a statement than a question. Either way, I didn't answer.

I look back up to see where I'm walking towards and now I'm in front of the bathroom door. I seem to remember a lot of the things I did with Julia now. This memory would have been a lot more useful had I had it before I ran into her after all those years.

I open the door and I wait a few seconds, waiting for the fly to make the first move, but it never does. I look all around the bathroom. This goes on for maybe two minutes, and it starts to get frustrating. I look for a little bit more, but I can't find it. When I finally give up, I look out of the bathroom window, and sitting on the ledge is the fly. What I don't understand is how it got outside when the window was down.

I stand there, and I just stare at the fly. It sits on the edge of the ledge, as if it was some sort of superhero towering over the location it was meant to protect. It's dressed in all black and the only thing that makes it feel is all of the injustice in the world. Seeing things like this gets you to believe that out of one thousand flies, one fly will be important to you in your life. I can tell you that I stood there for at least fifteen minutes, and in all that time, it only made one movement, which was a slight twitch. After I can take no more, I leave, and I let it be, for I know it has a city to protect.

Time. Minutes turn into hours and hours turn into dinnertime. Just before I leave my apartment to go to Lynne's, I go back to the bathroom to see if mister or misses fly is still there. He or she is not, but I am however greeted with a beautiful window view. The return of the dark blue setting, clean white snow falling from the Heavens. For some reason it makes you think of love. Peace and goodwill. Maybe that's why the fly isn't still here. One glance at something like this and he or she will forget what he or she is fighting for. All that trouble that forces its way into the world.

I knock on Lynne's door and Sarah lets me in. Of course Lynne is still working frantically to get every thing set up, but she tells me to sit down with the kids. Makes sense, sometimes I am a child.

I sit down with Sarah and David. Dawid is playing one of his games, so I ask him which game he is playing. “It's an adventure game, you wouldn't know it,” he says. He's probably right. A few seconds later a sound comes from his game and Sarah asks him if he finally beat it. “Yeah, but for some reason it still said 'Game Over,’” he responds.

Things like this happen all the time in the free world. You work hard, you play all the right cards, follow all the instructions, and then you actually win, yet somehow still manage to lose. You still manage to get game over.

I look at Lynne who looks like she is trying so hard to impress me, and I think about how if I were a parent, one of the hardest decisions I would probably have to make is deciding whether to encourage my children to live in the free world or in a world of their own.

Because I can't stand to watch her do it alone, I get up and go to the kitchen to help her out. She smiles at me and says “thanks,” and eventually we bring out all the plates and eating utensils and last, but not least, the food. Finally, we are all seated, and then Lynne asks Sarah to say grace. To thank God for all the food we are about to eat.

At dinner's end we are all laughing and telling stories. The most memorable one being the time Sarah learned how to swim and how deeply afraid she was of being underwater.

The laughing and the storytelling ends, and I figure it's about time to head home. Time to travel about twenty feet back into my living room so I can watch some television. So at the right moment, I introduce the idea of my leaving, then I bid them fairly well. Not in those words. While I'm at the door, Lynne walks up to me and asks me if she can come over to talk about something with me later, and I say it's fine.

So now, you can picture me sitting on my couch watching television but not really watching television, instead, I'm thinking of all the things Lynne could possibly want to “talk” about. I get to ponder for exactly seventeen minutes, and then the inevitable knocking begins. I don't answer it at first, then because of fictional sound waves, the knocking becomes louder and closer.

I get up and walk slowly towards the door and look through the peephole. Fictional matter would be useful right now, but instead it's Lynne on the other side. I open the door and she walks in. She walks past me and then asks me what I'm watching. I actually have no idea what I was watching, but if I had to take a guess, I'd say Seventeen Minutes.

I tell her I had no idea what I was watching and she laughs, and then I ask her what she wanted to talk about. She turns away from the television and looks at me and says “Oh yeah,” remembering why she came here in the first place. It must be important.

She starts asking about my house, the home my parents left for me. I had forgotten I took her there before I went down to stay in the city. I tell her it was just some property I owned, that it was left for me after my father had passed. Of course, she says “I'm sorry,”

but it was something that happened a long time ago.

After a few more questions, she starts drifting off in conversation to about how she has never lived in an actual home. That as a child, it was all apartments for her. Her family would move all the time, from apartment to apartment, and during each move, she would always wonder what it would be like to stay in one home. One real house. Of course you and I both know where she is going with this psychologically, even if she doesn't know herself.

Surprisingly she changes the subject and tells me that what she really came here to talk about was how she was filing a restraining order against Silvio. She starts telling me about how her mother convinced her to finally do it, and how she finally realized that her association with Silvio was affecting the lives of other people around her, including me. Her words.

"That's very thoughtful of you," the narrator says sarcastically to Lynne. Lynne laughs at my reply then looks down at the ground. She says my name softly, and I reply, "Yes?" "Can I tell you something?," she says still looking at the ground, but in a voice that is not as soft. "You can," I reply.

"I love you." That's what she tells me. I can honestly say at first I wasn't sure if I heard her right, but as much as I wish she hadn't said it, she did. I know Lynne, and I know she doesn't expect me to say it back, but she has still put me in a tough spot. How do I respond? The only way I know how.

"Are you sure you don't just like me?," I say trying to make her laugh, but she doesn't. Not even a smile. "I don't know what to say Lynne." She starts to speak, "Do you love me?" I pause, and then I say no. The Sun in her eyes quickly becomes Moon, and after seeing that, I don't know why but the blood in my body begins to boil.

"Do you feel anything at all for me?," she asks. This time I don't pause and I tell her to get out. "What?," she says with a confused look on her face. I open the door. She looks at me one last time, and with her facial expression and her eyes, she asks me if she really has to leave, and eventually she does and I close the door behind her.

I sit down on my couch and by now I am completely angry. I get back up and turn off the television and then I go to my bedroom. I turn off the light as I enter the room and then walk towards my bed and turn on the radio. I put it on a radio station and then I lay down. I've heard this song before when I was younger.

I stare blankly at the ceiling, but I never really think about anything. Just pure nothingness. Time passes by, then more time passes by, then I come to the conclusion that I can't stay here anymore. "How could I live here now?" I need to move out.

At the end of that thought, there is a knock at my door and I already know who it is. What could possibly happen in round two.

I walk through the living room and try to prepare, but you can't really prepare for things like this. You may find that any preparation was simply a waste of time. I open the door, and it is definitely Lynne. Immediately, she begins to speak.

“When I'm with you I feel like I'm in a dream, you're gentle and caring and I feel safe, I've never felt like this with anyone else, please don't ask me to leave.” This is what she says to me, and the one thing I find particularly interesting is how she said it all in one breath.

Now I'm standing here, looking down at her, both of us without any expression on our faces. What she doesn't know is that the only thing that is stopping me from closing the door on her is the fact that she said she feels like she's in a dream when she's with me. It's mostly in my dreams that I feel alive, so perhaps when she is with me, or around me, she feels alive.

I tell her to come in and after she passes, I close the door behind her. “How do you know?” I ask her. “That I love you?” she replies. “Yeah.”

She tells me a story, “After you left to go wherever you went, I checked to see if you were home every single day. After a few weeks I thought you had left and weren't coming back. When I found myself coming up with ideas on how to find you, that's when I knew.”

A new song comes on from the radio and the both of us can hear it. I don't say anything for a while, I just look around, and then she begins to speak again. “It's okay, I understand, but I would like it if you at least stayed in my life.”

I look at her and say, “Okay.” Don't you love that sentence. Most of my life I have made it a priority to help others, but I can never help those who get to close. A question from my dreams asks me if I would rather casually help millions around the world, and focus all of my energy on them in division, or if I would rather dedicate my life to a single person and make them happy. I have always been a fan of the former, and I always will be, but right now, tonight, I feel that this person standing in front of me is in need of help more than any other person in the world, so I guess I will dedicate this night to her well-being.

I walk up to Lynne and I ask her if she's ever heard the song that is playing on the radio. She listens for a moment, and then says yes, that her parents used to listen to it all the time when she was younger. I take her arm and soon we are sadly dancing. As we sway slowly, I let her know that I don't love her, and that I never will, and in a soft voice, she says “Okay.”

As we dance, looking out of my living room window I can see a full Moon. I subtly move the both of us towards the window, then I start to turn the both of us so she can have the view instead. I stop the turning as soon as I feel her heart beat louder because

that's when I know she sees it. You don't see the Sun much around this time of year, but even in winter, the Moon is always there.

Some time into the dance I begin to ask myself what I'm doing. Who is the mask I've put on for this lady. I pull my head back and look at Lynne, she's crying. I never did like tears, but I can't help but wonder why this salty discharge is discharging. Is it because her entire life she had only dreamed of moments like these? Question mark. Looking at her tears, I start thinking about the two of us meeting each other as children, maybe so she didn't have to cry. Playing, singing, dancing, as children, in a world that was free.

Chapter 56

INSPIRED BY A TRUE NIGHTMARE

1:2:6:56

MARIA picks out a tie that she likes for the narrator to wear to an upcoming event. They had now been together for about two years, and tonight was a celebratory night for the company she had been working for for the past year.

“How come you still don't know how to tie a tie?,” she asks the storyteller. “I've maybe worn a suit two times in my short adult life,” the storyteller replies.

After they are ready, they both get into the narrator's car and they travel to where they need to go. When they get there, they are greeted by a young man who takes the keys to the narrator's car so that he may park it for them.

Maria and the narrator then walk into the building and a woman shows them to the theater hall. The woman opens double doors that have a happy and sad theater mask on either sides, and inside, Maria sees her co-workers and introduces them to the narrator.

After a few minutes of talking, the show begins and the actors and actresses appear on-stage. For the next certain amount of time, the narrator has to sit here and watch a show that only a wealthy individual could even pretend to enjoy.

After the show is over, they all retire to the banquet hall to begin the real celebration. Maria and the narrator sit at a table with her boss and her boss's wife. As well as the married couple could hide it, the narrator sees through them and quickly realizes their true arrogance. Observations of the way they eat, the way they sit, facial expressions, tones of certain words, the way they read and write. Most importantly, the way Maria acts around them.

Soon after, the arrogance is confirmed, at least on the husband's side, when a person in the service of Maria's boss brings him food, but for a trivial reason has the food brought back to be redone.

After the food is redone and then brought back to Maria's boss, he is once again dissatisfied and he promptly has the process repeated once again.

Once again, the food is redone, re-brought back, and once again, Maria's boss is re-dissatisfied. This is when the narrator begins to take notice, not because of the current situation of poor food, but because the person servicing the husband has the same exact tie as the narrator.

As the narrator is examining the tie duplication, the husband tells the person servicing him to throw out the food and to have the cook come out, and the narrator can't help but overhear.

In a sarcastic manner, the narrator begins to speak, “You know, I'm not sure, but I think there are children starving somewhere out there.” Maria looks at the narrator. The

look she gives indicates that she knows that she has lost her job.

“Pardon?” the husband asks because he cannot understand the sarcasm of today's youth. “Nothing it was a joke,” the narrator replies.

The husband begins to speak again, “Do you mean to imply that I am arrogant because I refuse to eat a poorly cooked meal while there are children in other countries starving?” The facial expression of the narrator quickly changes to reflect that of a reply that was not expected. “You took the words right out of my mind,” the narrator thinks within the narrator's mind.

Maria grabs the narrator's arms in an attempt to leave the table, but it fails. “I'm simply saying that all things considered, under most circumstances, you shouldn't really throw out food.” The person servicing the husband cheers inside of his youthful head.

The husband replies, “And what if as a child I starved myself? Do I now have the right to pick and choose what I eat?” “If you truly starved as a child you should know better,” the narrator quickly responds.

Maria apologizes on behalf of the narrator and then firmly grabs the narrator's arm. The narrator rises to the narrator's feet and both the narrator and Maria begin to walk away, now the narrator's blood is boiling. The narrator looks back at the young service man and asks, “Why are you being his bitch?” The expletive causes Maria to walk faster, still tugging onto the narrator's arm.

Outside, Maria begins to yell. “We're through, I can't take this anymore.” “Okay,” the narrator says calmly, as if the narrator knew this conclusion was inevitable.

“Okay? Just okay? What do you mean 'Okay?'” The narrator doesn't reply, instead the narrator looks at a parking lot full of expensive cars.

Maria begins talking again, “If you don't want to open up to me then fine, you can find someone else other than me or your therapist to deal with your bullshit.”

Many days go by, and the apartment that both the narrator and Maria lived in was now only inhabited by one person. The narrator hadn't known it yet, but that night full of dancing and music would be the last time the narrator would see Maria.

Now it's been weeks since the narrator has last seen or heard from Maria. The narrator looks down at a bunch of legal pads; yellow pads meant to keep your notes. The narrator picks one at random and begins to read it. A dream about a junkyard.

Later in that same day, the narrator goes to visit a dying father, something that had become routine. The father and narrator sit in the same room but do not talk. It is only when the narrator gets up to leave that the father, for the first time in a long time, begins to speak.

“Do you have dreams?” he asks the narrator, to which the narrator replies, “Sure dad, everyone has dreams.” When the father asks the narrator, “Then why do you let your

dreams get in the way of your dreams,” the narrator becomes confused, but begins to suspect that Maria had told this man about a room that had not yet existed.

“What do you mean?,” the narrator asks in uncertain confusion. “Maria visited me, told me a few things I didn't know about you.” “What did she say?”

“She told me that you kept a strange collection of dreams you've had. She says you write them down on yellow pads of paper.” The narrator doesn't respond, and the father continues to speak. “She says that keeping track of your dreams isn't the problem, the problem is that you're more concerned with your dreams than actual reality.”

The narrator continues to listen. “She says that you told her it feels like these dreams you have, they're your other lives, and that if you can put them in order you'll find a story, or a life you never had. Something like that.”

The father begins to laugh, then says, “It sounds like you have an anthology disorder.” “Anthology disorder?,” the narrator asks. The father answers, “An anthology is a compilation of stuff, in your case these stories and dreams you have written down. If I know anything about dreams, yours aren't in order, so you must feel lost. Am I right?”

“Sometimes I do, yeah,” the narrator responds. “Writing them down on legal pads won't do you any good.” “What else can I do besides write them down?,” the narrator asks in search of wisdom.

The father begins to tell a story of his own, “When I was younger, in Africa, doing my studies on deoxyribonucleic acid, I wrote down a lot of notes. A lot. I used a spiral notebook, but I found that after a while they became unreliable. A friend of mine told me to start using composition books so I took her suggestion. The pages in a composition book aren't as easily torn out. After a while I felt they were more useful to write down my findings and record my journey. There's really only one flaw with them, though, if you force out one page, because of the way it's bound by string, the entire book may fall apart. That's not a metaphor, I know from experience.”

A month later, the narrator's father passes away and a funeral is held. The narrator says goodbye to the last remaining relative, and a few weeks later, continues to indulge a newly found addiction and ends up meeting a person named Jamal.

Sometimes I wake up to find that my dreams are only dreams. Feelings of complete peace left behind. Many times I'll dream about the stories I've heard of, some of the bizarre things I've seen. Even a simple little quote that had me thinking for days. “Come to the edge,” she tells me. “I can't, I'm afraid,” I reply. “Just come to the edge,” she says once more. “I can't, I'll fall,” I reply. One last time, she asks me to come to the edge, and after a long pause, I do. I go to the edge, and then I look down into a very long and fatal fall. That's when she pushes me, and before I fall, I fly.

Two-hundred and eighty six days ago, I had a dream. I'm in a complex named “Purple

Forbidden City.” There are nine-hundred and eighty buildings in this complex, and all but one of them are filled with composition notebooks. They are filled so tight that you can't even open the doors.

So I checked them all for what they had inside, and like I said, there was that one that was different, the one that seemingly had nothing inside.

I open the door and I look inside. There is nothing. Just an empty room; white walls brown floor. There is however, of course, another door, and when I open that door, it's not so empty. Inside I find an obsession that is worse than mine.

Four noses, whole human bones and fragments, nine masks of human skin, bowls made from human skulls, ten female heads with the tops sawn off, human skin covering several chair seats, a woman's head in a paper bag, another woman's head in a burlap sack, nine vulvae in a shoe box, a belt made from female human nipples, skulls on a bedpost, organs in the refrigerator, a pair of lips on a draw string for a window shade and a lampshade made from the skin from a human face.

Seeing something like this makes you wonder if there are fires in a place where it's always raining. The person who did this understands that imagination is the only instrument you can use to reach things that you cannot reach physically.

Disgusted yet intrigued by this collection, I decide that I have to leave, and on my way out I see one more thing. A brain sitting on a desk next to the door. Beside it there is a pen. I pick up the pen with the intention of poking the brain with it. At first, I gently tap it, and when nothing happens, I stab it. The pen is in about halfway, and it feels like every thing has frozen in time, and when I remove the pen, everything turns dark and I wake up.

Thinking about it now, walls can be very metaphorical and a complex always has a lot of them. Nine-hundred and eighty buildings and if you can think long and hard enough you'll find a metaphor for each one. Personal barrier. Form of protection. Stopping point. Division of property. One of my personal favorite walls, the wall that causes the storyteller to not be aware of the storyhearer.

Because this storyteller wall has been crumbling for quite some time now, you might ask me why I'm thinking of walls, and I might answer you and say because I'm in my old room. The room I resided in as a child in my parents' home.

I'm standing here staring at these walls in this empty room and it reminds me of Joe and his apartment. His former apartment.

We are surrounded by walls, literally and metaphorically, and each of us have our own different walls we build. We may not all have carpentry as a profession, but we are all definitely carpenters of ourselves. We decide which walls to put up and why. How thick they will be and what type of material they will be made out of. The problem is,

similar to a story about three pigs, is that we are not all good carpenters. Some of us are inexperienced, some of us are lost. Scariest of all, some of us don't even know that we're carpenters to begin with, and we are the ones who have no structure.

Thinking of Joe, I have to ask myself if it's the type of walls we build that define us as people. Does a thief build a dummy wall to throw off other thieves? Does a rambling narrator who sometimes loses all logic build hundreds of walls to keep the mind interested?

I leave my empty little past room and walk back down the stairs to the living room. Such an old home that has gone to waste. In a more recent past, there were times when I used to think that the entire real world was just fragments from my dreams and nightmares. That would of course mean I was a bit crazy because I'd believe the dream world was more real than the real world. That the real world could only exist because of the dream world.

So this old home, it would be somewhere in the dream world, but maybe it wouldn't look exactly like this. Maybe instead of being a home it would be a toy that made me feel safe, so when it transfers to the real world, it's a huge house with four huge walls that no one can penetrate. There can be fictional matter in the real world, but can there be non-fictional matter in the dream world? Maybe things like emotion?

These questions suffocate you because it's absolutely absurd to wonder if you will ever know the concrete truth, but these questions are also what drive you. They help you to remember that you are still very much alive and that there is still much to know, that to learn and to discover may be the only real purpose to your existence. Mostly everyone has this psychological fragment. The thing they think about all the time, the one thing that hits them so "hard and true." That keeps them "south of normal." It's one of the few things that gets you out of bed after you've had a nightmare in Hell.

I leave the home and close the door behind me then walk down the steps. I make a left and I am eventually greeted by a crosswalk. I watch the traffic lights; red, then green. No Sun will shine in my day today.

Willson, the detective in charge of solving the thirteen abandoned building murders, calls his partner, Rousseau, who of course would be the secondary on the case.

"Me and Patty were just going to bed, so this better be important," Rousseau threatens. Wilson tells Rousseau that the eighth of the thirteen bodies had just been identified as Rondo Mac, Dante Mac's brother. Wilson begins to explain to Rousseau that most of the already identified bodies were members from a crew on the west side, while Rondo and his brother were known affiliates of Raheim Johnson, who did most of his business on the east side. "So you're saying Rondo's body has no business being there?," Rousseau asks. "Exactly," Wilson answers. Wilson continues, "I thought these murders

were fully drug related, maybe Raheim cleaning out the competition and hiding the bodies so we wouldn't find them and so they wouldn't catch heat, but it doesn't make sense for Rondo to be part of the cleaning.”

“You think maybe Rondo got caught doing something he wasn't suppose to be doing?,” Rousseau asks. Wilson answers, “Maybe but I don't know. What's bothering me though is that when I questioned Raheim, he obviously said he knew nothing about it, but he also said that some of his crew was missing, and that he wouldn't be surprised if some of those bodies are his people.”

There is silence, and then Rousseau asks Wilson if he thinks that maybe there are new players in town. “Maybe,” Wilson replies, “but because of what's happening in this city every day, I would not be surprised if there is a vigilante killer who did these deeds.” Rousseau replies, “Vigilante killer? It's a lot more simple than that, Wilson. We don't have serial killers here and we definitely don't have vigilante killers; we just have guns, drugs and innocent bystanders.” Wilson then asks, “Do you know how many people die from drugs a year? Out of all those affected families, you will eventually get someone who starts to build a hatred for drugs.” “So?,” Rousseau replies. “What do you mean so? You wait long enough and one of the victims' relatives is going to go after the person who sold the drugs to the victim in the first place.”

The next day, Frank Mainor and Tim Ryan are driving down a street they have driven down many times before and come across the same three young men they had seen previously. The same three young men in which one of the three had been the cause of death of two sisters, however Mainor and Ryan do not know this, and they will not be the ones who find out.

Frank pulls the car up to the three young men and then both Frank and Tim exit the vehicle. “Hello officer,” one of the young men says sarcastically as he smiles. “Up against the wall,” Tim replies. Frank and Tim force all three men onto the wall and it is apparent they have not come back to talk about sports.

After a mild check which yields no guns or drugs or anything illegal, Frank and Tim kick the young men off of the sidewalk they had been talking on. “Go do whatever you're doing somewhere else,” Frank demands. These actions make it obvious that the two cops are frustrated that they can't even find out the name of the man they are after.

As the three young men walk away, one of them says to the killer, “You lucky you ain't had that shit on you.” While he does not have the murder weapon on his person, he is still in possession of it, and this possession will be a dominant factor in his demise.

Later on, inside the police department, Lieutenant Scott Merils speaks to his shift about his upcoming retirement. Further on into the day, detective Fields gets a break on the Samantha and Brittney Morrison case, they are known to you as “the sisters,” when a

civilian calls and says she saw the people who did the shooting. The old lady, she tells Fields that she saw two dark colored males that she didn't know firing at a boy named Malcolm Carson. Fields finds Malcolm, but he is hesitant to cooperate.

After much persuasion, Malcolm tells Fields that he was there, but that he wasn't the one who killed them. That it was three others from the west side who came to their territory and started shooting at him, intentionally leaving out Marcus's name.

Because of a moral compass that is still partially intact even under Malcolm's living conditions and because of a certain amount of guilt of the sisters' deaths, when Fields asks him if he could identify the other three shooters, Malcolm says yes, and a couple of days later Fields brings him down to the station.

Based on the description of the old lady who came forward, Fields shows Malcolm dozens of suspects, and while Malcolm identifies Triggerfinger, the crazy peer who continues to shoot even after hitting one of the sisters and also the one who is too stubborn to dispose of his gun, Rock and Travis are not in the gallery and are therefore, for the time being, free.

During the walk back home it begins to snow heavily, and I find out why very soon. When I get to the front of my apartment building I see four kids having a snowball fight. Two of the kids are David and Sarah, but I'm not sure who the other two are. Regardless, that's the great thing about snow. It can be a Cupid for friendship.

As I walk pass the kids, waving my neutrality flag, David thinks it would be funny to throw a snowball at me. I always got the feeling that David was nothing like his sister. That he has problems opening up to people freely unlike his sister. However, there seems to be something magical in this snow that erases his ability to stay closed off. After I'm hit, he starts to laugh, as do all the other kids, and I have no choice but to strike back.

After a few minutes of my dominance by massive military knowledge, I leave the children and retire to my apartment where I sit on my couch. A bit tired, yet still full of energy, my mind begins to remember a dream I had a couple years ago where I'm in the military traveling through a broken down urban area with about four other soldiers.

What I'll never forget about the dream is that Tao was one of the soldiers I was walking with, and I'll never forget his helmet because I could never figure out what it meant. On his helmet, he has "born to kill" written on it with all of the letters capitalized except for the "i." Right next to it there is an oxymoronic peace symbol. *Si vis pacem, para bellum*. I guess even in the dream world, if you want peace, you will have to prepare for war.

As usual, Tao is talking nonstop, jumping from subject to subject without pause. Sometimes he'll even seamlessly begin to talk about himself in the third or second person, but I don't think he ever realizes it.

Finally I tell him to shut up, and he just stares at me. I ask him if he's ever just stopped to hear the silence around him, if he's ever witnessed its beauty and calmness. For the first time he has nothing to say, and then I tell him he hasn't because he spends all of his time talking. Tao stops talking, but the irony is that we are then attacked and any potential silence is lost.

We all find cover in foxholes, and I can see the legitimate fear in Tao's eyes, and I'm sure he can see the fear in mine. For that moment, I feel as if I'm looking at a mirror. Some people will tell you that the people in your dreams represent versions of yourself. Tao's fear is my own, the people attacking us is my anger towards myself, our comrades who are fighting back, they are parts of me that fight back and seek redemption; some kind of victory even if it causes my own demise.

One thing I constantly wonder is if the same idea applies to the real world. Can you find aspects of yourself in real people. Is there a piece of you in all others?

Possibly because of the Cassandra complex, you tell few people, including myself, about your suffering, but their only response is that you are depressed. That you need to go out and truly see the world instead of just writing about your experiences from dreams. My advice to you is to live before you die. These are the words of a therapist I was suggested to see many years ago. "The meager satisfaction that man can extract from reality leaves him starving." Those are the supposed last words of a psychologist.

Remembering how the therapist told me that I needed to live before I died prompted me to do just that. Go and live. I walk to the room and I select a random composition notebook to relive a dream. Like one of Lynne's flowers in full blossom, I feel something as I read about a dream that concerns both Jesus Christ and the Antichrist.

I'm walking on the surface of the Sun, and while I do feel intense heat, it does not burn. After some time, in the distance I can see another person walking, and as I get closer, I realize that it is Jesus Christ.

Eventually we reach each other, and he asks me, "Where are the shoes that I had given you?" Thoughts of a metaphorical salvation. I look down at my feet and see that I am wearing no shoes, but I do not answer, instead, I ask, "Why are you walking on the Sun?" He replies, "I am the son of God." "The son of God?" I ask.

He starts telling me about how his father and a friend created the Sun from clouds of gas, and that its purpose was to give light to all it touched. I look at him for a second, and he puts his hand on my shoulder, and he says to me, "I am not walking on the Sun. I, am the son."

Suddenly I find myself alone again, but this time I am walking on the Moon. I search around, expecting to eventually find Jesus again, and after a while I see a man walking in the distance. When we reach each other, I see that it is Jesus Christ.

“Where are the shoes that I had given you?,” he asks me. Even though I know that I have no shoes on, I still look down, and I still do not answer. “Because you are the son of God, I can understand the pun of you walking on the Sun, but why are you walking on the Moon?,” I ask. “I am not the son of God,” he replies. “You are not Jesus Christ?” “No, I am not.” “Then who are you?” “I am whoever you decide I am.”

I pause, and then I ask him why he's walking on the Moon again, and he answers, “The same reason you are. The Moon often appeals to those who are lost.” “What do you mean 'those who are lost,'”, I ask.

He starts telling me about how his father and a friend accidentally created a large piece of rock, which would later become the Moon, and had no way of removing it, so they simply pushed it away. Out of sight, out of mind. The Moon wandered through the universe with no purpose or place, moving only because it was already moving. Eventually, this large piece of rock, large piece of mistake and purposelessness, it crashes into Earth and begins to orbit around it, effectively ending a long period of idleness.

The Moon begins to believe that it has finally found its purpose. Perhaps it is to protect the Earth, or perhaps it is to watch over it, but enough time passes by and nothing ever happens. The Moon finds itself in a state of idleness again, simply orbiting around a planet, never really doing anything, so once again, it begins to believe it has no purpose.

Sometimes I wonder if Jesus really is the savior of man, or if he was just a crazy guy with a messiah complex. Is it possible that he was just a man. A man who truly believed he was the son of God, and that he was truly sent to die for all of our sins, but in reality simply just a man nonetheless? Imagine the psychological make-up of such a mind, its perception on the world and the people in it. Even if Jesus was just a man and not the son of God as he said, he accomplished more things than men dream of.

Adolf Hitler and his followers, it's not hard to see that they truly believed they were a superior race and that other races belonged at the bottom of their heels. Because of this strong belief, when murdering all those men women and children, they truly believed they were doing nothing wrong, or in other words, they were doing what was meant to be done.

So now you really have to ask yourself, what is real? If an individual or a group of people believe in something so firmly, but you and I agree that it is not real, can we really say that it isn't? You put a child into a dark room alone and tell them that there is a monster in there with them, it doesn't matter if this monster is real or not because the fear of the child is, and there is no one that can tell this child that they aren't really afraid because only the child can feel this fear. Once you put an idea in someone's head, it enters reality, it now exists, and that alone can make it real.

If you go to Mars in real life, and then begin to have dreams about your visit to the

extent that you can't tell which memories came from the real visit and which came from the dream visit, do both types of visits become equal? I'd say yes, until you are told which memories were real and which memories were dreams, then by human nature the dream memories aren't as significant anymore.

The past and the future seem to be the exact same thing, and it feels like the only thing that sets them apart is memory. In a life without memory, not even the present can help you divide.

The dream ends and I flip the page to the next dream, but before I could start reading about a helicopter, the phone begins to ring. I put the composition notebook back in its place and make my way to the living room.

When I get to the living room, someone begins to knock on the door. I stop, and suddenly I'm in a place that many of us have been before. Singing phones and yelling doors.

"Who is it?" "Lynne." I hadn't recognized her knock. "Hold on." I go and pick up the phone, "Hello?" "Hi, I found this number in Jamal's room, may I ask who this is?" "I'm a friend of his. He and his brother stayed here for a few days not too long ago, but before that I hadn't seen him in years." "Do you mean Derek?" "Yes, Derek." "Do you by chance know where Derek is now?" "No, the last time I saw him was when he was staying here. Is he missing?"

I had forgotten that Lynne was waiting at the door, so as this woman answers my question I walk over to the door to open it and wave Lynne to come in. Lynne walks into my apartment, obviously smiling, and she is also holding a single purple rose.

The woman on the phone tells me that she was Jamal's longtime girlfriend and that Derek's family hadn't seen Derek himself for a day or two. I wanted to tell her about the mail I received from Derek, but because they were only letters it would be pointless. The woman gives me a number to call her back at should anything come up and then she hopes that I have a nice day. Such a proper individual.

I hang up the phone and when I turn around I see Lynne sitting on my couch with the purple rose in her hand. As into the.

She holds out her hand and says, "It's for you." She'd told me the significance of the colors of many roses but I had forgotten what a purple rose meant. I walk up to her and take the rose and I look at it for a second. "Thanks," I say, "I know you told me what a purple rose meant but I can't quite remember."

She laughs and says, "It's alright, because I never told you what purple meant." We both laugh, and when the laughter dies out, she tells me that purple roses represented enchantment. That the person who gives them usually wants to convey the message that they had fallen in love with the recipient at the very first sight. In other words, "love at

first sight,” something I didn't want to hear.

“So are you ready?” she asks. I'm not sure what she's talking about. “Ready for what?” “You said you'd go with me to the library today to pick up some books.” I'd forgotten about that. “Oh yeah,” I reply. It's funny how you can remember every detail of most of your dreams, but when it comes to real world things, you are very forgetful. The question I had to ask myself was which world was my reality.

I grab my coat and we walk out the front door. I lock the door behind me and as I'm locking it Lynne and I both hear Mary and her second-floor friend coming out of an apartment as well. I turn around and see Mary holding Anthony, the other woman who is at her side, while I do not know who she is, I had seen many times before.

Mary waves at us, and then she walks over. “Hey Lynne,” more signs of a transformation. Lynne smiles back at her and then at Anthony. “Is he feeling better today,” Lynne asks. I wasn't aware of the developing friendship between Mary and Lynne, but some people say the world is a better place when there is more love than there is hate.

The other woman, after locking her respective door, comes over to join us and I'm now asking myself how I got caught in the middle of this. I am introduced to Mary's friend and in turn the proper nounless character is no longer proper nounless. Her name is Deana and she lives in the apartment right across from Lynne with her boyfriend Mike. Lynne needed no introduction as the two had already been well acquainted.

The party ends and we all leave through the front door of the apartment building, then we go our separate ways. The library was only a few miles away, so because Lynne's car was being repaired and the weather hadn't been particularly harsh, we decided to walk instead of waiting for the bus.

As we are walking I see Boris drive by with a woman in his car, probably his wife. For some reason seeing Boris made me laugh. I'm not sure why.

“David had a night terror the other night.” I look at Lynne for a second and then ask if that's the same thing as a nightmare. “No, well kinda, except it's more severe. He was screaming and when I got to him he was sitting up and sweating a lot.”

From what she said, I can say that I've had nightmares, but never night terrors. “That's one of the reasons why I wanted to go to the library. He's had them before and this time I want to know more about it.”

I start thinking about David, then Sarah, and wonder what they may be learning about in school right now. Suddenly a helicopter flies overhead, then another, and another. “Wonder what happened,” I say.

A bit further into the walk Lynne begins to giggle and says, “I know I fell asleep on your couch.” Why is that funny? “I'm sure you did considering you woke up on it,” I

reply. "Twice," she replies. Her saying twice could only mean she was actually awake the first time it happened. The first time when I had to carry her to her own apartment.

"Well why didn't you say anything?," I ask. She laughs and tells me it was because she was too tired. She says that she did actually try to say "thank you," but that it only came out as mumbles. "So you were awake when I touched your foot?," I ask. "You touched my foot?," she asks surprisingly. It makes sense that she didn't know that I touched her foot. That cold plastic. "No I was kidding." She looks at me, confused yet interested.

Moments later I find myself standing in one of the many aisles of a public library. Lynne had already found a book on sleeping disorders and was now looking for a book for Sarah, who like her mother, loved to read. Just standing there, waiting for her to find her book, I watch her and admire her personality, but then I am struck by the room. I look at the shelf in front of me, and I get the urge to select a book at random, and then open it to a random page.

After doing so, I read about an author who continues to insist that the world is a pretty place. I close the book then look at Lynne once more, who is still trying to find a book for her daughter. The world may be full of pretty people, but it is not a pretty place. The author persistently told me that "the world is a pretty place" with no real message other than that it simply was, but I had always believed that storytelling was meant to tap into that part of the reader's mind that lingers. The part of you that reacts to the loss of a loved one, how you have nothing to say. Like seeing the Moon in daytime.

Lynne walks over to me with Sarah's new book in hand, "Are you going to get anything?" "Trust me, I have plenty to read at home."

Finally we leave the library and go back home. On the walk home I find myself subconsciously picking at a cut on my thumb which had been trying to heal itself but had been failing. Like a society trying to plan and make up rules for the people to follow. A society that taught self-creation rather than self-destruction. My father had always told me that any meaning in life had no objective value, that meaning could only have subjective value, but these subjective values were not universal to all.

The snowfall gets heavier and I can't help but think about how I cannot be the person Lynne wants me to be. That's when she slips and falls with the help of black ice. I laugh. She laughs even harder. A musician once said that a dream you dream alone is only a dream, but that a dream you dream together is reality.

Chapter 57

NEW YORK MINUTE

1:2:6:57

LAST month, I had a dream. There are six of us in total in the back of a moving van, one driver, no one sitting in the passenger's seat. We all have our ski-masks sitting at the top of our heads as we organize and load our guns. "We're almost there," the driver says, telling the thieves that they aren't too far away from the bank.

Five of us have black ski-masks, but there is one individual sitting across from me who has a ski-mask that almost represents the face of a clown. Blues and whites and reds all over. My partner, who is sitting to the left of me, he begins to speak to the clownface, and he says "What's so special about you?"

Clownface looks up and expresses his confusion. "Your ski-mask, you couldn't follow proper clothing codes?," my partner says jokingly, except Clownface doesn't interpret the joke aspect of the sentence. Instead he is now expressing annoyance and then looks back down at his gun. "It's homage to whadu the clown," Clownface says.

"Who?," my partner asks. "You've never heard of whadu the clown?," the driver says, inserting himself into the conversation. "No. What was he, some sort of clown bank robber?," my partner asks. That's what every one else also assumed, but we were all wrong.

The driver begins to tell us about a clown who could make any child laugh. It didn't matter how gray the clouds were, if this clown was around, with just his sound laughter was bound.

So this clown, he clowns around for ten years, and then something happens to the environment of Earth, and women can no longer procreate. "Procreate?," one of the thieves asks. "Have children," I reply.

For ten more years, he clowns around, but he knows that his profession as a clown will soon come to end. On some of his final days, he finds himself searching for work, but there are no children to be found, and of course, adults do not find the same amusement in clowns as children do. With the death of children comes the death of his long-loved profession.

A couple of years go by and the clown goes mad, lost in his anger. Not because there are no children around, but because he has to grow up. He has to endure the loss of childhood as he enters adulthood. The clown symbolically washes the paint off of his face and later on finds employment at a bank as a bank teller, but he is eventually killed by a lone bank robber while working. The question is, in a dying world where every single thing is trivial except life itself, where everyone will soon be forgotten, why do

people still kill each other over money?

“Story's over,” the driver says, “we're home.” We pull down our ski-masks and grab our guns. “Remember, you have to get this done in a New York minute,” the driver stresses.

We exit the van and walk into the bank. As soon as the people realize who we are and what our intentions entail, one of the robbers, I'm not sure what his name is, begins to speak. “Hello world, we're here for a very small portion of this country's wealth.”

He then grabs the most beautiful woman you've ever seen; black hair, brown eyes, fair skin. “The philosophy of composition.” He pauses. “It was written by an American writer who claims that the most poetic topic in the world is the death of a beautiful woman.” He raises his gun to the side of her head and kills her. I feel my stomach turn, and I know my partner feels the same thing. Probably because we believe we aren't criminals, because we believe we are simply good people who do bad things.

After he kills her, the bank employees then give us full cooperation with no hassle. It makes me wonder, had he killed an unattractive homeless man who smelled like he was dead, would the kill have the same effect?

After we gather as much money as we can, we run back outside and into the van and we begin to make our getaway. “Was that fast enough?,” one of the robbers asks the driver. “Well, there are no cops in sight and that's all that matters,” the driver replies. I'm not a very superstitious person, but I almost wish they hadn't said those words because not a second later, three police vehicles show up and begin chasing us.

This is a bit worse than it seems because my partner and I had originally planned to kill all five of these men. Not for the money, but because like the people they worked for, they took advantage of the weak and the poor and sometimes killed them just to get a message out.

We were all hired to steal from this particular bank by a rival bank owner and were instructed to kill at least one person in the process. These two bank owners, they had been tormenting each other for a long time and this robbery was just another bad joke in a long history of rivalry.

About twenty seconds into the chase, the driver panics, maybe from a lack of experience, and we find ourselves combating on-coming traffic. A moment later we crash into a parked car and the car chase is effectively over. Our driver is knocked out, and we each know that our only shot in staying free is to initiate a foot chase.

Clownface opens the van door and jumps out, and because he hadn't looked both ways first, he is smashed by a speeding car and flies directly upwards. Due to physics, he comes directly back down and lands right in front of me. I look down at his body as I

stand next in line to jump out of the van. He lays there, his eyes wide open, blood leaking out of his mouth.

My partner is behind me and he pushes me as he says my name, and he tells me to jump. A common mistake by masked thieves, to reveal the identity of another. I look both ways and I see that there are no cars coming, so I jump over Clownface, and after I land, after I start running for my freedom, I can hear him begin to laugh with the sound of more and more blood seeping out of his mouth.

My partner catches up to me and we make our way into an alley and after a while we notice that none of the other robbers are following us, that they had gone their own way. Still, in the distance, we can hear Clownface laughing, a sort of laughing sickness that echoes in eternity, and no matter how far we run, it's still there.

As we are running, and as the laughter persists, all I can think about is how it is illogical to work with other thieves. As a thief, your main priority is to take from others, so it's not a bad idea to think that the thieves you are working with, after it's all said and done, will steal from you as well. It's just the nature of the profession. If, however, two or more thieves are bound by an idea greater than themselves, greater than mere possession, trust may not become an issue.

The running and the laughter eventually wake me up in the middle of the night. I get up and go to the kitchen to get a glass of water and then I go back to sleep.

Sometimes we'll have dreams that we really enjoy. Maybe in the dream we're happy, maybe we're living the life we always wanted, or maybe we're just having a very exciting dream. Then we wake up, and we try to go back to sleep immediately afterwards in hopes that we can continue having that dream, but it never works. Even though I wasn't particularly trying to continue the dream I had just woken up from, when I went back to sleep, I found myself not too far from where I left off.

In the dream, my partner and I, along with three others who jumped out of the van, had been apprehended by the local police under the suspicion of participating in a robbery that left one person dead. The driver and Clownface had already been caught and charged.

They line us all up, and one by one, they have us each say "Hand me the keys, you fuckin' cocksucker!" You fuckin' socialite, that's what I wanted to say. In fact, that's what I had said some time before when me and my partner interrupted a dinner party that was put together by a bunch of socialites. Ego-driven sheep. The things I've had to do to stop myself from becoming a serial killer.

No, we didn't kill them all, but we did take all of their clothes. We left them there standing in their embarrassment and freezing from their own air conditioning.

After the police line up, they let us go. My partner and I had decided not to kill the other three robbers, instead we traveled to a country on the other side of the globe, but I can't remember which. There we bought food and medicine with the money we had stolen, and like always, we distributed the food and medicine among the less fortunate population.

There is a book that often implies that the path of a righteous person is determined by those who do evil. For a long time I had wondered if my partner and I were simply good people who did bad things, or if we were bad people who did good things.

It is morning now and I can hear the school bus drive up as I sit on my couch. I get up and look out of the window to see David and Sarah getting on the school bus and their mother waving them goodbye. All dressed up for the cold that is winter.

As the school bus drives off, I think about how we teach these children to be the best. At any age, competition surrounds us all, but when we are small and fragile, competition can be all we see. Our instructors of life unintentionally throw us into a pit where we fight with others for whatever prize is set. Places with competitive colleges, capitalist markets. School will prepare you for many things, and right now Sarah and David are being guided to the pit.

Even if Sarah or David fight for their life and make it out of the pit, crushing those who could not compete, leaving them in the shadows to be criticized as “those who didn't try hard enough,” it will be difficult, perhaps impossible, to clearly identify whether Sarah or David really won the game of life or if they lost.

It seems like sport is one of the few things in our world where there is a clear winner and a clear loser. That may be why it's so important to so many of us. Social debatable issues like the topic of the death penalty and abortion will never have a clear-cut winner, and these are the things we have to live with. One concern of mine is after Sarah and David have lived a long life, after they've beaten other competitors to attend that college or to have that job, how will they know if they won in life or not? If only life kept score.

After the thought, I go to The Room and take a composition notebook that has many stories about the thieves from New York. In it I find the dream that takes place after the dream about robbing a bank with Clownface. After the getaway, but before being apprehended by the police, my partner and I find out where our boss lives by fooling the man who brokered the plan to rob the bank.

Instead of visiting this man's estate with our theater masks, we borrow the creativity of Clownface and use ski-masks that depict either a frown or a smile.

We make sure to interrupt an entire family that consists of a husband, a wife and three children while they are eating dinner. The husband tells us that we can take anything we

want, but we let him know we aren't here for possessions. We tie them up along with their security and then have them sit in their ridiculously large backyard.

My partner and I go back into the mansion and begin dumping gasoline on every thing we see. After a few minutes my partner stops and stares at the family's dinner table. I ask him what he's doing, and it takes him a while, but he says "I remember one day when my entire town had little to eat, my family especially, so my older brother stole some bread from a local bakery." "Nice story, but we have a lot of mansion to cover," I respond, but he goes on, "My father made him return the bread." "Was the bakery owner a family friend?" I ask. "No, but I assume my father made him return the bread because his family too had little to eat," he responds.

The both of us think about what he had said for a few seconds, and then my partner begins to pour gasoline on all of the food as well as the dinner table itself, and as he's doing this, he says, "It's not what we're stealing, it's who we're stealing it from."

At the end of it all, we left behind a burning mansion and this husband and his family watched as all of the things that were dear to them burned to the ground. Everything except their loved ones. We'd hoped that a catastrophic event such as this would stay with the three children forever, and that they would understand that everything they worked so hard for in their coming life could be taken away by a thief in the night.

The criminal mind has always fascinated me. What makes a criminal a criminal? The common person sees a bank and may think "a place to store my money," whereas the common criminal sees a bank and the first thought that enters their mind is "society has made it easier for me by putting it all in one spot."

Are criminals the way they are because they are lazy? Because they lack the work ethic that the working man has? I'd find that hard to believe considering many criminals spend days on their criminal plans. Maybe they're just a different breed altogether, like a mathematician is to an artist. A mathematician looks at a bank and probably sees how much money the bank steals from its customers, an artist looks at a bank and probably sees an unfortunate iconic representation of modern civilization.

Tim Ryan's eyes open. He can hear the high school students speaking outside and waiting for their bus as he rises from his bed. He completes his morning routine and leaves his apartment to go to work. Every day he is reminded of his failed marriage by the closing of the door behind him. No kiss goodbye, no "I love you." Just memories of a relationship that he didn't want to end.

When Ryan gets outside, the high school students are gone. They are replaced with children and their parents, and they too, stand on the corner waiting for the school bus to come. Ryan laughs at the image because he truly believes that if you are young and

standing on a street corner, you're either selling drugs or getting an education.

Ryan enters his car and starts the engine and then makes his way to the home of a long-time friend; the wife of a police officer who had been murdered by Spider. When he gets there she invites him in. She tells him the children had already left for school. Ryan sits down and reassures the dead cop's wife that Winston, the detective assigned to the case, was making progress in finding out who murdered her husband.

After Ryan leaves, he drives to the police department to begin his day but is met with words of anger. As he is walking across the parking lot, he runs into another detective who he suspects has had issues with him since the creation of the new unit.

As they pass each other, the other detective, Richards, gives Ryan a look that implies a lack of respect, so Ryan finally speaks out. "You got a problem with me or something?," he asks.

Richards replies, "Yeah I got a problem with you. You and your nigger partner." "Yeah what's that?," Ryan interrupts. "You guys need to stop trying to be heroes, having a useless unit be made to save a city that can't be saved. Stop trying to set examples for the rest of us and just let them kill each other, it's the only thing they know how to do." Ryan looks at Richards and decides to just walk away. As he begins to walk away he tells Richards to go "fuck himself," but Richards laughs and says "It's pointless. I'll retire in one year and be done with this bullshit and you'll still be running around with your dick in your hand trying to figure out where it all went wrong."

Ryan takes extreme offense to Richards's last statement, so he turns around and walks back towards Richards and the hostility begins to take form. "You think dead cops and dead children are fucking pointless?," he asks, but does not want an answer. "You go ahead and sit behind your desk and wait out your retirement while the rest of us actually try to do our jobs." Ryan begins to walk away again, and Richards says, under his breath, "You're just too young."

Ryan enters the police department and finds his desk. As he begins to look through some papers, Frank Mainor comes out of the break room and sees a disturbed Jim Ryan in the distance, and chooses to wait a while before he initiates the day's first contact.

I turn on my television to find that it's not on my favorite channel. For some reason, it often resets itself to the starting channel. As I'm flipping through channels just to see what's on before I get to the news, I come across a program that depicts life in the vast ocean.

The image reminds me about the time Jesus and I were standing at the beginning of a sea, as if he were preparing to baptize me. After a while he tells me to wash my hands, and I do. After the deed is done, he tells me to wash them again, and we do this over and

over again for God knows how long. As he's looking at me, I can tell he wants me to wash away the sins of such an idle life.

Some time goes by and then he tells me to stop, so I do. He then starts to walk towards me slowly through the water, and when he finally reaches me, he puts his hand on my shoulder and begins to speak.

"I know you have many questions, and I know life has made you very angry. This is not a bad thing, though." He says these words to me and when he's done I simply nod, letting him know I am listening and that he should continue. "Having many emotions may cloud your judgment, but if you have one very strong emotion, it may turn into passion. There is no doubt that this passion will bring about suffering, and I am certain it will heavily decide the course of a life, but depending on who a person is, it may drive them to do great or terrible things." It makes me think of social fragments that become alter egos.

"There will be these individuals that will do terrible things," Jesus continues, "but my father in Heaven has given you a right to distort these events in the case that an event is so terrible that it becomes unbearable to hear."

I continue to flip through channels until I finally land on a news channel, then I turn off the television. I grab my mail key and go downstairs to check my mail. Nothing unusual at first, bills, junk mail, but then I find two envelopes that are addressed to Lynnette Parker. "To the parents of Sarah Parker." "To the parents of David Parker." This is probably the fourth time this month that I've gotten someone else's mail.

I go back up the stairs and knock on Lynne's door, but it's not Lynne who answers. Instead, it's a teenage girl and it confuses me. "Is Lynne home?," I ask. "No she's at work," the teenager replies. "Work?" "Yes," she looks at me like I'm crazy, "work." I pause for a moment and then I hand her the two envelopes that belong to the parents of David and Sarah Parker, "These are for her." The teenager thanks me and then I leave, still a bit confused.

Hours go by and because Lynne suffers from the politeness complex, which has sub-complexes named apology complex, merci complex and por favor complex, she has the need to pay me a visit to thank me for bringing over the misplaced mail.

We talk for a while and by the day's end, I learn that she had recently found a job working as a waitress at a restaurant in the city. I asked her about the young girl who was at her apartment, and she tells me that she was just a babysitter who lived just a few blocks down the street.

The babysitter, Alondra, is the daughter of one of Mary's friends. Mary had met Alondra's mother at the hospital where she gave birth to Anthony. Alondra's mother had

given birth a few days prior to Mary's arrival, and after they'd met, they realized they lived very close to each other so they decided to keep in touch.

Keeping in touch was a good idea because Mary's sister would be leaving soon and Mary herself would need a babysitter as she was returning back to work. Alondra, who is home-schooled and is well-known for her professional babysitting skills but was currently out of work, was immediately volunteered by her mother to help Mary with her situation at no cost.

Mary and Lynne, who had become friends, talk about how Lynne had just found a new job but was having trouble finding a babysitter. Mary brings up Alondra, and because they both live in the same apartment building, Mary asks Alondra and Alondra's mother if she would feel comfortable babysitting for Lynne as well, and that of course she would pay.

They agree, and now Alondra babysits for both of them. If both Lynne and Mary need babysitting at the same time, Alondra brings Anthony down to Lynne's apartment. However, even if Sarah and David are not home, Alondra will sometimes still bring Anthony down to Lynne's apartment because she enjoys playing David's video games. This is the exposition that has been given to me.

After she tells me about the babysitter, I had asked her if she liked the job, and she says, "Well, it's a job." I then ask her how far into the city it is, and she says not too far, that taking the bus gets her there in about twenty minutes. "You take the bus?," I ask her. "Yeah," she replies. "How come you don't take your car?" She laughs and reminds me that she has to get it fixed first. "How ironic, one of the reasons I needed the job was to fix an already dying car, and when I do get it, the car that was suppose to take me there gives up," she says.

"That is pretty funny," I reply, "you can borrow mine until you get yours fixed if you want." She looks at me, I'm not sure if she's confused or delighted, then asks, "You have a car?" "Well not here right now, but I have one just sitting somewhere in a parking garage," I reply. "How come I never see it?," she asks. "It's cheaper to not use it. Anywhere I need to go is usually in walking distance, and if it's not, the bus will take me there," I reply. She looks at the ground, then tells me she's grateful for the offer but that she doesn't mind taking the bus. "Come on, I can't let you stand out there in that cold waiting for the bus to come. Especially when you don't have to," I say. "No really, it's not that big of a problem and I really wouldn't feel comfortable taking your car," she replies.

I look at her and say "Well I tried," and we both laugh. She looks at the ground again, and I can tell she hates taking the bus; like most of us, she probably hates waiting for it the most. I had tried my best to lend a helping hand, but it appears she doesn't like getting

in the way of others.

She looks back up after the brief pause and says “I have an idea!” “Okay,” I say. “I know you just want to help, but I don't want to just completely take the car, so what if you just drive me there and back? That way you have your car here and can use it as well when you need it. And I'll help pay for gas.”

I think for a moment, and even though that would probably actually be more work on my part, I laugh and agree. “Sounds like a good idea to me, but you'll have to drive when we are both in the car since I don't have a driver's license,” I reply, “and obviously I'll just have to follow the rules of the road when I'm taking the car back home and coming to pick you up.”

Smiles and social fragments are passed around and then she tells me that she will give me her schedule at the beginning of the week so I know which days she is working and at what times. Before she leaves, she starts walking towards me and gives me a hug, then says “I'm really happy to have you be a part of my life,” to which I reply, laughing as I say it, “Yes, you are indeed very fortunate.”

The next day, I call Brandon, a mild friend who I had previously let borrow my car. I ask him if the car is still in the parking garage and he says yes, that the last time he used it was about six months ago. In the night time, I walk to the bus stop through the bitter cold and the dirty snow and wait for the bus to come. After a long time, it arrives, and sooner or later I find myself entering the parking garage and standing before an object from my previous life.

An object that I wanted nothing to do with, but because of a reoccurring messiah complex, needed to metaphorically save a friend from long evil sidewalks in relentless evil weather.

I take off the blue tarp and to my delight, the car is not very dirty. Thank you Branden, such a kind soul.

I get the engine started after a few tries and then begin my drive back home, of course meticulously following the rules of the road. On the way I get more gas, and after a while I am finally home. I park my car in my parking space and enter my apartment. After opening the door, on the ground I find a piece of paper, and after reading it, realize it's Lynne's schedule. The next time she would be working is the day after tomorrow.

Tired from the day's few events, I go to lay down on my bed and immediately close my eyes. The blackness you see after closing your eyes, but before truly falling asleep and beginning to dream, I had always called that “Black Therapy,” a sort of therapeutic conversation you have with yourself.

During my black therapy, I think about the ironic chair that changes these people who

sit on it, these same people who wanted to change the world. I think about how the real way to change the world is to destroy the chair itself. To break its bones with objects of metal anger. Before this black therapy can evolve, though, I fall asleep.

In the morning I wake up to a knocking door. When I answer it, I see Lynne who seems to be dressed for work, but on the piece of paper she had given me, it said she wasn't working until tomorrow.

"I know the slip said I work tomorrow but someone quit today and they need me to fill in, I saw what I'm assuming to be your car in the parking lot so I was wondering if you wouldn't mind taking me today?," she asks.

"Of course I don't mind," I reply. I tell her that I'd be disappointed if the car wasn't used and jokingly say that I might demand that she meet a certain quota each month for car usage.

I hand her the keys so that she can start the car up and then I go to my bathroom to wash my face. I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror, and it reminds me of a downtown city hotel.

After a few minutes I leave my apartment and then the apartment building and in the distance I can see smoke coming out of my car's exhaust pipe. As I get closer I notice that Lynne is sitting on the passenger side. I go to the passenger side and knock on her window and she rolls it down. "You're driving, remember" I say.

She slides over to the driver's seat and I then enter the car and we start our voyage. Phrases like "I really appreciate this," "Thank you so much," "This is a big help," are often said during the drive. I knew she hated taking the bus.

When we're halfway there she asks me if I will know my way back, and I tell her that it won't be a problem. Finally we reach her place of employment, Famous Max's Diner. I'm not sure why, but the name seemed familiar.

"Well, this is me," she says as she laughs. I laugh as well and say "Nice knowing you, you can get out now." She laughs again and pushes my shoulder as she says "You know you could ask nicely." "Please, put your hand on that doorknob and pull," I continue to joke. She laughs one last time and then tells me what time she is finished with work.

Before she gets out of the car, she kisses my cheek, and the moment after that, after she's gone, I feel as if a solution of regret had been injected into my veins. House was a children's game I had never liked playing.

Hours go by and I drive back to Famous Max's to pick up Lynne. During the drive back, we don't talk much, but I do notice that it appears her eye color was a lighter color. The same color, but a lighter shade.

In the past I had heard about people claiming that their eyes changed colors with their

mood, but I had always suspected they were misinformed. That their eye color only seemed to change colors due to different angles and lighting circumstances. Whether that is true or not is irrelevant right now, because I know for a fact that Lynne has been seeing brighter days.

Detective Fields, along with his partner, Michael Samson, and two other police officers in uniform arrive at the residence of Triggerfinger in two unmarked police cars. Because the commissioner of the police department has expressed his concerns about cops being killed in the line of duty, Lieutenant Merrils insisted that Fields take other officers into the field for assistance, and that they all be aware at all times.

The four enforcers of law exit their vehicles and Samson tells the two uniformed officers to go around back to cover any possible exits, but because they are not certain if Triggerfinger is guilty of murder, not one of them knows what to expect. Fields reminds them all that they are just here to talk.

“Mom where's the remote?,” Triggerfinger yells out. “You the only one who watches the T.V. boy, look for it,” she replies. As Triggerfinger gets up to begin his search for the lost remote, he sees Fields and Samson walking towards the apartment building, and the only thing he can think of is how one of the bullets from his gun killed a little girl.

He panics and runs through the apartment towards his gun. After he gets his gun, he immediately runs out the back door and into an alley where he sees two police officers in uniform. In the past, most criminals knew better than to shoot at officers of the law because of the severe consequences that followed, but the past is the past and today belongs to the youth.

Triggerfinger, never failing to live up to his nickname, immediately starts shooting at the two police officers as he runs away. Fields and Samson hear these shots and immediately draw their firearms. Any people who are in the area are now paying attention to their surroundings.

The two officers take cover and then draw their firearms as well, but at this time, Triggerfinger is long gone. Fields and Samson now appear in the same alley as the uniformed officers and notice that they are hiding behind garbage cans. “Which way?,” Samson asks. One of the uniforms points in the direction they saw Triggerfinger run.

“Okay you two go between these buildings, Samson and I will tail the suspect,” Fields says. All four of them slowly engage their duties, checking all corners and making sure their partner isn't one breath away from Heaven or Hell, however, none of this matters, because when Samson reaches the end of the alley and looks out into the street, he sees that Triggerfinger has been hit by a school bus and is laying on the ground surrounded by other people.

Fields calls for an ambulance as he and Samson run up to Triggerfinger, but it appears that he is as good as dead. A few seconds go by and an angered Fields puts away his weapon as he hears his now unnecessary backup's sirens in the distance.

When it is all over, Triggerfinger is pronounced dead and his firearm is collected as evidence, which would later be proved to be the gun that killed Brittney Morrison. Since there were no bullets found inside Samantha Morrison's body, the police would unofficially assume that Triggerfinger had killed them both in an attempt to kill Malcolm Carson, even though it was actually Rock who had killed Samantha, and was now feeling regret for the life he lead.

Some people say that children are the only innocent people in the world, and that when they are gone, the world will burn. The irony is that Triggerfinger was but a child himself.

Chapter 58

THE EMERALD CITY

1:2:6:58

ONE one-hundredths of a century ago, I had a particularly interesting dream. Before the dream, however, I had been resting on my favorite couch watching my favorite channel. Every once in a while I wondered if the people reporting the news suffered from euphoria, the fear of good news, but every so often I would be reminded that they didn't.

Every so often, I'd hear about how an eighteen year-old beat cancer, how a child caught a football from one of the professional players at a football game, and when she saw that another child was sad that he didn't catch it, she gave it to him. I'd hear about people risking their lives to save another, a man standing up for a woman when an ignorant person spat on her religion.

These uplifting stories, they are out there, but what it seems like to me is that the people reporting the news don't report them as often because the general public is more affected by the stories that bring you down, and thus almost appear to generate more interest.

You might find yourself digging deeper to learn more about the death of someone you knew long ago more-so than digging deeper to learn about the birth of a non-immediate relative. Then again, most newborns aren't buried.

By now I had fallen asleep and was dreaming. In the dream I am in someone else's apartment, waiting for them to come home. The only thing this person has in their apartment is music. No food, no bed, no books, no tables or chairs, just a pile of music.

Something like this makes you wonder if it's how much value a person puts into a single entity that defines them as a person. What is the one thing in the world Joe would refuse to live without? If Joe wakes up and finds that he has lost every thing, what would he miss most?

The door opens and I hide in one of the rooms. The person walks in and stands still for about a minute, and then goes to sit down in the corner of the living room, perhaps to sleep. After a while I walk out and try to say something to him, but I can't. That's when I realize that I have no mouth thanks to a shotgun of my past.

I was confused because I had remembered a white shade that took off my bandage and allowed me to speak, but now, once again, I couldn't speak.

The man in the corner of the room looks up, then he stands up and simply stares at me. He's completely dressed in black and to say he had the demeanor of a mysterious man would be a serious understatement.

We both stand there, and then he puts his hand inside his coat. Because of all the sinful things I had heard about him doing, I assumed he was pulling out a weapon of

some sort to do me harm. Instead, he pulls out a lower face of a human head; lips, jawbone, chin, teeth, every thing. He throws it at me and I catch it, and then he tells me to put it on, and I do.

“Did you piece my face back together?,” I ask. “It's not your face,” he replies. He sees the confused look on my face and continues to speak, “Your face was never gone to begin with, but since you believed it was, it was.” I'm still confused, so he's still talking. “This is a fragile world. I gave you a mouth because you believed you didn't have one, and so now you do because you believe I gave you one.”

While I'm still mentally digesting what he's telling me, I ask him, “Why do you do these bad things that you do?” “What bad things do I do?,” he asks me back. I know that he knows exactly what I'm talking about, so I divert. I begin to speak, “You and me, we are alike. We both know the truth about birth and death, the truth about the power of belief,” “What is this truth?,” he interrupts. “You yourself said this is a fragile world, and in a fragile world such as this one, where belief is every thing, if you simply choose to believe that your death cannot occur, then it will not occur.”

“Is optional immortality such a bad thing?,” he asks me. “No, it's not,” I reply, “but when someone like you has this power, a person who preys on the un-optionally immortal and does as he pleases with absolutely no consequences, they must be put down.”

A grin grows on his face, “And how do you intend to put me down?” This reminds me about what the white shade had told me, how the only way to truly defeat the man covered in darkness was to convince him the error of his ways. Brutality was pointless.

I remember the white shade sitting me down and telling me that people died because they believed in death, because they had heard so much about it. Because unlike birth, they had to prepare for it. My question is, how do you convince a man to do good deeds when there is no threat or reward of an afterlife.

“If you let me, I will show you the satisfaction of charity,” I say. Something I said must have ticked him off because he starts to walk forward, and when he gets close enough, he takes a swing at my face that knocks me down. He hovers over my body, continuing to punch my face, and after the first few punches, I can already feel my jaw denting inwards. As he's punching me, he says “There are no high horses around here,” then his punches get harder, “The rain falls on the just and the unjust alike.”

A few punches later, he stops for a moment to catch his breath, and then says, “If you want to spar with me, you better take your gloves off.” He delivers one final punch that completely breaks my jaw, and then he stands up. He walks over to his music and begins to play something, but I can't completely hear it because I'm fading away. Slowly, the pain becomes more and more overwhelming and my eyes begin to close.

Right before I wake up, as my eyes are closing due to the intense pain, I notice spray-paint on the ceiling. "Welcome to the emerald city." Seattle.

What was unusually interesting to me was the concept of death, primarily his death. He basically tells me that he cannot die, not unless he wants to, but the truth is he already has. The moment anyone finds out that they can live forever, they will experience a sort of spiritual death. That person who you used to be for so long seemingly disappears, and with that spiritual death comes a spiritual birth. He is indeed alive, but his past life is gone forever.

Whether he can dig up his past life or not is a mystery, but after you've seen the writing on the wall, it's very difficult to return to a life where death hovers above your soul. A car, some money, maybe a significant other, things like these become background noise and the only thing that really matters is your spiritual birth, and what you will choose to do from then on.

Abraham Lincoln said if you wanted to test a man's character, you had to give him power. The man dressed in black has all the power he could ever wish for and then some, and he has chosen to become what he has become. I sometimes wonder which way the world would tilt if everyone believed in belief, and every person's character was put to the test.

About two months later I have another dream on the same dreamline. I'm back at the office with the white shade, wondering if my efforts to stop the man of darkness are worth it. "What if all this is just a dream?," I ask the white shade. "And what if it is?," it replies.

"Then none of this matters. If he kills someone, it doesn't matter because it's not real," I reply. The white shade thinks for a second, and then he says to me, "You are saying a dreamworld does not have real events because you are comparing it to another world which you have been told does have real events, but the lack of belief and value in the dreamworld should not automatically credit this other world."

The white shade starts to tell me about how either world's events, depending on your character, are equally important or equally unimportant. "If you live your life in the dreamworld, and there you find that your son has died, will you not grieve?," he asks me, "If a loved one betrays you, will you not feel?"

"I get it, I get it," I reply, "but if this is a dreamworld, his actions are not affecting me and the pain he causes in his victims' lives is not real." "You do not get it, because you are still gray." His color reference confuses me, but he continues to speak, "Do you truly believe that because you cannot see or touch or feel the pains of his victims, that they are simply non-existent? You probably do, yet in this supposed 'realworld,' when you hear about a woman being stabbed to death, even though you have no connection with her

whatsoever, you probably hoped that her death was quick and with little pain.” He looks at me for a few seconds, then asks, “Why should the death of a woman in one world be more important than the death of the same woman in another?”

The both of us stop talking for a little while and then he tells me that he has something to tell me, that there is another entity that he had not yet told me about. “There is a black shade, who unlike me, believes that all events in any world are equally unimportant.” Suddenly his color reference starts to make sense.

“In our past lives, we both had a certain duty to our community; I had to guide new life into our world, which often made me smile and believe that good things are all around us, and he had to guide those who had died to their eternal resting place, and of course because he knew a life of death, he had a sorrowful way about him.”

“How come you got the better job?,” I ask. “When we are old enough, there is a room that holds our biggest fear that we must enter. When I opened the door to my room, it was filled with emeralds. When the black shade opened his, it was completely empty. Some of us thought that he was maybe fearless, others thought that he was maybe fearful of leading an empty life.”

Kathleen crosses the street and makes her way to her desired place of worship. Just before she opens the door to her church, she passes by the church's sign which reads “Patience is a virtue.”

As she walks up the stairs, the singing and the praising of the Lord gets louder and the words being sung become more clear. Finally she reaches the top and finds a place to sit. One of the other church members glance at her and smile, and then goes back to her singing. The shouts of innocent men and women whose goal is to let God know they are still here and they are still willing.

After the singing is over, the pastor begins to speak. “Not too long ago, we all suffered not one, but two losses.” The pastor looks in the direction of Samantha and Brittney Morrison's mother and father. “And while we cried, we demanded answers. We demanded justice.” He pauses. “Just a few days ago, we received one but not the other. No justice for the two beautiful girls who were taken by our Lord way too early. No justice for their parents or those who loved them. Instead, we find out that the criminal who killed them was just another child, not even much older than the girls themselves. We find out that he too, lost his life. We may not know why or how, but any one of us can guess that he is no longer here because of drugs and gangs, these vicious concepts that drain the life out of our children.” “Amen,” a man in the front row says.

The pastor continues, “I know every one of you goes to sleep each night wondering when things are going to get better, when things are going to return to how they used to be, and while I can't give you the exact date on when that's going to happen, I can tell you

that God is still watching over us every moment of every day.”

The pastor continues to speak for about an hour, eventually ending his sermon by telling his listeners about how the Bible speaks more about the bad way than the good.

When the service is over and every one is talking, Kathleen walks over to the pastor and they begin to talk. The pastor asks her about her diabetes and if management is going well. Kathleen tells him that she's getting by and wishes that he would pray for her. The pastor tells her that she is always in his prayers.

Later that Sunday, during the night time, Kathleen finds herself tossing and turning in her bed, never really able to fall asleep. She sits up from the frustration, then gets up and walks towards one of the windows in the house. She lifts up the window and a familiar sound comes through the window. The empty sound of the night street, the blind passage of air. It's not much to hear, but it's there. It's always there. The musical oxygen satisfies Kathleen, and she pulls up a chair next to the window to hear more.

“Mikey said he heard that the cops had him trapped, and when they started shooting at him he just tried to make a run for it and that's when he got hit by the bus,” Derek says to a curious Wallace. “He said the cops shot first?,” Wallace asks. “Nah he didn't say that exactly but it seems like every one who was there said they heard shots and you know how the cops here are,” Derek replies. “Cops have rules though, they can't just start shooting at people,” Wallace says, “And Trig, he always had his finger on a trigger.”

Derek hears someone shout his name, and when he looks up, he sees a man in the distance raising up his hand with two fingers sticking out. Derek then retires to a pile of hidden drugs and retrieves two vials. The man who did the shouting sends a customer towards Derek's way, and Derek hands him the two vials, and then goes back to talking with Wallace.

“Yeah anyway man, now's the time to step up. Maybe I can take Trig's spot,” Wallace says, thinking of the handgun he received from Rock. “That shit is tough man, have you even ever seen a dead body before?,” Derek asks Wallace. “Nah,” Wallace replies. As much as Wallace wants to defend himself, he doesn't, and at this moment, the two begin to think of their near futures.

About a block away, Mya Jackson is sitting in an unmarked police vehicle watching the actions of these two young men. She has been for the last couple of hours. About forty-five minutes later, Derek and Wallace part ways and Derek begins his walk home. Mya decides to head back to the station with her notes to add to the board of individuals who are suspected to be involved in the drug trade.

Derek arrives home to find Spider sitting on the couch speaking on the telephone. After Spider hangs up the phone, Spider tells Derek that if he wants to stay with him, he has to call his family every once in a while. That they have been calling way too much

wondering about him and how he's doing. Derek agrees, and then Spider hands him mail that had been delivered to him. Derek immediately realizes that the letter is from the narrator.

“You ever seen this guy?,” Mya asks Frank. Frank looks at the picture. “No, who is he?,” Frank asks. “I'm not sure but he must be new. Today's the first time I've seen him,” she replies. Frank notices another picture on the table, it is a picture of Derek. “Who's the kid?,” Frank asks. “Not sure either, but this guy,” Mya says as she points to the unknown individual in the first picture, “he's yelling out to the kid to go get the ordered number of drugs.”

Scott Merils opens the door to his office and looks into the room of police officers, scanning the entire room for detective Wilson. He sees Wilson sitting at his desk speaking on the phone. “Wilson!,” he shouts, “in my office!” He leaves the door open and then quickly returns to his chair.

About twenty seconds later, Winston appears at the office door. “Yes, sir?,” Winston asks Merils. Merils laughs and says “I said Wilson not Winston.” Winston leaves and lets Wilson know that Merils needs to speak to him.

“Wilson sit down,” Merils says. After Wilson sits down, Merils asks him if he's any closer to finding the son of a bitch who left them thirteen bodies to clean up after. Wilson says, “I've tried several different angles, I've even considered it being a serial killer.” “Well it is, isn't it?,” Merils interrupts.

“Well, yes, I guess, but because all of the identified victims thus far are related to gangs or drugs somehow, I'm inclined to see it as gang and drug violence. Not necessarily one sole individual with homicidal tendencies, but maybe a few drug dealers with motive and opportunity.”

Merils thinks for a moment, and then Wilson continues. “We've gotten positive IDs on most of the bodies so we are trying to find a connection between them.” Suddenly the phone rings and Merils answers it. “Lieutenant Merils,” he says. “Yes captain,” he continues to speak as he gives Wilson a thumbs up, signaling that their discussion is over and that he may leave the room.

Wilson begins walking back to his desk, but before he gets there, from a distance he can see the mounting pile of paperwork he left behind before he found himself in Merils's office. He stops himself in the middle of the aisle, then turns around and heads for the exit.

Moments later he is driving down a street that will take him to the abandoned apartment building that previously housed thirteen corpses. When he finally gets there and he steps out of his vehicle, the only sounds he can hear is the crushing of the snow beneath his dress shoes and the sound of the cold wind. No one around to ask questions.

In fact, if you asked an expert who studied this small abandoned part of town, they might tell you that for the last two years, people didn't really live around here, they just passed through.

Wilson walks towards the abandoned apartment building and opens the door that is deteriorating in health. He walks inside to find that the bad smell is still there, and unlike the dying door, is still very much alive and living well. He looks around for a while, hoping to find something that he or the others who looked through here may have missed. The first floor does not speak to him much, but when he goes up to the second floor, he finds water leaking from the ceiling.

He walks over to the puddle of snow-water, but this discovery is of no real value to the case. Wilson looks up again at the leaking ceiling, and then gets the impulse to go up onto the roof.

Because it is a small building that is intended to only house two families, there is no fire escape to take to up to the roof. Instead, Wilson has to stand on the edge of a window ledge and pull himself up to reach the roof.

As he is pulling himself up, he immediately sees a small cardboard box in a corner of the roof. After he's lifted himself up and after he catches his breath he begins to walk towards the small box. Detective Wilson should be touching any potential evidence to a case with a pair of gloves, but unfortunately he left them in his vehicle.

"Fuck it," he says, and he opens the box with his coat. Inside he finds that the box is filled with broken toothpicks. He stares at them for a long time but can't understand the image.

After a while he looks up, and not too far away, he sees a playground set. Like the door, this playground is also dying, but even moreso beginning to decay. For a moment, Wilson wonders if he is seeing the same thing that the killer or killers had seen. He had seen the playground before, but not like this.

Wilson gets another impulse and decides to search the playground for any possible clues or evidence. Nineteen minutes into the search, he begins looking through a recycling bin. There he finds a bunch of documents, but more importantly, he finds a few unbroken toothpicks and a receipt for three boxes of toothpicks purchased from a store called Chase Mart. Interestingly enough, the date on the receipt indicates the toothpicks were purchased around the same time the murders were discovered.

Wilson prays that this receipt belonged to the killer or at least one of the killers, and begins to thank God that garbage trucks no longer passed through here. He also prematurely thanks the person who recycled the receipt for having the notion that all trash and recycling bins are regularly emptied everywhere.

Wilson calls Rousseau, his partner. "We need to collect some evidence at the thirteen

crime scene,” he says. Rousseau arrives with another officer of the law and she helps them collect the potential evidence, and then Wilson and Rousseau begin their drive towards Chase street while she returns to the police station with the box of broken toothpicks and all of the contents of the recycling bin.

Wilson and Rousseau park right outside of Chase Mart. As Rousseau is exiting the vehicle he sees the narrator exiting Chase Mart with Sarah, who is attempting to open a bag of candy.

Wilson and Rousseau finally enter Chase Mart and begin to walk towards the clerk. Wilson and Rousseau properly identify themselves as police officers to the clerk, and then Wilson says, “I know this may seem out of the blue, but do you recall a customer purchasing exactly three boxes of toothpicks?” The clerk informs the officers that he had only just recently begun his employment at Chase Mart, and that they were better off speaking to the store owner.

The store owner, however, had already been listening since the officers first began to identify themselves. “You are talking about Mr. Toothpick,” the store owner says as he walks out from the back room.

“Mr. Toothpick?” Wilson asks. The store owner laughs and says, “Yes, that's my nickname for him. Not only does he love them, he's shaped like one as well.” “You wouldn't happen to know anything else about him, would you?” Rousseau asks. “What do you mean?” the store owner replies. “Well we'd like to talk to him. You probably don't know his name or where he lives but could you possibly tell us how often he comes here or how he pays?” Rousseau asks. “At least once a week. Sometimes he'll buy food and other things, but sometimes he will only buy three boxes of toothpicks, and he only uses cash,” the store owner replies. “Is he into some kind of trouble?” the store owner continues. “No, we just need to talk with him,” Wilson replies.

“I'm not even sure if I would want to know what he's into if he was,” the store owner laughs. Wilson points at a security camera in the corner, “That doesn't work right?” he asks the store owner. “Hasn't in two years,” the store owner replies. “Of course,” Wilson thinks to himself.

“Can you give us a basic description of him?” Rousseau asks. The store owner pauses. “Well he's your average white male, except he's a bit tall and very underweight. No facial hair, black hair I think, brown eyes.” “No identifying marks? Something like a tattoo or a birth mark?” Rousseau asks. “No, nothing like that I don't think.”

The two detectives ask for the names of the clerk and the store owner and then give the working men their cards should anything arise, and then they leave the store. Two days later, two uniformed police officers are sent out to take turns staking out Chase Mart at the request of Wilson.

I finish filling up the basket with my dirty laundry and then make my way towards the apartment building's basement. One by one I put each article of clothing into the washing machine, but I pause for a brief moment when I see a shirt that I had bought about three years before.

Traveling the world, not necessarily to find myself but to find peace, I found myself somewhere in Thailand when I came across an old woman selling t-shirts. I asked her about this one, and she told me that this was a shirt that warded off evil spirits.

I have never been the type to actively believe in spirits when I'm in my right mind, but at that particular time in my life, I found it very interesting and that led me to purchase it. I can honestly say, though, as far as I can remember, I've never found myself in an evil situation whenever I have it on.

I continue to fill the washer with clothes and as I'm doing this I hear two or more people coming down the stairs. Eventually I see that it is Lynne and her daughter who have come to get some things from their storage. They had been bringing up various items that they had completely forgotten about.

After I finish, I initiate the wash and then proceed to help them. Two trips, I had the task of bringing up four paintings. I had almost forgotten that she loved to paint. Sometimes you wake up between a dream and a memory and your biggest fear about death isn't death itself, but the possibility that after you die, you come right back.

After we're done, I stay in their apartment for a little while and notice that David is playing one of his games again. In the game he is the main character and a superhero. It's the complex, and it can even get you at an early age.

I tell him that I hope he is able to save all the people, but I'm not sure he heard me, then I go into Lynne's room where she is putting up her paintings.

"Did you paint these?" I ask. "No," she says, "I'm not this good." The painting she is currently putting up is that of a Sun rising over a city. I find it funny because every time I think of a sunrise I think of the Sun rising over a body of water.

"You want to know something funny," she asks me. "I've never actually watched a sunrise," she continues, then laughs. "Liar," I reply. "I'm serious. I've seen them but I've never actually watched one," she says. "Well it's not like it's anything life changing," I reply.

The next painting is lying on her bed, but I can't figure out what it is. When she goes to grab it I ask her what it is, and she tells me it's a painting of a joker, a beggar and a thief. This one I find especially interesting.

God once told me about the beginning of his existence. He tells me about how it's been a while since he's completed the project, and one day as he's watching over it, he comes across a life that is on its knees with its arms in the air, asking if there is anyone

out there. He tells me that people had wondered about him before, but not like this man. Those are his words.

The Lord never tells me if he ever answered the man, but he does tell me that the man, later on in his life, devotes his life to the idea that after he dies, he will meet the entity that created every thing around him. His firm belief in this causes him to prepare for this meeting, and when people ask him about his rituals, he tells them about his faith. Some of the people he tells simply do not understand, but those who have also wondered about what is beyond the little white dots in the sky are immediately drawn in by what he has to say, and they too begin to prepare for their own separate meeting with their maker.

I ask the Lord if this man is the reason why we have churches today, and he answers “Yes and no.” He tells me that a number of random events occurred in this man's life and eventually led him to wonder. Then he tells me that this was happening to people all over the world, that regardless of this man, all people would wonder and eventually something would happen.

His prime example was a story about a little girl who met God for the first time in a field full of fear.

This little girl comes home a bit early after working in the fields with her brother and her mother rewards her with an apple, but when her mother isn't looking, she takes two apples. As she is returning to the fields to rejoin her brother, it begins to rain, and then she hears thunder. Later on she finds that her brother had been struck and killed by a tree that had fallen over.

The naive little girl immediately begins to wonder if her action of thievery cost her brother his life. A concept of karma or some form of discipline coupled with the knowledge of good and evil start to dance around in her mind, and this is when she begins to wonder. But what really puts the icing on the cake, what really makes her afraid, is when she is kneeling over her dead brother, and in the sky, she sees a cloud that almost looks like a hand.

After he's done with his story, he laughs and tells me that he had nothing to do with it. I guess this was just one of those things you had to credit to coincidence. I always ask myself, if it had been another human being who killed her brother, would she still have found God? Often times I find myself reading past dreams and asking the same questions, and even though the question is the same, I always find a new answer.

“No, she would not find God because she would not connect her theft with something so supernatural such as the murder of her brother.” “Yes, she would find God because the murder of her brother would have such a profound effect on her it would cause her to wonder.” There are so many of these.

“Yes, Jesus portrays a form of nihilism.” “No, because the row of parked cars, while

it may reach an intersection and pause for a brief moment, will eventually start again with another row of cars to reflect the image of life and the dot on the circle.” “Yes, but only because the thieves are borderline-communist under their own rules and mainly steal from the undeserving to give to the deserving.” “No, however, a person's violent urges can very well manifest in their dreams.” “Yes, while God and Satan are usually definite representations of good and evil, they appear to be indefinable in their stories.”

After Lynne puts up the painting, I move in closer to get a better view of it, and I realize how astounding the detail of the painting is. Julia had always said that in her writing, she always tried to not be over-descriptive. That she wanted each person to create their own unique world. Where one may see a character with black hair, another may see the same character with blonde hair. These are her words, and while I do agree with her, looking at this painting makes me wonder if that is the best choice. This painting wouldn't be the same without the intense level of detail.

I leave her apartment and on the way to mine I see Tao knocking on my door. “What's up?,” I ask. I invite him in, a place he hadn't been to in a while. I find out that Tao was feeling the blues because his job let him go. Bad employment rate in a bad city. I guess Tao has white blood; angry about the situation but wants to talk about it to get it out of his system. That's exactly what he does. He talks and talks, and as uninterested as I am, this is at least good for karma for me.

Sometimes I feel as if my friendship with Tao was created from a joke. Kind of like how you can bump into someone in a bank while waiting in line, say your sorrys, and then when the bank is being robbed a minute later, when you see that person again, they are your only friend.

Eventually Tao goes home, still sick with the blues, but all I could really tell him is that everyone gets it and everyone gets over it. Well, most do. Some common colds are fatal.

After he leaves I go to my bedroom and lie on my bed with the intention to sleep. During this black therapy session, I think about my life and all of the important events that led me to be here right now in this moment in time; probably something you've done many times before as well.

A few hours later, after I've fallen asleep, I wake up in the middle of the night gasping for air. This is not the first time it's happened, and it won't be the last. About half of a year after I started writing down my dreams, for a short while, they became more intense. Intense enough to make me stop breathing.

The nightmare I'd woken up from was Silvio killing his ex-family. He walks into the apartment building, goes up the flight of stairs and then walks straight to Lynne's apartment door. Somehow he opens the door, and afterwards he walks into Lynne's room.

He takes out a chef's knife and hovers over Lynne's lifeless body. The first stab is directly in the center of her chest and it goes right through her heart. The silver knife cuts her flesh wide open and the dark red blood squirts out as the lifeless body comes to life.

Her eyes are wide open, and when she realizes what is happening, she tries to scream but Silvio's big hand is already over her mouth. She is too weak and too small to fight back. With his hand over her mouth, he viciously stabs her twenty-six more times until she has finally died.

With bloody clothes, bloody hands and a bloody knife, he walks into the children's room. He walks over to the side of the bed where David sleeps, and he puts his hand over David's small mouth. David follows in the footsteps of his mother. Open eyes, try to scream, you're dead before you know it.

After he kills David, he walks around the bed to Sarah's side. He puts his hands over her small mouth and then he stabs her, but she does not open her eyes. He continues to stab her, and that's when the emotions from the dream overwhelms me and I wake up unable to breathe.

Of course now I'm wide awake pacing through my living room telling myself it was just a dream, but I've heard too much about bad omens and about dreams foretelling the future.

I open the door to my apartment and look down the hallway, then I look at Lynne's apartment door. A few minutes later I find myself walking, continually pacing through the second floor's hallway from end to end, not knowing how I got there or why I had started.

When I realize this, and I calm down, I walk to the top of the staircase that leads to the third floor and stare out of a window that gives you a view of a nearby street. It must have started snowing during the night.

After I've had enough of the view I sit down at the top of the staircase and think about the nightmare again, hoping that Boris doesn't come home from his graveyard shift to find me sitting here like a crazy person.

I sit there for a while, and after enough time I start falling in and out of sleep, periodically traveling between both worlds. I had already decided to stay seated just in case both worlds collide and the very unlikely event of Silvio showing up actually occurred.

Some time goes by, I'm not sure how much, but the time comes when I find myself laughing about something Sarah told me a few weeks earlier. I remember her telling me about a bully she had at her school, and how one time she saw this bully sitting in a corner crying.

Seeing a child trying to explain a story or tell you about something that happened to

them is often funny because they sometimes lack the vocabulary to do so, and then is sometimes paired with stuttering, but all is always well because where the child lacks, they make up for it with great enthusiasm. Physical gestures, facial expressions. Who needs vocabulary?

I would bet Sarah remembers the image of seeing a bully cry so vividly because it was something that she had never seen before, and because her logic tells her that a big and mean person crying simply does not make sense and is never suppose to happen, but the fact of the matter is anyone can fall to emotion no matter their size; just because you're bigger doesn't mean you don't get as jealous. Many times have I seen giants cry in my dreams.

The sound of an opening door below me wakes me up a bit, and I'm almost sure it's Boris. I get up and begin to time when I will start walking back down the stairs. After I hear the person walking up the stairs, I begin to walk down, and when I reach the bottom of the stairs and I see who it is, I realize that I have found God's message in a bottle.

In some of my dreams, I am told by many people many stories of mythology and folklore. One of the legends is a story about God being unable to communicate with people, so one day, after many failed attempts of trying to contact us, he writes a message on a piece of paper and then puts it in a bottle and floats it out to sea. Peculiar story, but it's a fragile world; tell someone a story and they just might believe it.

The same person who tells me this story, he tells me that whenever someone witnesses something beyond a miracle, something so bizarre or something so great, the only proper definition to define the witnessing is to metaphorically state that this witness has found the very message that God himself had written.

Seeing Silvio in very near proximity unconsciously forces me to wonder if God is infact still watching over us, and my belief that he has forgotten about us is slowly changing direction. I know that I have strange dreams, who doesn't, but now I know that I have a stranger life.

"You again," Silvio says to me. "Yeah, I get around," I reply with half closed eyes. Silvio finishes walking up the steps so that he is eye-level with me and that's when I smell the alcohol on him.

"Because of you my buddy got picked up," he says as he starts to walk pass me, "You'll get what's coming to you but today I'm not here for you," he continues as he gets closer and closer to Lynne's door.

"Are you sure that's a good idea?," I say as Silvio is about to begin knocking on the door. Silvio puts his arms down and looks at me, "It's the middle of the night," I say. He is unusually calm, I am as usual calm, but this isn't surprising considering he's half-drunk and I'm half-asleep.

Silvio raises his arm, and while he's still looking at me, he's knocks on Lynne's door as hard as he can. I walk towards him and grab his arm to stop the knocking, and as I'm doing this he starts to laugh. After he agrees to stop knocking, he tells me that he just wants to see Sarah and David.

I tell him that I would tell Lynne that he came by, and if she wanted to let him see the children then he could. That's when, as any normal human being would, he gets severely ticked off. "What do you mean if?," he begins to yell. He starts ranting so I tell him to shut up, be quiet, keep it down. That ticks him off even more and that's when the anger switch flips on and he starts pushing me like I'm the enemy. Like I'm the one in a relationship with his ex-wife now.

So he's mad, and now I'm mad, and now we're in a scuffle. We go back and forth for a long while until I finally get the headlock in and drag him towards the stairs, and then I throw him down the stairs. I can't deal with this type of shit.

I walk down the stairs and at this moment I don't really care if he's hurt or not; this bitch deserves a few black and blues of his own. I pick him up, open the front door and then drag him outside, and that's when I see a police officer walking towards us. He tells me to let go of Silvio, so I do, and then Silvio gets up on his feet and the both of us look like we're about to be sent to the principal's office.

Later on, I find out that Lynne had already been awake because of one of David's night terrors. As she's trying to comfort her son, she hears the loud banging on her door and then realize Silvio and I are speaking outside. She calls the police and informs them that her restraining order is being violated, and that's when they come and find Silvio and I outside. Silvio explains to the two police officers about how his visiting was without ill will and how they are only separated and are working on things, but they arrest him nonetheless after they speak with Lynne. My question is how is it possible to get a restraining order on someone you are legally married to.

A while back Tao asked me a question that concerned the murder of Silvio. In the Academy of Sid, I learned that in over ninety-nine percent of the case, if there is no body, then there is no murder. He tells me that if I kill someone, get rid of the body so there is little chance of an investigation. Of course I will never kill Silvio, though; I'm just not that disconnected and I am not the one who decides who gets to live and who gets to die.

During my travelings, under a very dark night, I came across a man who was burning garbage in a small field. When I asked him what he was doing, he told me that he was burning all of the waste that everyone had dumped there. The fire of course was attractive, but the man's actions left something to be desired. Staring into the fire, it tells me that we must all die because we are born, and we must all be born again because we died.

On my way back, after I was tired of traveling, I met a woman who prayed for my soul after I told her that I had stopped going to church. How does one pray for a soul that has already been lost? So many different people from all walks of life from all over the world that many of us will never meet, but if by chance you do, many of them will be people you'll never see again.

Chapter 59

DUOLOGY OF MAN

1:2:6:59

MOST of us have at least one addiction or obsession throughout our lifetime that we prefer to keep hidden. We lock it away in hopes of keeping it a secret because if anyone ever found out about it, it could completely change the way that person thinks of you. We avoid this strange case by doing our best to keep it hidden, but when you think long enough about it, I'm sure, almost positive, that everyone's strongest desire and the thing they always have on their mind is to just simply be free. To be free of it all. These are the words of a therapist I was suggested to see many years ago. "Money can't buy life." Those are the last words of a dying musician.

It's Monday afternoon and there's a knock on my door. When I open it I see Tao. "Hey you know Jack right?," he asks me. "Jack who?" Tao points behind him in the direction of Joe's old apartment. "Jack Booth?" "Yeah yeah, that guy," he says.

Tao tells me that he and Jack had become friends and that Jack had invited him to the opening of a sort of bar Jack's uncle was opening. Jack also tells Tao that he is free to invite some of his own friends, and of course, this is Tao inviting me. "Good food, good music," that is what he uses to lure me in.

Eventually he convinces me to join him and his new friend Jack, and he lets me know that the bar is opening on the up and coming Friday.

After Tao leaves, I go downstairs to check my mail. While I'm down there, I see a large woman coming up from the basement floor with a basket of clothes. She smiles, I smile, and then she goes on her way. Nothing you haven't read before.

Afterward I pull out the mail I had received, and on top there is a card that tells me it can help me change my life around. "Come to our healing and teaching meetings and find the power of the inner soul." People say that love conquers all, that goodness prevails, but there is a darkness I have seen that not even love can conquer, that not even goodness can overcome.

It's Tuesday and it's three o'clock in the morning. There's a snowstorm outside and I'm inside watching a fictional television program that depicts real events from the second World War. "The only hope you have is to accept the fact that you're already dead, and the sooner you accept that, the sooner you'll be able to function as a soldier's supposed to function," one soldier says to another concerning the unconscious hopes and fears of war.

The television show reminds me of a dream I had several years ago where my entire company and I parachuted into enemy territory. As soon as we hit the ground, we were fired upon, a sort of baptism by fire.

I managed to escape without a scratch and find a nearby ditch where I would hide for

the next few minutes. I would have stayed there longer had I not heard enemy soldiers' voices coming toward me.

The strange foreign language gets closer and closer yet in my mind it feels far away. With each passing second I go back and forth on my decision to stay hidden or to attack, and then moments later I begin to hear music. Violins, guitars, drums, trumpets, they begin to slowly drown out the strange language. The music gets louder and louder but I get calmer and calmer.

Finally, it stops, and I find myself standing in the ditch with my rifle pointed at two enemy soldiers. They stand there with their primary weapons strapped around their bodies. Every thing is silent. No more music, no more language, no more heartbeats. I'm sure even if fear had a sound, at this moment in time, it too would be silent. I eventually pull the trigger and kill them both, but at the same time give away my position and am forced to move out.

After much running and walking I find other soldiers who are part of my company and I join them. For the next few days I am surrounded by sleep deprivation and nightmares. I'd hear other soldiers screaming in the night while I was on watch.

"My turn," a soldier says to me. He takes my seat and begins his shift of watching the line. "Semper Fi," I say to him as I leave, then I walk over to the other soldiers who can't sleep, and as tired as I am, I can't sleep either because I know I'll have nightmares of the foreign language, so I join them in playing cards. At least here, there are winners and losers.

Many times I've thought about the beginnings of war, and ultimately I come to the conclusion, as would anyone else, that war is not a creation of man, but a discovery by his nature.

It's Wednesday evening and I'm waiting for Lynne as she gets dressed for work. I lean against my door throwing my car keys up into the air to kill time, and finally she comes out and walks pass me as she's putting on one of her earrings. "Gonna tell Alondra that I'm leaving," she tells me.

About two minutes later she comes down the stairs with Alondra and I see the young girl holding Antony. I say hi, I say bye, then I leave with Lynne to take her to work.

"Emily says hello," Lynne tells me. I hadn't seen Emily in a long time. The thought of Emily reminds me of Kathleen; I can only wonder what she could be doing now.

Lynne doesn't say much more throughout the trip, not until we reach her workplace. Just before she is about to exit the vehicle, she asks me a question. "Can I depend on you?"

"What do you mean?," I ask her. "I just mean, all the people I've gotten close to in my life have ended up leaving me or worse. I just don't want us to become really good

friends and then one day you go on without me,” she says.

My disconnect often causes me to sever ties with the people I know. In enough time, say several years, I may be far away from here in a place where no one knows my name. “Lynne, look at me,” I say. I smile, almost laugh, then say “You're my best friend, how could I just leave?” At that point she knows I'm screwing around and attempting to avoid her question. She laughs and says that she's being serious, and then waits for me to answer again.

“I can't promise you. I can't even say I'll try my best,” I tell her, “because I might not.” Had I cared just a little bit more or tried just a little bit harder in life, I may have been a great person. “But I've been here for you and I will continue to be here for you God willing,” I finish. She smiles and gives me a car hug, but the only thing going through my mind is the fact that I just said “God willing.” I soon realize I'm still feeling the effects of a message that I found in a bottle.

Finally she leaves and heads into the building. I sit in the car for a short while, thinking about what she said about people leaving her, thinking about the inevitable future. As I am leaving the parking lot, the inevitable future prompts me to, instead of driving back home, drive deeper into the city.

About fifteen minutes later, I find myself in a place I've been before. Down the block, you can find the office of the therapist I was suggested to see many years ago. As I drive past the office building, I see that the lights are on and that the sign is still up. Perhaps he and his colleagues are still very much busy changing the lives of others. Correcting their faults and making them normal. Shining out the darkness that seeps.

Not too far from here is the apartment building that Maria and I used to live in. Seven minutes later I find myself standing in front of it. It reminds me of the time Lynne took me to where she used to live.

I walk up to the apartment door and peer inside; it hasn't changed a bit. I walk inside but a locked door stops me from going further, so I get back in my car and drive away. Never really liked this place that much anyway.

The next place of my past that I visit takes me twenty-five minutes to get to. In this building I explored my obsession of the human mind by participating in group therapy sessions to which I had no reason to involve myself with. People who abuse drugs, people who eat too much, people who have anger issues, people who have sex on their mind every hour of every day; the list goes on and on.

This is the same building where I'd meet Jamal for the first time. On a bus ride home, because he'd assume we both had trouble with illegal drugs, we would instantly connect in our first conversation, but the honest truth is, there was no connection because I lied.

It makes you wonder if the success rate of people being able to quit their bad habits

would increase if there was a program where two individuals who suffer from the same problem depend on each other for support; if you're trying to quit something on your own or for the sake of your friends and family, it's very easy to let yourself down, to let them down, but it's a bit more difficult to let down someone who is in the same boat as you and is also trying their best not to let you down.

How bad would you feel if you succumb to the temptations of your addiction and your therapy partner doesn't? I'm sure couples or friends who smoke have tried to quit together, I'm just wondering what the numbers are.

I glance at my car clock and realize the time has flown by and that I have about an hour until I have to pick up Lynne. I get there early and instead of waiting in the car, I decide to enter her workplace. Famous Max's Diner, it just rolls off your tongue doesn't it?

She is both surprised and delighted to see me. She asks me what I want to eat and I order something light since her shift is over soon. Afterward, she drives me home and I stop by her apartment to see Sarah and David. Alondra is relieved and Mary had already picked up Anthony so it's just us four for a while until I leave myself.

When I get inside my apartment I head straight for the bedroom and lay down on my bed. After a while I start thinking of Anthony and the fact that I may have judged Mary too soon. In the past, there were times when I would see her and that very sight would sicken me, but after getting to know her I've come to realize that she may not be so bad after all. I'm still not sure what the answer is, but what do I know? The only thing that is undeniable, as I have been told by a former police officer, is the simple truth that people show you the sides they want to show you and that you see the sides that you want to see.

But of course, because people normally have more than one social fragment, we tend to complicate and contradict ourselves. You might call this the duality of man; some kind of double fragmented two-faced yin-yang. War and peace inside the same soul. Good and evil on the same wasteland.

It's Thursday morning and I'm driving Lynne to work again. After she is finished and after I pick her up, we go to a supermarket. She plans to make dinner again. We part ways and eventually I find myself laying on my bed again. I am constantly tired without the presence of Mr. and Ms. Nosleep.

After a while I fall asleep and have a dream about my time in prison. In a corner of the prison, there is a place of religion. People who want to change, they go there and they pray, or they worship, or they do whatever it is their religion would have them do.

I decide to visit this place of religion, and when I walk inside I see people sitting. In the far back on the right side, I see an old man sitting inside a booth, calling me over, so I go.

I kneel down so I can see his face, and in the background I notice pieces of paper hanging on the wall behind him. Written on each separate piece of paper is the name of a religion; religions that I assume he has knowledge of. Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism.

“What is your sin?” he asks me. I think for a moment but I have no idea what I've done to be sent to prison. “It's okay,” he says after he assumes that I am not ready to reveal my crime, “You can confess to God when you are comfortable doing so.” As I get up to leave, the old man grabs my shirt and tells me to seek forgiveness before death comes to find me.

I've spent a lifetime thinking about death and half of a lifetime writing about it, but I'm sure when death comes to find me, I still won't be completely prepared.

After some time someone begins to push at my shoulder which eventually wakes me up. “Wake up sleepyhead.” After I open my eyes I see that it is Sarah, telling me that dinner is ready. I ask her how she got in and she tells me that the door was unlocked. Your eyes move rapidly while you sleep.

At the dinner table, Sarah begins to say grace and I'm sitting there wondering why David isn't playing one of his games. When Sarah finishes, Lynne asks them both about school and that's the direction we begin in.

After we finish talking about school, Lynne answers my question by statistically telling me that David is so blue because his game thing broke. Those are her words.

“I'm sorry to hear that,” I say. “Don't really care, the games sucked anyway,” he replies. Of course Lynne looks in David's direction and promptly tells him to mind his manners.

Nine times out of ten when I would see David, he'd be playing that “game thing,” but apparently he doesn't even care that it's gone. I guess it chose not to be great.

After pouring mustard on my plate I look up and catch Lynne smiling at me, and I can feel her happiness. Sometimes a person who is capable of being great will choose to be an asshole or a mediocre person instead, mostly so that when they are dead and gone, no one really cries too hard.

This is in comparison to the person who is capable of being great and is actually great in their life. They make the lives of the people around them so colorful and so worthwhile, but of course, when they die, glass shatters and people cry their eyes out, drowning in their own sorrow.

In one hand, you don't want to leave the people you love in agonizing pain, but in the other, you want to make those around you as happy as you humanly can. Lynne wants me to be part of her family, but she has no idea who I am and how painful it would be for her if I decided to leave.

Dinner is over and I find myself back in my apartment on my favorite couch watching a boring documentary about sleep-learning. Trying to get someone to learn something by conveying information to them while they sleep. The theory actually goes into practice as soon as I fall asleep while it's still on.

However, when I wake up, I find that I am not any more knowledgeable than I was before. I also find that I am even more tired than I was before I fell sleep.

I walk into my bedroom and stare at my bed, knowing that laying down on it will only make it worse. That's when Mr. Nosleep appears and he asks me if I've noticed that it isn't snowing. I look out my window, he's right. I go and lay on my bed, then I tell Mr. Nosleep to go away, so he does, but he never really does. He's always there, even when he isn't.

I close my eyes and I firmly believe that there is someone out there pushing me to the edge, and eventually I will snap. Maybe in that I will find a moment of clarity where I can see everything for what it really is. No dualities. No perceptions. Maybe I'll see that nothing is one or the other, but that everything is simply the same.

When I was younger my mother told me a story about a snake who didn't know who God was. The snake had no family and no friends, hence no one to teach it about the existence of God.

All of its life, it would hear about this God character, it would keep hearing the name, but it would never know what the other snakes were talking about, nor would it ever have the sense to ask. Not until it actually does many years later. "Who is God?," the snake asks a complete stranger.

My mother tells me that most of us have an understanding, even an agreement, on who God is, but to the others, it's no more than a name given to someone or something you don't know. She says this is why it is important that we teach the Godless about God.

Thinking about it now, you could only imagine the face of an old person when they first hear about the idea of God.

Kathleen walks into the hospital and makes her way towards Joe's residence, however, before she makes it there a nurse informs her that Joe had been moved. The nurse explains to Kathleen that because Joseph White has been in a coma for about a year, he had been moved to a certain part of the hospital.

The nurse walks Kathleen to Joe's new residence and then lets them be. Had it not been for the nurse's words, Kathleen may not have had the idea of Joe being lifeless for over a year running through her head and she may not have been as depressed.

For the sixth or seventh time, Kathleen tells Joe that Harry is gone, and then she takes his hand. After enough time with her son, Kathleen finds a nurse to tell her doctor that she has arrived for her check up.

“Did you find Joe?,” the doctor asks Kathleen. “Yes, a nurse told me about his moving,” Kathleen replies. “Yeah, yeah. He's stable, but unfortunately there's no telling when he'll wake out of it,” the doctor says. “How 'bout you, how are you feeling?,” he asks.

“Recently I've been feeling very warm, is that normal?,” Kathleen asks. The doctor tells her that this might be an issue of blood flow and that he will conduct tests to see what the problem may be.

“Let's start your examination,” the doctor says. Kathleen sits down and the doctor extracts a small amount of blood from her arm for a hemoglobin A1c test. Afterwards, the doctor attaches a sphygmomanometer to her arm to conduct a blood pressure test, and then checks her legs, arms and eyes for any irregularities.

After the examination, she says goodbye to Joe and then heads home. When she arrives at her place of residence, she walks in and attempts to turn on a light, but soon finds that there is no power in the entire house.

Kathleen makes her way to the basement and then to a fuse box. Her sister had taught her how to use the box, yet it all seemed foreign to her. After a few minutes, with a bit of luck, trial, error and dedication, she restores power to the house and immediately turns on the basement light.

As Kathleen is leaving the basement to go back upstairs, she passes a couch and notices a book on one of the arms. She assumes the book is some type of medium for keeping notes because there is no title on the cover or on the side.

She picks it up and notices that there is a bookmark towards the end of the book. She opens the book to the page that is bookmarked, and when she realizes that it is not a medium for keeping notes and that it is actually a novel, she turns to the first page of the story. The opening lines are particularly interesting to her, so she continues to read.

It's Friday night and I'm knocking on Tao's door. “Getting my coat, hold on,” he shouts. Somehow he knows it's me.

When he's done we get in his car and drive towards the bar. “This better not be a waste of my time,” I tell him. He looks at me and says, “Would you be doing something better?” “Fuck you.”

“You know, I've known you for a while and I still don't know what you do for fun,” he says. “I usually spend my Friday nights seeking oral sex with underage Chinese boys and girls,” I reply.

Tao is now looking at me from the corner of his eye with a facial expression that would be hard to describe in words. “That's not funny,” he replies, “and seriously though, I don't even know if you're joking or not. You're a fucking obscure person.” I laugh, which then gives birth to a laugh of his own, and then he tells me that just because he's

Chinese, that doesn't make what I said any more disgusting.

Eventually we find the bar and we walk in to find music and a lot of people. I would be amazed to see this place fail.

Tao and I sit down and not too long afterward a lady bartender tends to us. I order water and I can't make out what Tao orders, but nonetheless, she comes back with our drinks. That's when a new song starts and Tao notices that Jack is one of the musicians up on the stage, and that he's playing lead guitar.

The band's song isn't all that bad, but it gets a lot better during Jack's guitar solo. His playing makes you think of how much you love music, and how important you think it is to the world and the people in it. Hearing notes that would make you cry if you had it in you. Tones that tell a story. Chords that remind you that as you age, you may appreciate these sounds less and less until music no longer affects you.

The next song I find even more interesting than the last; a song about a sad clown. Here we have another contradiction that plays into the complexity of man. Always what you are, never what you're not. Here we have a sad case in the duology of man. You are always what you're not.

The song is over and the band is done playing. Eventually Jack finds us and lets us know that he's glad we could make it. He sits down with us and orders a drink, and right after this, a woman who looks like she is looking for a wild night comes up to the side of Jack and says "Nice guitar, wanna play me now?"

Jack sits there and looks at the woman for a second. She has a nice body and a pretty face, and at this moment, that is all that's relevant because there is no way any one will ever marry this girl.

"I'm sorry, I'm a zoosexual," Jack says. "What?," the woman replies. "I'm a zoo, I fuck animals, not people," Jack says beginning to raise his voice. Tao, the woman and myself, we all stare at Jack. When the woman realizes what Jack had said, a look of disgust grows on her face as she calls Jack a creep, then she walks away.

Jack looks in our direction. "I'm fucking around," he laughs, "I'm a normal guy. I just don't have time for shit that goes no where fast, you know? Been there, done that."

"I was hoping you weren't," I say, "because Tao and I, we love animals." Tao tells me to shut up, and because I have nothing more to say, I do. Not because he told me to.

As the night goes on, I realize more and more that Jack is a man who laughs at his own pain. That he's about a footstep and one door away from reaching the irreparable darkness, and the only thing that may or may not save him is his passion for music.

The next morning, I wake up at about noon to screaming children. When I look out of my window, I see David and Sarah playing with their next door neighbor friends. Another snowball fight. I watch them for a little while, and I am thankful that none of

them are Chinese.

After about five minutes, I see a man walk towards the children. The man reaches David and begins to talk to him. At this point I'm a bit alarmed because I don't know if David knows the man or not. After about ten seconds, the man leaves, and the kids begin to play again. No harm done.

I wonder, if it had been the president of the United States who approached the children, would I have been as alarmed? Would I have feared some type of wrong-doing? Probably not. How is it that the president is immediately less harmful than a complete stranger? I'd like to say it's because the president has paid well for his or her image, gaining an advantage over our fragile minds. Marketing and advertising, once again, at work.

Of course, it works both ways. In my dreams as a thief, after my partner has died and after I have found peace, I am confused when I come across a wealthy woman who is giving away her possessions. I know of her and who she is because we had targeted her once before, but we couldn't get to her.

On the outside, she was your average rich heir, and she did well advertising it, but I had no idea she was something more. Something like myself. She was simply something she wasn't. So many times a story is untrue. Or, it has more truth to it than you thought.

In a dream that seems to take place in a distant future that is not on the same timeline as our own, I wake up to find that it is our moon we that have inhabited rather than our earth.

I am a spaceman, as the young ones like to call me, and on this particular day I am to be sent out, like many other men and women who have accepted the nickname "spaceman," on a very long and lonely journey through space.

Before I am cleared for departure, Georgiana, a "spaceman" who is set to explore the earth that we know, comes and wishes me luck on my travel, and hopes that I find my journey back to the moon to be filled with pleasantries.

I would tell you that it was on my first night in space that I saw a shooting star, but such a sentence would make no sense. Regardless, the sight prepared me for the many things to come.

Inside of a week after departure, I would often receive messages from the other spacemen who too were sent out to explore space, I'd read about the planets they saw and the stars they felt. The colors and glows that they failed to put in words. The great thing was I had just as many words for them as they had for me.

Outside of the week, however, the messages stopped. I had tried sending some out myself but had no success. I realized that I was finally far enough to be truly alone. Black holes and exploding stars, they were my only company.

Six months into the odyssey and I would still see something new every day. It wasn't until I was three years in that this pleasantry began to fade. On the days where I would see things that I had seen many times before, I'd think of Georgiana, and wondered what she had found on your earth. I'd sometimes also wonder how long it had really been since I had seen my friends and family.

I've heard that there are places in the universe where, to an outside observer, time speeds up or slows down. Many times I thought about my journey being over in the blink of an eye.

It's seven years in, and on a cloudless night I see a small planet surrounded by what seems to be about a hundred satellites. Of course this excites me, the possibility of finding different life in our universe, so I change my trajectory and head towards the planet.

When I get close enough, I realize that the satellites are not exactly satellites of our kind. I'm not sure what they are, to be honest, but this is when the gravity begins to do its job and my landing process initiates.

When I land, I see that there is no life around. No more life than the life you find in rocks. Perhaps it is just unfortunate that I have arrived on this planet during echo silence. During a time when a species had previously died, and a new species was on the verge of evolution. Nonetheless, I end up spending about a year and a half on the planet before I leave and go back into space.

When I am back up in the air, I set up the ship to return back to your moon. Eager to report my findings in space and on the planet, I have the speed at a level that gets me back my people approximately within five years. In space, you can never be fully prepared for your miscalculations.

While approaching your moon, I receive a broadcast telling me that all residents of the past moon have moved to the new earth and have settled there, so I quickly change trajectory towards your earth.

While on my way to entering this planet I had never been on before, I see satellites that have bodies tied to them. The bodies look to be of a foreign nature, something you or I would call alien. Some are different colors, all have different anatomies.

Nevertheless, I enter your earth and land safely on a tan terrain. I walk for miles and miles until I finally see vehicles approaching me in the distance. Eventually the vehicles stop and the people exit them, but they aren't happy to see me. Even though we speak the same language, they do not look the same as they did on your moon, and of course, this is when I realize that I too must not look the same as I did before. Yes, aging will change the way you look, but not nearly as much as physical location can.

So, right before they kill me, I realize that the bodies on the satellites were those of

other spacemen who had come back after years of travel, and that these people didn't want any more outsiders coming to their planet. I thought I might die out in space, but in the end, it was time and a bad case of fisheye mechanics that were the death of me.

After a while I hear Lynne shout out Sarah's name, and when I look outside I see Lynne talking with the mother of the neighbor kids. At least she looks like a mother. A few seconds later they all walk over to the neighbor mother's apartment building; it's always nice to see parents become friends through their children.

After they disappear, before I can turn away, I see a car pull up. Borys and his significant other get out and walk towards the building, and in her arm she is holding a gorlatnaya hat. A gorlatnaya hat is a fur hat typically worn by Russian nobility. A higher hat indicates higher status. Exactly why I would know something like this, I'm not sure. It makes me wonder if it's the things we know and take interest in that define us as a person. If Joe went to college, what would he study? If he became a teacher, what would he teach?

After sometime I decide to visit my parents' home, and when I get there I go directly for the room my brother and I used to live in as children. I open the closet and take out three boxes and begin to search through them. Unfortunately for me, I do not find what I'm looking for until I hit the bottom of the last box.

A video game console, two controllers, a bunch of necessary cords, and of course, dozens of video games. I can see the light on their small little faces right now.

Before I leave with Sarah and David's gift, I sit down for a moment, as I always do, and try to remember my family. I hardly ever have a problem remembering my dreams, but I've found that it's the things that should matter most that seem to lose me.

It's pitch black when I get outside and I can only hope that the little ones are still awake. I knock on their door and Lynne answers. She asks me what's in the box, and I tell her to take a look. Once she realizes what it is, she looks at me and then tells me to come in.

Lynne tells Sarah, who is sitting in the living room doing her homework, that I have a gift for her. Sarah shoots up and runs towards me, and when I lower the box so she can look inside, her eyes begin to glow. I begin taking out the contents of the box and place them on the table, and in the background Sarah is jumping up and down on their couch. I have about eighty percent of the games out when David walks out of his room with his opened eyes, wondering why Sarah is making so much noise. Once he understands what he is looking at, his eyes too become wide open. He begins to slowly walk towards me, his eyes never leaving the games, and that's when I know I have him.

"They're yours," I tell him, "both of yours. Consider it an eighty percent late Christmas present and a twenty percent early Christmas present." I'm covered.

“Can you set it up?,” he asks me. That's when Lynne interrupts and tells David to say thank you, to which he does, then asks me again if I could set it up, to which I do. After I set it up for them and after I walk out of their room, I catch Lynne smiling while she does the dishes, so I stand there for a moment.

I see Lynne as a naive and stupid person, and myself as a fairly intelligent person, but when I really look at her, there is something there that is more important than any amount of intelligence, and that's what makes her stronger than me.

When she turns around, she tells me that David was blue because he had been having nightmares all week, and that this would probably cheer him up, but even I know that a dozen video games can't stop nightmares. Maybe he'll have a nightmare about video games. If you have a nightmare about something you love, is it a nightmare? Maybe those are the worst ones.

I think of Lynne having a nightmare about a field of dead roses and think maybe the dreams and nightmares that we have can sort through the complexities and contradictions that we have, and maybe they can define us. If Lynne is a rose, she should not be stepped on. If she is sad, she should not pretend to be happy, just as a sad clown should not pretend to be jolly.

Chris Tales, a firefighter, walks into a neighboring police department to submit a couple of forms concerning a local guns for cash event and runs into an old friend, Steve Jefferson.

They greet each other and talk about lost time until Chris asks Steve about John, one of the police officers who was shot at by a lone gunman last year. Steve tells him that John is doing fine, but that he is still shaken up about the death of one of his fellow officers.

“You know, I've heard like five different versions of what happened, but none of them are from anyone who was actually there,” Chris says, “did John ever tell you what happened?”

Jefferson, who is probably tired of living in the past, pauses for a moment, then begins to speak. He tells Chris that he and John would always talk in the break room, and that in one of those conversations he mentioned how much of a nuisance one of Dante Mac's little cousins was. Then lo and behold, about a week later, John and three other officers drive up on Mac's cousin while he's hanging out with his friends.

“Why were there four officers?,” Chris asks. “You tell me,” Jefferson replies, then he continues with his story.

“So they drive up and start bothering these kids, and then they arrest one of them. Now I know Mac's cousin is up to no good, he always is, but these are just punk kids who are wannabes, you know? Either way, things get out of hand and before you know it they

have two of the kids in handcuffs and a huge fucking crowd to witness the whole damn thing. Shit really hits the fan when one of the people watching picks up a big ass fucking rock and launches it at one of the police cars, shattering the entire window. John's partner doesn't think and he immediately draws his firearm, and as he's turning around he sees a man pointing a Webley & Scott revolver in their direction, yelling about inequality or something, so he fires off some shots at him. The gunman is down now, but it is only a matter of time until John and his partner discover that the other pair of police officers have also been shot, and to make things worse, one of the two kids that they arrested is dead on sight.”

Chris thinks about what he has just been told, and then remarks that he had never been told that a rock had been thrown. He was told that one of the gunman's rounds took out the police vehicle window. Chris also tells Jefferson that he recalls being told that the gunman actually had an IMI Desert Eagle instead of a revolver.

Jefferson takes a sip of his coffee and then nods his head, then says, “Well you know what they say, memory can change the shape of a room or the color of a car.” “Who says that?,” Chris asks. “It was in a movie I saw way too long ago,” Jefferson says, “and I can't seem to remember its name.”

PAGE 3 OF 8, "THE EIGHT DREAMS"

1:2:6:60

AN old philosopher once described the development of a misanthropic nature as when a person puts his or her complete trust in another person, thinking this person will be good and absolutely reliable, but later on finds out that the person is not good and is not absolutely reliable, and that when it happens all too often, this person "ends up hating everyone."

In this film playing before me, on this large screen, I feel that this is the way the main character feels, and while this is all very intriguing, what intrigues me the most is how filmmakers can emulate "adult" problems into "children's" films.

When the film is over, you can see the grin on the kids' faces as they leave the movie theater with their siblings and parents or guardians. The same rings true for Sarah and David, who can't seem to stop talking about the funny character with the funny accent.

Walking down the long hallway with all the other families, Sarah sees a father carrying his daughter on his shoulders. At first, Sarah asks Lynne to carry her the same way, but then Lynne looks at me and eventually my shoulders become the victim.

We get outside and reach the street, so Lynne takes David's hand. With Sarah on my shoulders, we cross the street, and this is when I take a mental photograph of myself looking down at all of us.

While driving home Lynne notices that the tank is almost empty, so she stops at a gas station. While she's filling up the car, David asks her if he can have some money to buy candy, to which she says yes. David and Sarah run into the small store and I watch them as they make the hardest decision of their life.

Lynne finishes and she gets back into the car and we're both watching them now as they pay the clerk. This is when Lynne puts her hand on top of mine and starts to gently squeeze. I look at her, she looks at me, then I say, "I don't know if I should tell you now or later, but I wipe my ass with that hand." She laughs, then she leans forward and kisses me on the lips, then leans back into her seat. I'm still looking at her, but now she's looking straight ahead at Sarah and David with a stupid smile on her face.

Eventually the kids come back to the car with their candy and we go home. I bid the family farewell and then I enter my apartment and walk towards the bathroom. After I'm finished, I turn on the news to see what it has to say.

After a bunch of uninteresting words, I spot an ant on the wall behind the television. I get up and walk towards the ant and I slam my hand on the wall; I've got the ant's attention now. The ant tries to run but I block its path with my hand. Each time it decides on a new direction, I block it, wondering if more and more fear is building up inside this

ant.

As I do this, a passage from the Bible rings throughout my head, one that talks about how man and the animal share the same fate, how they breathe the same breath and how they both must die, and more importantly, how meaningless it all is.

I eventually let the ant go back to its family, but I make sure it knows not to return, nor should its friends or its queen.

When I sit back down I notice that the stories from the news are still uninteresting, so naturally my mind wanders. I begin to think of the family next door, and how Lynne didn't say a word after she kissed me. I've noticed throughout my years, at least in my experiences, that it's the people who are not genuinely happy that talk the most. They have to move around a lot and do a lot of things. In the words of a humorist, maybe Lynne didn't end up where she intended to go, but I believe she has ended up where she needed to be.

The news continues to lack decent subject matter, so I begin flipping through the channels until I come across a commercial about rescuing animals. I had never really given it much thought, but I suppose non-human organisms can suffer from poverty as well.

What I have given much thought to, however, is poverty in itself. I've looked at and studied it from just about every angle; logically, mathematically, scientifically and philosophically, and in all my time and research, or simply put, my search, the only answer I've ever been comfortable with is that a world without poverty is the impossible dream.

Bias economic systems, overpopulation, excess surplus and the general nature to possess, these things get you to believe that poverty is simply a natural phenomenon and if your desire is to make a difference, you are better off focusing your energy on something more reasonable and not so close to the complex. Pyramidically, money always seems to go up and back to the rich.

Maybe the end of poverty is indeed the impossible dream, but I do believe that many of the problems we have in the world today could be solved if there were more dissatisfied people in it.

Most of us, myself included, we wake up in the morning, we go through our day, and then we sleep at night, living a satisfied life even if it isn't a desirable one and turning a half-blind eye to what is really around us so long as it doesn't reach us.

We say we believe in things, that we believe in causes, but the days and how we spend them remain the same, rinsing and repeating, waking and rewaking. We do this, of course, until the cause finally reaches and affects our livelihood, and this is the true irony.

Fourth year, June 7th, I had this dream. Roach and I are walking down a street

placing notes on cars. For as long as I can remember, I had wanted to ask him why he does this. I wanted to ask him if he really thinks that these notes will have an effect on the people who end up reading them or if he's just wasting his time. I guess it's possible that they do; had I not received his I wouldn't be here now.

“Skip that car,” Roach says to me, so instead of placing the note on the car I read it again and try to better understand what it means, but I get the same output. What I feel it's saying is that at the end of the day, the world is going to let you know your place. It reminds you of placement tests and the massive organization of the human society.

“Don't you feel like you're wasting your time sometimes?” I ask Roach. He stops and looks at the sky, this pretty much means he is about to say something profound and important. I kind of hate when he does this.

“No, because you are young and life is long, and there is time to kill today,” he replies. I stare at him blankly as he begins to bring his head down. “It's from a song about time. I think it's about how quickly time goes by and we don't even realize it, but also about how we choose to spend this time,” he continues.

Half-life is, in definition, how much time is needed for something to drop to half of its value, and what he says makes me think of the concept of half-life and how quickly or how slowly every thing around me is dying. I think of the biological cells, humans and animals, how quickly ideas fade, the length of dreams, I think about even the half-life of knowledge and technology, and when I'm through, I come to a dead stop when I see a car that has a light switch in the place of a car door handle.

Roach also notices it, but he doesn't say anything. I slowly walk towards it, put my hand on the switch, and then I flip it upwards. I want to say that I remember the night turning into day, but I'm not completely sure if it was night into day or day into night, the only thing I remember is that the light setting instantly changed.

Roach continues to walk, and I follow, and then that's when we spot a man dressed in a suit and tie standing on a curb with a sign that reads “hiring the homeless.” At the bottom of the sign, you can see that it's signed by a Mark C., but you can't be entirely certain that Mark C. is the same person as this man.

Roach and I simply walk past him and continue our work. That is, until we reach the last car on the street and come to a dead end. For this brief moment in time, you think about how there has to be an opposite to half-life.

Now Roach is kneeling down in front of a sewer opening near the curb and throwing down all his notes into the filth. He sticks his hand out and asks for mine, and after I give them to him, he throws those down the drain as well. I begin to wonder if he even actually cares.

As we begin to walk back towards where we had come from, he tells me that he's not

adverse to being alone if it means he gets to keep his mind, that he's not adverse to losing it all if he gets to leave it all behind.

I find myself daydreaming, but I suppose now, at this time, it would be referred to as nightdreaming. When I look out of my living room window, I notice that it is both raining and snowing; imagine abnormally dense snow. This almost tells me that weather changes are coming, but who knows, I've never been that great at predicting these types of things.

As I walk away I hear a loud thunder, and when I open the door to the room that houses the notebooks, I peer out of its window as well, only to once again see a dark night accompanied by dense snowfall. Lightening hides to the blind, and thunder, to the deaf.

I continue to look out of the window in the hopes of seeing a lightning strike, but after a few minutes I become distracted and begin to look at my other lives. How is the weather where I'm not but will be? Or maybe have been.

Of course as I'm looking at the composition notebooks, lightning strikes and I miss it. Fortunately for me, however, it strikes twice, and I catch it the second time as it branches out into the unknown. Sometimes if it's close enough, a lightning strike can turn night into day, and even if it's just for a second, the sight is enchanting.

I walk over to the other side of the room and wake up a sleeping computer. In the past, long before I met you, I would turn off the lights, turn on the computer, select an album and hit play, then lay on the ground and listen to it in its entirety. Why I did this, I'm not sure, maybe I wanted the music to enter my dreams, but why I have the sudden urge to do this now, I'm definitely not sure, but I figure it's been long enough.

I begin to get tired during the fourth song, and on the fifth song I am falling in and out of sleep, but on the sixth song I am completely gone.

I am standing alongside five other soldiers in what appears to be an unfinished courtroom. Before us stands three people, one of whom who appears to be in charge of both his party as well as I and my associates.

"You have all been accused of committing absurdities in war," he tells us, "with the primary absurditive charge being the slaying of other soldiers without prior attempt for resolve."

"Sir," one of my associates says, "it is not our duty as soldiers to seek resolution, it is our duty to carry out strict orders from our superior officers."

The man in charge walks up to the soldier who has just made a statement and asks, "Is it not absurd to end another person's life based solely on the idea that 'someone told you to?' To murder, yes, murder, another individual who is a father or a mother, a brother or a sister, without any factual evidence of their guilt or wrongdoing, or without first seeking a solution to the problem you have with this person?"

“Sir,” the soldier replies, “war is a complicated process with individual roles. It is not logical to assume it consists of only black and white, to the contrary it has a vast array of colors to perceive and a complex ideology. Our actions are not to be observed individually but as part of a larger system.”

“It is not the system that is on trial, soldier, it is you alone, and this revolver will be your conviction.” The man in charge has a revolver brought to him, to which he then loads and spins. “This revolver holds six bullets, I have loaded it with five. From right to left, you will each point the handgun at your heart and pull the trigger.”

I've heard about many brands of justice; sophisticated justice, karmic justice, even this fate justice being delivered onto us, but I am certain that true and natural justice exists nowhere, at least not on our planet. I've come to observe that the only justice that actually exists here is the justice that people in power will allow you to have.

The man in charge hands the first soldier the revolver, and this is when I recognize who it is. Taio points the gun to his head, but the man in charge reminds him that it is to be pointed at his heart. About twenty-one seconds later, Tao pulls the trigger, and we all hear a click.

Soon after I wake up to find that the weather is the same and that the music has stopped. I get up from off the floor and walk over to the shelf to take out the composition notebook I am currently working on so I can write the dream down. “I am standing alongside five other soldiers.”

“My daughter is obsessed with that show,” Wilson says to Rousseau as they drive towards Mr. Toothpick's home, “I literally have to drag her away from the television.”

“Wait wait,” Rousseau says as he looks out of his window, “turn right here.” Wilson makes a right turn and then asks Rousseau if he's sure that this is the correct street. Rousseau does not answer at first, but when he sees the apartment building with the numbers he's looking for, he points out the building to Wilson, and Wilson then parks the vehicle.

“Which apartment did they say?,” Wilson asks. Rousseau looks down at the piece of paper that had been given to him by one of the officers who were assigned to stake out Chase Mart. “I can't read this,” Rousseau says as he hands the paper over to Wilson. Wilson looks at the piece of paper and then says “first floor, 3rd door on the right; what are you, blind?”

The two detectives exit the vehicle and begin walking towards the apartment building. “Remember, we don't want to scare him. As soon as he feels threatened he gets smart,” Wilson says.

Rousseau opens the door to the building and they enter, then proceed to look at the names on the mailboxes. “It's got to be one of these six,” Rousseau says while looking

through all of the names that are associated with the first floor.

“1A, 1B, 1C, 1D, 1E, 1F, take your pick Wilson.” Wilson thinks about how the door they are looking for is the third door on the right, then tells Rousseau that he believes it's either 1C or 1F. Rousseau then tells Wilson he believes it's either 1E or 1F. They then both decide on the common denominator which is registered to a mister or miss Freyman, and as Wilson is about to ring the bell, Rousseau discovers that the door to enter further into the building is actually unlocked.

Fortunately Wilson had not yet rang the bell, so they both enter the building and walk towards the third door on the right. When they reach it, they see that it is indeed apartment 1F.

They knock on the door and eventually it is answered. They are met with a tall, skinny man, whom has often been referred to by the narrator as “the first-floor man.”

“Hello Mr. Freyman, we're with the local police,” Rousseau says as he shows Freyman his badge, “I'm detective Rousseau, this is my partner detective Wilson, we were wondering if you had a moment to answer a few questions.”

“I'm sorry but I'm actually headed to work,” Freyman says. “Is there a more convenient time we could speak with you?” Wilson asks. Freyman thinks for a moment, and then tells them tomorrow morning would be the best time. He also tells them that the police department is en route of his daily routine, so he would actually be able to stop by himself.

As Wilson and Rousseau are walking back to their vehicle, Wilson asks Rousseau what he thinks about Mr. Freyman, to which Rousseau replies, “I still think you're barking up the wrong tree. Plus now, if you are somehow right about him, he has time to prepare.” Wilson sees that Rousseau has a point, but what is really on his mind is why Freyman didn't even bother to ask the detectives what they were inquiring about.

The next morning, Freyman keeps his word and shows up at the police department. The three men sit down in a private room and as Wilson is about to begin to speak, Freyman says, “This is about those apartment murders isn't it?” Rousseau and Wilson look at each other as they are caught by surprise. “You found my toothpicks, right?” Freyman continues.

“Yeah, we did. Can you explain why they were there?” Rousseau asks. “I can, actually,” Freyman says as he laughs. Freyman continues, “Sometime in the summer of last year,” “June 23rd?” Wilson interrupts as he remembers the date on the Chase Mart receipt. Freyman thinks, then says “Possibly.”

Freyman continues, “I was driving home, passing through that abandoned part of town, when without any explanation my car breaks down. After I realize that I'm not going to be able to repair the car on my own, I call for roadside assistance. So I wait, and

about an hour passes by and no one shows up, I figure they're just having a hard time finding the place, so I decide to pass by the time by cleaning out my car after I notice a trash bin. You should have seen how filthy it was," he says as he laughs. Wilson asks Freyman to write down the phone number of the service he called, to which he does.

"I take a few trips back and forth from my car to the trash, getting rid of a bunch of papers I no longer needed, but in the process I must have accidentally thrown out the toothpicks and the purchase's receipt. You could only imagine my surprise when not too long after that, I read about the murders taking place exactly where I had been, although I hadn't thought too much about it considering I had not really been anywhere near the apartment building. When you showed up at my house, I figured you had searched the area and simply traced the purchase back to me."

"You say you didn't go anywhere near the building, but what about the box of broken toothpicks we found on the roof of the building?," Wilson asks. "What box?," Freyman asks. As Wilson is about to speak, Freyman cuts him off, "Oh, yes, I did leave a box next to the trash bin filled with papers. My best guess is that I must have accidentally put the toothpicks and the receipt in that box without realizing while I cleaned, and then completely forgot they were in there when I left the box next to the bin."

"Did anyone ever show up?," Rousseau asks. "Yes, about an hour and a half later." "Then where did you go?" "Home."

"Mr. Freyman, is there a reason why on some of your trips to Chase Mart, you only buy toothpicks? I mean I buy toothpicks too, but it's maybe once or twice a year," Rousseau says. "Yes, I build things with them," Freyman replies. "The Chase Mart isn't my primary supply for toothpicks, I actually buy them wholesale. I buy them from Chase Mart when I only need a few of them."

"What do you mean you build like little miniature houses?," Wilson asks. "Oh, no, I'm at the point where I can build just about anything with them. People, skyscrapers, household items, even dinosaurs if I were so inclined," Freyman replies.

"Okay Mr. Freyman thank you for your time, we will contact you should we need your assistance again." "I am happy to help anyway I can," Freyman says.

After Freyman leaves, Wilson tells Rousseau that he thinks Freyman is a liar and that he was going to his desk to call the roadside assistance number Freyman had written down for them.

To Wilson's surprise, the phone number is not disconnected and is actually a roadside assistance service, however Wilson soon learns that the company did not send out anyone to the area Freyman was located within the past four years.

While on his way to relay this information to Rousseau, Wilson runs into Frank Mainor, who asks him about how thirteen is going. Mainor, being a homicide detective at

heart, continues to keep tabs on thirteen.

After speaking with Wilson, Mainor searches for Mya Jackson, who has been out in the field all day following Derek as she attempts to gain more information on the inner workings of his associated organization.

It inevitably turns night and Derek decides to go home, as does Jackson. On her way home, Jackson realizes that she too is being followed, but is uncertain by whom. After some driving, she parks in front of a random house and simply sits there as the tailing vehicle passes her by. Not too long after, Roc, who had become increasingly more aware of her awareness, gets out of the tailing vehicle and begins to walk towards her.

At this sight, Jackson begins to handle her firearm in the case of an assault, but soon realizes that this unidentified person means no harm.

Rock walks up to her window and reveals all ten of his fingers to her, two of which have a folder in between them, and then she slowly exits her vehicle. "Who are you?," she asks.

Rock hands the folder over to Jackson and she looks through it, but doesn't know what it is. "What is this?," she asks.

"Omar Robinson, he's who you're looking for right?," Rock says. "Who is Omar Robinson?," she asks. Rock laughs and then realizes that she is asking a serious question.

"Omar Robinson?," Rock says, "Drugs? Weapons?" Suddenly something clicks in Mya's mind. Is Omar Robinson the "ghost" that she had heard Timothy refer to so many times before? Is he the fundamental problem that she had heard Francis curse in the past?

She looks at the papers again and sees names, phone numbers and addresses. At the same time she sees Rock beginning to reach into his coat and she instinctively panics, but Rock only pulls out a few photos. "I thought he was a pretty decent guy until he started killing people for the worst reasons," he says as he hands her the photos.

After he gives her the photos he begins to walk back to his car. "Where are you going?," Mya shouts. Rock doesn't answer. Mya knows that she should be telling Rock that he will need protection, that they may even need him to testify if this information checks out, but by then Rock is gone. Not literally, but philosophically.

In the distance, there is yet another vehicle being used to survey other individuals. Spider begins to dial Robinson's right hand man as he watches Rock drive away from a still somewhat confused Mya Jackson.

"Yo, Robinson was right just caught 'em talking to that bitch cop, gave her some shit too," Spider says. "Hold up," the man on the other line says. A few seconds later he responds to Spider, giving him the authority to kill Rock. Omar had suspected that the life was beginning to wear Rock down, all the silence and hesitation spoke for him.

Mya immediately contacts Frank and informs him about the information she had

received and about the character she had received it from. When she begins to describe Rock, as soon as she mentions the tattoo on his neck, Frank realizes that she is speaking of Terrell Bell, someone he had questioned numerous times about numerous homicides. Frank contacts the remaining members of their task force and they all decide to meet in the middle of the night.

Rock begins to drive home but stops at a corner store near his residence. He buys a carton of cigarettes and tells the clerk, a long time friend of his deceased father, that he won't be around for a long time.

Rock begins to walk home and leaves his car parked just around the corner of the store. As he is approaching his apartment building, he notices a dark figure lurking behind the brick wall. He begins to reach around to his backside where his handgun is located, but upon seeing another figure coming towards him from the corner of his eye, he decides to run back towards his vehicle.

Shots are fired at Rock, but none are on target. Realizing that there is no way he could make it to his car and have enough time to get away, Rock cuts into an alley in an effort to lead them away from his car.

The two gunmen follow him into the alley but are mocked by the night. A quick search yields nothing and they are forced to retreat due to a lack of time. When Rock sees them retreating, he quickly runs around the block and gets into his car and begins to drive towards Omar's place of work, his previous employer.

Rock parks about five blocks from Omar's legitimate business and begins to walk towards it. When he sees two men exiting a vehicle and enter the building, he is sure that Omar is still inside, so he hides in an alley waiting for his appearance.

Inside the music store, Omar, Spider and a few others are conversing over Rock after the two gunmen explain how he evaded them. Omar firmly expresses to his group how they cannot fight a drug war, Rock and the police all at the same time, so some things will have to cool down and agreements will need to be made with Raheim Johnson, the main drug runner on the eastern side of the city. But as for Rock, Omar says, "He must be put into the ground."

Omar has all drugs located inside the music store destroyed as well as any evidence that may portray illegal activity as he anticipates law enforcement will begin to survey "his" company.

Afterwards, Omar sends Spider outside to check the area. Rock sees Spider exit the building and look around, and when Spider goes back inside, Rock moves a bit closer to the building. A few minutes later he sees Spider exit the building once more, but this time he is followed by Wallace, who is a friend of Derek, a few other individuals and finally Omar.

Rock understands that he in no way has any advantage, so he simply fires four rounds targeted for Omar in the off chance that a bullet may hit him, and then he sprints off back into the alley.

Two bullets shatter the glass of the music store and the other two bullets bury themselves into the shoulder of Omar's right hand man, but he claims he is okay.

Omar has every one fan out to search for Rock, knowing if he doesn't take care of him now, Rock may become a nuisance. Omar leaves with his driver and an injured right hand man in hopes of getting him patched up at a friend's house, and the search lasts until the police begin to drive around the area, and so Omar's searchers too disappear, never finding Rock.

The attending police officers drive towards the music store to find that two large glass window panes have been shot out and they immediately begin to search the area around the broken glass. One of the officers begins to file a report and stamps the time of the report as eleven-thirty seven p.m. The police then attempt to contact the owner of the music store, one Davis Jerome, who is also a friend of Omar Robinson, in hopes to enlighten him about the condition of his place of business.

Inside the police station, Mya Jackson and her fellow law enforcement officers are looking over the material Rock had previously handed over. Past all the names and associated crimes and or roles, they come across the address of the music store which is specifically identified as a front for their illegal activities. "Omar Robinson. Rolls right off the tongue doesn't it?," Tim laughs.

Somewhere in another part of the sleeping city, Robinson and his driver discuss the events of the night. At first, Robinson and his driver, who is also a close friend, both agree that the person who tried to gun them down earlier was definitely Rock, but after some thought, Robinson begins to believe more and more that it may have actually been one of Raheim's men who tried to gun them down in an attempt to seize more ground for his drug peddling operations.

Eventually Robinson sells the idea to himself when he begins to have a lack of faith in the possibility that Rock would actually try to take them all on. Because of this, Robinson decides to turn what was a borderline cold war into a full frontal attack, seemingly losing his sanity in the process of making this decision. "By tomorrow morning, I want the whole damn city to know that Omar Robinson owns every block from Lincoln and Garfield to McKinley and Kennedy," Robinson says. "But I thought," "Fuck that," Robinson interrupts the driver, "that hide and seek shit is for children."

Upon near completion of the documentation of my vision, there is a gentle rapping at my chamber door. It is Tao, telling me about how his ride to the airport would not be able to pick him up, asking me if I could lend a hand. I'd ask him why he couldn't just take a

cab, but I'm sure it's because of the amount the fare will total up to. The best things in life are the things you get for free, especially when it costs someone else. Take love for example.

“What time is your flight?,” I ask. He tells me it's at eleven forty-five, but that he would need to be there in a couple of hours. After he leaves I look out of my window and find that the rain or snow and the lightning had stopped. At least I had that.

When the time comes along, Tao and I enter my car and we begin our long trip to the airport. For most of the first ten minutes, we make small talk, and when silence ensues I turn on the radio. Shortly after, the first airplane flies overhead.

After a little while I ask him if he had any luck finding a new job, and he tells me that employment is one of the reasons he's going to China. I learn for the second time that he is a computer programmer. He had told me before, but I'd forgotten.

“I'm actually going over there to teach, though,” he says. “Teach?” I ask. “Yeah. That's also the reason I went last time. I help teach a programming course at a university.” “Oh, I never knew that,” I reply. “I never told you,” he jokes. Thank God.

“But other than that I'm mostly going to visit family.” “For how long?” “Six months.” “Is your cousin going to be borrowing your apartment again?” “Yeah.” “Word.”

The conversation continues into his computer programming career and all of the jobs he's had in the past here in the States until it finally dies down and the radio takes over again as the second airplane flies overhead.

When I actually begin to listen, I realize that the person speaking on the radio is on the subject of scheming politicians and deceptive city officials.

As far as I am aware, the consensus on bad people is that they are bad. Words and actions will be of no use when trying to get through to someone who doesn't want to change. I've found that there is really only one thing in this world that can gain the attention of such a person.

A man who makes a killing in the selling of arms can turn a blind eye to his role in the deaths of human beings easily. He can go through his entire life being cursed and spit on without batting an eye. However, when death itself approaches his door and it knocks and he knows that it is here to claim his life, and he sees death for the first time in his life for what it really is, it may be possible for him to finally realize the strife he's caused.

“If you've ever been swallowed by a darkness that you can't seem to find your way back from,” the arms dealer says to me, “just sit down and write a story, or paint a picture, or compose a song, because this darkness is not as intimidating as it seems and we can all use it as a tool for the imaginative creation.” The third airplane flies overhead.

I'm sure by the time the arms dealer constructs his last breath, he will have already learned that people don't want to just live the special days of their lives; they want to live

the common days as well because they are what make us aware of the special days.

For certain movies or even novels, a viewer or reader may begin to unconsciously search for a plot when there is no plot to be found. In this case, it is probably best to simply enjoy the commonness throughout. The fourth airplane flies overhead.

We are about five minutes away from the airport when the fifth airplane flies overhead. When we finally get there, I stop in front of one of the entrances and ask Tao if he's sure he has everything, now implanting the idea that he may have forgotten something at home. "I hope," he laughs.

Tao exits and retrieves his luggage, then peers through the passenger window and says "Six months," to which I reply, "Six months indeed." He then jokingly salutes me and begins to walk off.

As I watch Tao walk away, I remember Julia and her literature. Is it possible for a character to be more than just a representation of an idea? Is God good and is Satan bad? Is black black, and white white, or is there a spectrum of colors that linger out of sight?

"Baggage, your passports ready, and follow the green line to customs and then to immigration. BA two-one-five to Rome, Prado, Naples. May I have your attention, please, customs will be receiving passengers for BA two-one-five to Rome, Prado, Naples."

On the way back, just a few miles away from my apartment, I come to a stop at a red light. For as long as the red light is lit, it reminds me of my sanctuary, and because of this, I turn right instead of left to visit the home of my parents on this wet night.

When I get inside I walk towards the basement stairs and remove a stubborn lock, then slowly walk to the bottom. I turn on the basement's ignite and am soon overwhelmed with nostalgia.

Sheets of papers on the walls, all filled with writings and pictures and diagrams. Idioms and phrases. Numbers and ideas. Sometimes you wait for life to happen, and when it doesn't you get bored, so you intentionally create a puzzle you can't solve just to kill time.

You walk up to one of the sheets of paper and see words written in red, green and yellow, but you can't remember why they're there or what they mean.

On the sheet of paper next to it, you find topics that concern repetitive DNA, genetic duplication and various cancers of the human body.

You turn around and walk to the other side of the basement, and on this wall, on this sheet of paper, you read about a short story idea that indulges in misplaced trust and strong curiosity. You think for a moment and you can remember exactly when you wrote this down. It was years ago, after you had a dream in which you were told that one of the biggest ironies in life is that the more you search for happiness, the less of it you find.

You laugh and remember that you had many dreams like this. Sometimes life thinks its jokes are funny, but really, most of the time they are just dull. They're almost as funny as carrying your own cross or digging your own grave. But now you have to wonder why you just laughed, as if you were actually encouraging life to continue on with its cynical self-amusement.

To the left you see a drawing of Satan counting all of the residents of Hell, primarily so he can show this number to God. Right under this you see another image detailing the human anatomy of both sexes accompanied with formulas to predict if a person has more or less of a chance of being born a certain sex.

Now you go over to the corner of the room and read about a theory on why criminals are the way they are. Not too far away there is a sheet titled "Dead Dollars," the notion that some wealthy individuals or families have such an excess in wealth that it will be impossible for them to reasonably use, or even come close, to using a large portion of said wealth, and because of this, there will be dead dollars that just sit there while neighbors starve.

It is because of this you believe that more money simply makes more people more poor because the money always goes upwards towards the top of the pyramid to the already-rich. This is the same reason why you believe that money is only a small part to the solution of poverty. Sure, you can feed an entire village, but the money you spent on that food goes right back to the people at the top of the pyramid. A good chunk of it anyway. Soon enough finances will dwindle and those who starved shall starve again.

At this point you realize that you have been unconsciously picking at your cut thumb, causing it to bleed again. You suppose the excitement of nostalgia can get the best of you sometimes.

You go to another corner and remember how you printed out crime statistics of your city and how violent crimes were trending downwards. You remember how you laughed uncontrollably when you realized that the correlation between a less violent city and less violent crimes news media reporting were not in tune. You laughed a bit harder when you realized the correlation was actually inverse.

A few steps away you find one of your father's old piano lesson books. You think about him and his passing and remember how he told you that there is a good chance that you won't win, so just don't play. You look around the basement at your lunacy and wonder if you had taken his advice too lightly or too literally.

You look at the lesson book again and then put it back down. When you live your life as a recluse, sometimes music is the only person you have to talk to, or to listen to.

Next to the lesson book there is a spiral notebook titled "Notes." You pick it up remembering it was yours and begin to flip through the pages. In it you find the likeness

you found on these walls. Documentation detailing your first decent into darkness. For the sake of old times, you begin to read it.

“On the subway today, a man came up to me to start a conversation. He made small talk, a lonely man talking about the weather and other things. I tried to be pleasant and accommodating, but my head began to hurt from his banality. I almost didn't notice it had happened, but I suddenly threw up all over him. He was not pleased, and I couldn't stop laughing.”

Volume 1 - Composition 2
(1:2 / 2 / II)

Part 7

Chapter 61

THE SOOTHSAYER

1:2:7:61

LAST night, I had a dream. I walked out of the wet sea and onto the dry sand, and before me as I looked out was the dawning of a dark blue setting Sun.

Accompanied with the vision were very tall human-made structures that seemed to touch a struggling sky. As I'd walk closer and closer to these structures, I would become more and more dry and eventually I would meet a road.

On the other side of the road stands a sign that reads "Citizens Only," but I couldn't be sure of what it actually meant.

As I go to cross this road, in the distance I would see some type of transportation vessel coming my way. When it finally arrives, the first thing I would notice is how it is marked with a symbol, followed by "Property of Civilians."

When the vessel comes to a complete stop, one of the passengers points a weapon of some sort at me, but is told not to waste his ammunition. As they drive off I am left there to wonder what had become of the busy world.

Years before, I would decide to settle out to sea to spend my remaining years in isolation, but when my boat would fail me, I would have no choice but to return here, and so now here I am. Returned to a place I so despised. To a government I profusely and rigorously rejected.

Turning back around away from the road, I would see the sign again, but would not respect it as I was in need of food and water.

I walk past the sign and not too long after a sort of temple appears before me. I enter the temple in hopes of finding another living person, and that's when I begin to have an out of body experience.

It is as if my soul had left my body and rose up like a gas, and when I look down, I see many rooms of many types.

In a westward room I would see seven blazing lamps that could tear your eyeballs into seven different parts if you stared at it long enough, and in an eastward room I would see a sea of glass that left an empty feeling inside of you. The most inspiring sight, however, was the revelation of a new Heaven and a new Earth.

Before I can study the new Heaven and the new Earth, I am forced back into my body as an old man in a robe attempts to wake me up. "You are not a citizen of the state," he asks. I am not sure if I was suppose to reply, but I tell him that I had been away for a long time.

He begins to stare at me, and this is when I realize that he has two glass eyeballs. When he realizes what I've realized, he says to me, "The world has changed since you left

it, and you have chosen to return when it is nearing the end of its course.”

“What do you mean?” I ask. He stares at me, and then tells me to follow him. As we are walking through the temple, he asks me, “Of who were you born?” but as I think and I think I cannot find an answer. “It is understandable that you do not know who you are,” he pauses, “I am John the Citizen, though I am born of a civilian.”

At the end of the revealing of his identity, we finally reach his destination. Before us there is a staircase that leads down into a darkness I had never seen before, not even in my time of isolation.

We begin to walk down the stairs and at the same time he tells me more about the new world. He tells me about how dangerous all living things had become, he and I both included. Then he goes on about the “Civilians,” about who and what they were. Why they did the things they did, but more importantly, their plans to bring civilization to the entire world by eliminating those who would not “evolve.”

This is when I begin to feel a sort of strangeness throughout my body. “Do you feel that?” the old man asks me. “Yes, what is it?” I reply.

“The ancient scrolls that I have studied define it as either the repelling or the expanding of matter at a sub-atomic level,” he tells me. “It happens back up there as well, however it becomes more and more magnified as we walk down these stairs.”

After a moment the old man continues to walk further down into the darkness, and for some reason I follow. “This force that you feel now, it is what is causing what is happening in the outside world, and it will also most likely be the death of it,” he says, “I believe it has been going on since the very beginning, and it is only now that we are beginning to feel its effect, and as it gains more and more momentum, it will eventually become unstoppable.”

The further down we walk, the more I feel my body ripping out of itself, but I have no desire to stop. It makes sense to me that a force like this would bring about the destruction of the modern world. My entire life I'd see people divide but not conquer. Even in the “tight-knit” communities I would see a repelling of some form. The divorce of the physical world.

So now, John and I, we decide that we've felt enough, so we turn around and walk back up the stairs. He offers me food, but not shelter as I am not a citizen of the state. When I get back outside, I find that it is night, and remember that my boat is still deep underwater.

When I wake up, I see that I had fallen asleep in my basement and I feel heavy air all around me, and after breathing my first conscious breath, I realize that I am getting sick. The sore throat. It always starts with that damn sore throat.

I get up and go to the kitchen to have a glass of water, but sometimes it almost seems

like drinking anything makes it worse. Makes it more realized. Yet you do it anyway.

I leave my parents' home and go to my own, and by the time I get there I feel even more sick. I have another glass of water, but it doesn't really help. As I am leaving my kitchen I notice a bag on the floor, so I throw it in the garbage bin. When I try to leave my kitchen again, I notice something else.

On the floor there is a pattern that seems to be marked in by black ink. When I take a closer look, I realize that it is not a pattern but a set of words. I try to read them and at first fail to realize that the letters are backwards, but once this is realized, I finally understand.

I go back to the garbage bin and take out the bag that I had thrown away, and I read what is printed on the bag, and of course it matches what had been marked in on the kitchen floor. I am puzzled at first, at how this could have happened, but when I look at the receipt that I would find inside the bag, I would see that I previously purchased water and milk, and of course it was the sweating of the milk that soaked through both the bag and the ink, which had now been imprinted onto my kitchen floor. For a moment this all makes me forget about my coming illness.

When I am finally able to leave the kitchen I go to the bedroom in an attempt to get more sleep, but as the long and estranged seconds go by, I realize more and more that I will not be able to comfortably fall asleep with this sore throat, so instead I go and try to watch television.

As I search through the channels, I find myself watching a show about a place that is unfettered by the realm of reality. A zone, detached from all impossibility.

It turns out that the show is having a marathon, so I watch for a while until I get a visit from Lynne, who tells me that she had finally gotten her car back from the shop. She asks me if I wanted to do anything later in the day, but I tell her that I was developing a cold and wouldn't be up to it.

After she leaves, I go downstairs to check my mail but find that I have received none, so instead I go outside into the windy cold. Hot showers and the thin cold air, these things have always helped me in times of minor illness.

I walk around a bit and then look down at a patch of dirt, the place that used to house Lynne's zinnias. After a while of staring I find myself wondering how I had gotten here. Not necessarily how I had gotten here to this patch of dirt from my apartment above, but how I had gotten to this point in my life.

In the opening of our dreams we always find ourselves in medias res, or, in the midst of things, never quite knowing how we got there or where we'd been, and in so many ways this is how I feel now as I compare the reality to the dream.

How can you be certain of your own birth? Of your own death? The only thing you're

ever around to fully and cognitively experience is life, but some people don't even get to have that, and of course this makes the question even more difficult to answer.

Sometimes I've wondered if our dreams are timeless. If, in raw format, they are thousands of still pictures, and our mind pastes them together to create film. Through this attachment, maybe we can development memory, and maybe this is what can help us answer the question. Maybe, maybe not.

There was actually a time when I was fascinated with time itself, fascinated by the possible values it may have carried. Fascinated by its illusion, its concept. I was not, however, fascinated by my own life or by my own tendencies. Tendencies that seem to enable and even encourage my obsessions.

Either way, by the time that time became so interesting to me, I had already begun to bounce ideas from the concept of time onto the theories I had about the dream world.

Zero was one of four numbers I believed to be of unique and significant value to the universe around us. The number zero maintained the fact of nonexistence, the idea of something with no value, the image of nothingness, and I truly believed that if you placed the number zero on a timeline, it could represent the present.

Back in the basement of obsession I remember seeing a sort of timeline-diagram. Directly in the middle of the timeline was the number zero, and on either sides were more numbers; positive and negative integers that went up to fifty-four and down to negative forty-five. Just above the right side, which was the side that carried the positive integers from one to fifty-four, I saw the word "future," and just above the left side, which carried the negative integers from negative one to negative forty-five, I saw the word "past," and of course just above the number zero, I saw the word "present."

Underneath the timeline I saw definitions and meanings, one of them being that the "present" has no real value. That it doesn't take up or consume anything, not atleast until the "present" becomes the "past" and obtains a real value of negative one or less, and this value can now represent a time in our life, or even a memory that physically takes up space.

As I had written this down many years ago, I began to think that according to my findings, in terms of time, in order for anything to have a real value, it must be in the past or in the future, but how would the future obtain a real value if it hasn't occurred yet. We can't just think of the future, that's absurd.

Or maybe we can. Maybe we can think of the future of another us in another reality. Maybe we can dream the future of another us in another reality. Maybe a younger us in another reality sometimes dreams of our future, in our reality, but to our present, their dream has a value of negative three hundred and twenty-eight, which means it is in our past. With time and value, we begin to jump around with perspective, but this may also

be why our dreams seem random at times.

Now that I'm thinking about this, looking back at what I had come up with, I'm beginning to realize that the entire time I had been writing this theory I was looking at it from a certain angle, that the “present” had to “exist” in order for the “past” and the “future” to exist. In ways, this is true, but if you remove the zero from the timeline completely, you will be unable to decipher the past from the future because you now have nothing to relate each integer to.

Of course, even if you don't have a present state of mind that is capable of separating what is past from what is non-past, you can still do so by observing other properties other than memory. Imagine taking film roll and cutting up each frame so you have many whole and individual frames. Then you put the frames in a cardboard box and shake them up, then dump them on the floor, and you are now tasked with putting it back in order. One technique that I have seen used in less complex frames, which is probably also the most obvious, is to observe the physical features that time leaves behind.

For example, if the film is about a sequence of events that leads to a man getting a small cut on his right arm, once you obtain the set of frames that show the man actually getting the cut, you can safely assume that all other frames that don't have the same cut are in the “past” section, and all other frames that do have the same cut are in the “future” section. Well, that is, and I laugh as I say this, unless the film is long enough for the man to receive the same cut twice.

There is a gap in time and suddenly I'm aware that I'm back in my apartment somehow watching the news. An uncharacteristically ugly man, who I'm assuming is new, tells me about two parents who have accepted a son who likes to play with dolls.

The more I think about the story the more I realize that society has already determined our social roles before we have the chance to determine it ourselves.

If you live in a certain city, then that city's home team is to be your favorite team. If you are of a certain ethnicity, then you are suppose to like a certain type of music. That's not to say, however, that certain individuals do not defy their roles, like a bird chirping at dusk, unable to tell whether it is sunrise or sunset.

As the man switches over to a different story, my door begins to speak. I answer and find Marry to be the puppeteer. She says hello and hands me an envelope. Once again, she received my mail.

“I'm having some family over, did you want to stop by to say hi to them and Anthony?,” she asks me. I tell her that I have a cold and wouldn't want to get him sick, so instead I have her send my regards, and then I thank her for delivering the mail and she leaves.

I look down at the envelope and notice that it is something about insurance for

homeowners, telling me that I am unaware of what the future may hold, oh but I am.

During my travels I came across a man who convinced me that he could see my future, so when I sat down with him to hear mine, I almost believed him. “Not a different, but a separate path,” he tells me. “Did you travel a long way, or were you born someone?,” he asks me.

I take up more of his time and ask him if he is afraid of death, and he asks me how much one could possibly know about it if one has never experienced it. He asks me what reason is there to fear it if we don't know much about it. “Isn't it the lack of knowledge that makes most people fearful, though?,” I ask him. “*Media vita in morte sumus,*” he says.

One of the few things we know about death, from the perspective of the living, is the simple fact that you are no longer conscious of your own existence. If you aren't aware that you are alive, are you as good as dead? Maybe many of us have already died.

Later on, he tells me about how there are other worlds. I tell him that I have actually been to these other worlds, and for a while he is confused as I explain my experiences in these other worlds. I tell him about how I have seen gods and angels, about how I have seen purple grass and green skies. I tell him about how in some of these worlds, I have even seen people who have died.

Speaking to him about these other worlds, I realized that I could never be fulfilled here in this one. Even if I found a hypothetical happiness, I would still find ways to poke holes in it, and because of this, I believe the only acceptable life is the one that is written in ink.

Silvio, who had been recently incarcerated, stepped out into the bright sunlight from the darkness of the jailhouse. Because Lynne had decided not to press any charges, he was to be set free. As he enters Justine's car, she attempts to converse with him but Silvio is in no mood for discussion.

When he gets home, he is greeted by his family, but this only reminds him of the family he cannot see. It is at this moment that he tells his visible family that he has had time to think, and that he will no longer harass his wife. Not in those words.

Instead, he will attempt to take a civilized approach to the problem and finally find the solution, and this time, he means it. He tells his family that he will submit to whatever he has to submit to, as long as it means he gets to see his children.

About an hour later, most of Silvio's family is gone. This is when Silvio decides to phone Lynne. As he is dialing her phone number, the wind from the window stops blowing and every thing becomes silent. Before Silvio can finish dialing, he hears a series of pops. He runs into the living room to find that every one had already ducked for cover, and then he runs upstairs to his sleeping grandmother. Fortunately, she is still asleep,

unaffected by the city's most popular theme song.

When Silvio gets back downstairs he finds his remaining family members peering through the living room windows. Though they cannot see what has happened, it was only two blocks south of Lincoln street that was now the current burial ground for several gangsters.

I was constantly told by my father that the struggle was always the most important darkness. That if we weren't struggling with something or someone, then we were at a standstill and present experience was minimal.

I've had dreams where I'm standing on a sidewalk waiting for the light to switch from red to green so I can walk across the crosswalk, but the problem is that the light never changes.

The cars keep driving and the light stays the same. I stand there for hours looking on to the other side of the street, to the next set of parked cars, and every time I think the light is about to turn green because of a decrease in passing cars, I am met with disappointment. Sometimes it makes me feel like a castle in the corner, in a medieval game.

Because I've had this dream so many times before, there are episodes when after such a long time of waiting, I actually become aware that I am dreaming, but even this awareness does not help me in crossing the road, and this is where the true struggle arises.

I've always felt that lucid dreaming was almost in a way a sort of free will in the dream world, as opposed to going through a dream without ever really feeling like you were in control, as if you were dancing with strings and predetermination was your puppet master.

I've often wondered if it's possible that the realization that you are dreaming could have a counterpart for the real world. Sometimes when you are trying to sleep through black therapy, music will begin to play in your head, but as soon as you are aware of the music, it stops. Is it possible that once you are aware that you are existing, you truly exist?

Night falls and I find that my disease is getting worse and that a headache is on the way. While a cold breeze does help to sooth my colds, I've also found that warm showers work as well. I would bet a large amount of money that this has something to do with checks and balances.

When I get in the shower I ask the shower-head for a warmer temperature than normal and it tells me that it won't be a problem. I end up staying in there for a while to prevent a headache that will probably come anyway. These things that we do.

After I've had enough of my skin absorbing water, I get out and walk towards my

bedroom, and this is when I notice that the lights are on. When I turn into the room, I find a woman laying on my bed, her backside facing me.

I feel I have been here before, but only in my dreams, so I stand there for a while knowing that it's Lynne, but wondering why she's here.

When I finally decide to approach her, I sit on the edge of the bed and stare at her prosthetic foot. Eventually she wakes up and realizes that I am there, and when she turns to look at me I see a little feather in her eye.

"You take really long showers," she says as she laughs. That sound of regret in her laugh that I hadn't heard since around the time I first met her. I smile and ask her what's wrong. She turns to lay on her back and begins to tell me about how Silvio had called her and told her that he is going to change. That he doesn't have much to say because he knows that talk is cheap and that it's actions that are convincing. "Expect child support," he says.

"That's good isn't it?," I ask her. She doesn't answer immediately, but eventually agrees that it may do more good than harm.

A few minutes pass by and we kind of stay there. No one is talking but I know what she is thinking. She's ready to move on, but I'm not quite there yet.

I start wondering when she's going to leave, and just sitting here looking at this image reminds me of when someone told me that the Grim Reaper sits at the edge of your bed while you dream your last dream.

"Tell me about Maria," she says. I pause, and then look at her as if I am confused, wondering how she could have remembered about Maria. Some people remember everything, despite how big or how small its importance may seem.

After a while, I say, "Maria was alright. I liked her, but I didn't like the people she associated herself with." "What kind of people did she associate with?," Lynne asks.

"Well I guess it's not so much who she associated with than it is just the simple fact that she chose to associate." Lynne stares at me blankly. "What I mean is, it's like in school, or almost any type of institution, you have a set of groups for different types of people and you never really mingle outside of your own group. If you are this type of person, then you are in this group and you socialize and associate yourself with other people who are in the same group. But, there are rare individuals who are an exception to the rule, and these types of people don't associate themselves with any particular group because in ways, they are a part of them all."

"I know exactly what you mean, it's like they're an O blood type," Lynne says as she laughs. "Exactly," I say laughing as well, "But Maria's blood type changed from O to whatever and it took her character along with it. It got to the point where if her blood type wasn't compatible with another person, it would show, and when she was actually around

people who her blood type was compatible with, she became such a superficial person.”

“High school themes translating into the real world, huh?,” Lynne states. “Something like that,” I reply. “My high school was the very definition of social hierarchy,” Lynne says, “and I just couldn't stand it.” At this point I let out a sneeze, and then say, “Lynne, you can't stay here, I'm very sick.”

She understands that I don't want to spread my sickness so the conversation is cut short and she ends up leaving.

Even though love and hate seem to be completely opposite of one another, people observing the physical properties of both emotions have stated that they both share some of the same nervous circuits in the brain, so as I see her out and as I watch her walk away, I wonder how I truly feel about her.

Kathleen, whose vision has been slowly declining due to cataracts, was having slight trouble doing laundry in her basement when she hears her doorbell ring. Wondering who it could be, she opens the door and finds a young woman standing before her who seems to be in deep discomfort. “Hello,” Kathleen says, giving confidence to the young woman that she does not bite.

The young woman begins to speak, but her words often fumble and streak, however, by the end of her introduction, it is known that her name is Karuna and she had visited Kathleen today to apologize for Joe's condition.

Kathleen invites Karuna into her home hoping it will relax her nerves, and then offers her something to drink. Afterwards Kathleen asks her exactly what she is apologizing for and Karuna explains how she had been trying to get into contact with someone who knew Joe. Karuna goes on to explain how she was at the other end of that collision and that it may have been her fault.

“Your fault? How?,” Kathleen asks. “I was looking for something and the next thing I know I'm hit from the side. I don't know if I ran a stop sign or what,” Karuna replies. “Were you injured?,” Kathleen asks. “Not at all,” Karuna replies, “which has been bothering me for a while. I just can't get over the fact that he is still in a coma.”

Kathleen, who has received numerous notes about Joe's current state, begins to reiterate to Karuna what the doctors have told her and tells Karuna not to worry, attempting to ease her of any guilt she may feel. Most of all, her efforts are to repel thoughts of Joe's death out of her own mind, as well Karuna's. “Joseph is a strong boy,” Kathleen reassures.

Kathleen, sensing the kind and compassionate nature of Karuna, realizes that this is a wonderful chance for a new friend in her nearing of old age.

Kathleen reaches for a framed photograph of Joe that she had recently found, and with great pride, plays show and tell with it to Karuna. Kathleen tells her about how the

photo had been taken on a vacation to Paris in 1992, when Joe was just ten years old. “Here he is holding a football,” Kathleen says. A football that, if you looked hard enough, you could still find down in the basement below.

“Is that his father?,” Karuna asks about the man standing next to Joe. “Yes,” Kathleen answers, “but he's no longer with us.” Karuna once again apologizes.

“I love this one so much because right after it was taken, Joseph ran up to me and told me that the people behind him were eating a frog's legs. The way he said it and the look on his face made me laugh so hard,” Kathleen says as Karuna laughs, “but I guess the real reason why I love it so much is because it's the only picture that I have left of Joe, so you can imagine how dear it is to me.”

This reminds Karuna of her own family back in India and how much she misses them as well. The thoughts bring her to words and the two begin to talk about the many members of their families, both immediate and non-immediate. In-laws and family friends. Deceased and non-deceased. A little while into the discussion, their conversation becomes so natural that the only aspect of it that feels off is when Karuna addresses her as “Mrs. White,” but this problem itself is soon addressed when Kathleen tells her that “Kathy” is a fine in stead.

After the two begin to bond, Karuna feels comfortable asking Kathleen if there is anything she can do to help, and to Karuna's surprise, Kathleen tells her about her declining eye sight and how she is having trouble reading. That when she starts off, she can see the words fine, but after about twenty minutes of reading her vision begins to fail her and the words become blurry.

Kathleen tells her about a novel she had found in the basement and how she was nearly done, and would very much like to finish it. Karuna agrees to help her finish it, however her assumption that this will be the first and last novel she reads aloud to someone else is wrong, and she is completely unaware of the impact that Kathleen will have on her life.

Frank Mainor returns home to his wife and children after celebrating the retirement of his lieutenant, Scott Merils. While in bed with the woman he has chosen to spend the rest of his life with, the two discuss Mainor's other future. He had previously been offered Meril's job, but requested time to think about it, time to discuss it with his wife.

Of course, Mainor's wife wants him to take the promotion, or to at least seriously consider it, but there is a voice calling out to Mainor that tells him that he breathes best in the streets of the city rather than inside an office building pushing papers and monitoring whiteboards.

The next day, Mainor finds himself in a parked car sitting in the driver's seat, accompanied by Tim Ryan. The two have been sitting on a location that has been

identified as a drug lab according to the notes of Rock.

Shuffling through the papers, Frank begins to speak, "A lot of these businesses on here have an association to music." Tim glances at Frank. "Look, a music store, recording studio, an instrument store," Frank finishes. "Maybe he's a rapper," Tim jokes. "You know what this might say about him?," Frank asks Tim. "Probably that he only involves himself with the things that he knows," Tim answers.

"Yeah," Frank says, "or the things that he is comfortable with. I wouldn't be surprised if he has control issues." "So let's put him in a place where he has no control then," Tim says as he glances back at the identified location.

Frank continues to look through the papers and brings up the fact that there are two locations that have been under construction for about eleven months. "What are you thinking?," Tim asks. "More burial grounds?," Frank says without certainty.

At this moment, an individual walks out of the identified location. After the individual looks around for a brief amount of time, he goes back inside, and then comes out with Omar Robinson.

"Is that Robinson?," Tim asks as his mind gets thrown into a state of confusion. Frank looks at Robinson's photo and confirms that it is in fact one Omar Robinson. The two had not expected to see their ghost anywhere near this location.

Omar gets in the passenger seat and is then driven away by his driver. "Fuck is this," Omar says as he continually switches through radio stations, wondering where the music of his past had been laid down to rest.

A few miles later, the driver tells Omar that they are being followed. Omar glances at the rear-view mirror and grins, seemingly cursing Rock at the same time. "See if you can lose them," Omar tells his driver. The driver continues to make left and right turns until he feels as if he has lost the unmarked police vehicle.

"Left left left," Tim shouts at Mainor. Mainor makes a left but Omar's vehicle is nowhere in sight. Mainor then stops the car, then looks around. "Shit," Mainor says under his breath. He sits there still looking around, and then he begins to drive again. He makes a right, but there is still no sight of Omar. He makes another right and it seems as if their tail had been lost on them. It is not until he makes a correct left that Tim spots Omar's vehicle, parked on the side of the road of an empty street.

Frank drives towards Omar's vehicle and this is when Tim Ryan, knowing the fun game had to end some time, tells Frank to pull over. Frank pulls over to the other side of the road and the two cars are now parallel with one another. As Tim exits the vehicle, Frank asks him where he's going but receives no reply.

At this same time, Omar exits his vehicle and begins to walk towards the road. Eventually Tim and Omar come face to face, and at this time Frank exits his car and

looks on at the two behind his vehicle with his hand on the top of his weapon, wondering what the hell Ryan is up to.

Tim and Omar stare at each other at eye level, but the time soon comes when a smirk begins to grow on Omar's face. Nevertheless, Ryan holds the same exact cold facial expression, sizing up Omar, in an attempt to win the war before it is fought.

After Ryan has made his point, he spits at the side of Omar, then proceeds to walk back to his vehicle. Omar never looks down at the spit, but instead keeps sight of Ryan's back, understanding that this may be his enemy's fatal flaw.

I'm lying in bed but I cannot seem to fall asleep. It appears I have fallen victim to an illness that trenches deep. I find myself coughing and sneezing, my head pounding and unrelieving, and in this moment in time, I realize that this is a pain that I may have to keep.

Now there is a knock at my door, but I don't recognize it. I get up out of bed wondering who it could be, and when I open it I find Jack on the other side.

"Hey buddy, I just came back from the supermarket and hadn't realized how much food I bought. You think you can help me bring this stuff up?," he asks. So many times have I heard Jesus say to be neighborly. To love thy neighbor as thyself. So of course, I tell him that I'll help him, and before I know it I'm standing outside waiting for him to pop the trunk.

When I see how much food he has purchased, a cloud of regret begins to form above my person. I tell you it could have been enough food to last two terrible winters.

I take about six bags of whatever and carry it up the stairs to his apartment, and for the first time, I see the inside of his home.

You couldn't say that it was messy, but there definitely was a lot to look at. Posters, electronics, books, paintings, furniture; this was just the living room.

When we finally finish I find myself standing against one of his walls, tired of the task that had just taken place. He starts looking through some of the bags and offers me some of the food, and even though I politely refuse, he insists, so I end up owning a couple boxes of cereal.

He then starts telling me that his friend, Mark, with a "C," so Marc, put him on to this supermarket and was able to get him discount prices. "They have the best fruit," this is what he says to me.

After I leave and after I place my new cereals on my kitchen counter, I can't help but think more about Jesus, and the first time I ever met him.

I had been walking through a forest, wearing rags for clothes, when I would come to the end of the trees and find hundreds of people on a hill huddled around one man who seemed to be giving a lecture. As far away as I was, I heard his words clearly, as if they

were spoken specifically for me.

“What are you if not your name?,” he asks the people, “Drums drum and flies fly, smoke smokes but death has yet to die.”

He then goes on to talk about how those who are happy will see less trouble in the world, while those who are not happy, will of course see all of the trouble. That our ill-sense of the world is a subjective flaw that should become a subjective strength, just as when one loses their sight, their other senses become more acute.

“Some of us will step on grass, but not on flowers, even though both contain life!,” he laughs. “The rest of us, we will say we are not writers, or even speakers of the truth, yet language is our world,” he continues.

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done in it will be exposed.”

After the lecture, every one leaves, but I feel that I must stay to learn more about this man. This is when he comes up to me, noticing my rags, and he asks me where I had come from. I tell him that I had been out in the forest wandering when I heard his voice and followed it.

The two of us begin to walk and talk, and eventually we end up in a temple, and it is there he shows me what has been carved into the stone. I look down and begin to read it, “In this temple, as in the hearts of the people for whom he saved the Union, the memory of Abraham Lincoln is enshrined forever.”

When I look back up, I find Jesus staring at me, almost smiling, and with his hand on my shoulder, he tells me to be wise in the coming days of darkness.

*Chapter 62***THE TWIN CITIES**

1:2:7:62

THREE and a half years ago, I had an awakening. The white shade and I are standing before two towering skyscrapers that stand beside one another, yet are defined as residing in two separate cities.

The two buildings are attached by an entity that lies between them; stairs that go from the bottom to the top, or from the top to the bottom if this is your perception, of these two towers. On the compartment that houses the stairs, in neon lighting, I see a message. "Welcome to the twin cities." Minneapolis and Saint Paul.

The white shade and I begin to walk towards the stairs and eventually enter the compartment. "Why don't we just use the elevator?," I ask the white shade. It looks at me blankly, then begins to tell me about how people tame animals just as a government tames people. Before it can continue I cover my ears and start walking towards the stairs, knowing I can't win.

It eventually catches up to me and we are now walking up these flights of stairs in an attempt to reach the very top.

"As I was saying," the white shade continues, "people tame animals; conditioning may be the only way we can stop this man of darkness." "How can we even begin to condition evil?," I ask it.

The white shade doesn't reply immediately, but after a brief moment asks me whether knowledge is power, or if it is instead wisdom. It asks me if an individual has incredible knowledge of its environment, if it will be drawn to goodwill.

The question forces me to think, and I ponder on the topic of power and how it can mean so many different things. The power to forgive is not the same as the power of forgiveness.

"Perhaps this man is the way he is because of the darkness that resides in his being," the white shade says to me. It continues, "If we were to give this man the knowledge of the aftermath his actions have caused, is it possible that these pieces of knowledge will then awaken him to what he's done?"

I think about what the white shade has said and it makes sense to me. If you murder a man and are unaware of how it affects his family, this loss of knowledge may become pivotal to the continuing of your destruction. "To fill the darkness with wisdom," I say to myself.

After what seems to be hours, the white shade and I finally get to the top floor of the compartment. It opens the door that leads out onto the roof and we step onto the platform. I follow the white shade to the end of the platform and when it stops, I stop, and before

me I see a marvelous projection.

A city of angels and a city of sin; cities of roses and emeralds and twins and wind. A city of fountains and a city of music, a city of circles and a city that never sleeps. A city of brothers, of charms, magic and rivers; a city of dreams, where it is only hope, that delivers.

What is it that drives someone to search for peace? The existence of peace, much like many other things, is sometimes discovered by an individual when they become aware of its opposite. I look at these cities, and though I cannot find the words to describe the sight, for the first time I realize that the only thing that can make me feel, truly feel, is all of the injustice in the world.

When the white shade notices my awakening, it tells me to move closer to the edge of the platform, so I do. As I begin to move, I lose sight of my balance and nearly fall, and this is when I look behind me to find instead of a white shade, a black shade.

Before I can open my mouth to question this, the black shade reverts back to the white shade and this is when I ask myself if I am dreaming.

The white shade, being as insightful as it is, looks into my eyes and immediately sees my doubt, so it tells me to remember our conversation about the real world and the dream world. I do, but my conscience begins to weigh heavy realism and I start to back away from the edge of the platform.

“If I tell you that I have two triangles, and that one of them is black, does that automatically indicate that the other triangle is a different color?,” the white shade asks me. “No, I suppose it can be black as well,” I answer.

“If you are scared in a dream, do you not wake up to find your heart beating faster and faster?,” the white shade asks me. “Yes, I suppose I do,” I answer.

“If you were to find that you have woken up from a life that you spent decades living, would you immediately discard it?”

I had always felt that life was the most important teacher. That the things you can learn from it should never be thrown away or discarded as no longer useful. To observe people and their actions; to dissect nature and its forces; to perceive numbers and their tendencies; these were some of the things you had to do on your own and beyond the classroom.

I walk back over to the edge of the platform and I look out. I stand there for a while, and eventually the white shade asks me if I am ready. I tell it that I am, but that I would need a push. As the white shade walks closer and closer to my being, I find that my eyes have been shut, and moments later, am falling.

Scared of my demise, my eyes stay shut. I think of the man cloaked in darkness, even about how he too, maybe sometime in the past, has been where I am now. I continue to

fall, and fall, and fall, and the pain that would come from the concrete begins to develop in my mind.

This is when the curiosity of my death begins to overwhelm me and I open my eyes. To my surprise, I find that I am not falling, but am flying, and beneath me there are cities that are casted in light.

“This movie sucks,” I say as I take the last bite of my sandwich, “I don't even get half of it.” Lynne, who is sitting next to me, begins to laugh and then asks me if the female protagonist is suppose to be good or bad. Unfortunately I can't answer, and instead ask her about the boy who appeared in the beginning of the film, if he was of any significance.

Lynne puts down half of her sandwich and tells me that I will be the one picking the movie to rent next time. I immediately tell her about a new film that was released last year called “Solomon's Legend,” and it is then we decide that this will be our next study.

While the film is still playing, I can't help but think about how film, much like many other forms of art, can be so subjective. Not even in the sense that one individual will like this movie while another will not, but even moreso in the sense that you can find a particular movie so awful at one point in your life, and then at another, find the same movie so magnificent. I've actually heard of books where the characters in them change as the reader ages.

These thoughts remind me of how Lynne once told me that a blue rose symbolized mystery and sometimes depicted the things that cannot be fully understood or completely unraveled. They remind me even of Lynne's nature, and my favorite painting of hers, “White Lights.” They remind me of the dreams I've had of her, the singing and the guidance, even the beauty even the silence. I knew you, before you knew me.

I get up and go over to my kitchen and place my plate in the sink, then I get something to drink. When I sit back down, I ask Lynne if she ever went to any kind of therapy for her foot. For a brief amount of time she continues to stare at the television, as if processing the question in her mind, but eventually she looks at me and answers.

“Yes, I did,” she answers. She begins to tell me about how she had a group of people who were very helpful and supportive. How she had a horrible time dealing with the situation she had been put in, but that in the end she came out stronger for it.

She starts to tell me about her prosthetic family. “There was a young girl there, maybe in her late teens, who had been in a car accident and lost both of her legs. The first time I heard her speak I was in awe. Maybe I had lost a foot, but she lost so much more and was able to talk about it. That's when I knew I had nothing to complain about.”

I ask her what the young girl's name was. She fiddles around with it for a while and then tells me it was Candice. I can't be entirely sure if that spelling is correct.

“The one thing I loved about her is how she said my name wrong, Lynney,” she laughs as she says it, remembering the past. Of course I laugh as well, but I'm sure you already knew that.

“I know it might sound weird, but sometimes I forget that you even have a prosthetic foot,” I tell Lynne. “It doesn't sound weird,” she says. This is when she begins to tell me about how in her previous life, whenever she was in the process of making a new friend, she would constantly ask him or her if the nonexistent foot made them uncomfortable. If the roundness was too much.

“But I don't feel like I have to do that with you,” she says, as if she could see right through me. As if my walls are down and she can see my inability to perceive disfigurement.

The movie continues aimlessly, and more often than not we find ourselves laughing at a horrible production. Instead of paying attention, I am thinking of Candice and her two legs. Thinking of Joe and his dreamless identity. Is it your ability to overcome adversity that defines you as a person? If Candice had not spoken, would Lynne see her as the same person? Would this person who I am sitting next to today be laughing at a silly piece of cinema?

“You know, at my job,” Lynne says as she chews her sandwich, “there is a girl who has two different eye colors.” “It changes?,” I ask. “No, I mean like, one eye is a medium brown and the other is a very light brown. Like hazel almost.” “Interesting,” I say, “I wonder which one is dominant.”

Lynne looks at me blankly, and then I tell her to make a circle with her thumb and her index finger. After, I tell her to pick an object in the room and to focus the circle onto that object, and to stare at the object through her circle. When she is ready, I tell her to close her right eye, and then ask her if the object is still in the circle. She says no. I tell her to open her right eye, but to close her left eye, and then I ask her again. This time she says yes. “Your right eye is dominant,” I tell her. She continues to stare at me blankly, then proceeds to nod her head. “I don't know where you learn these things,” she says, “but they're pretty neat.”

At this point we both hear a knock in the hallway. It sounds like it is coming from Lynne's apartment, so she gets up and opens my door and peers down the hallway to see Deana knocking on her door. “It's Deana, I'll be back,” she says to me.

When she sits back down she tells me that Deana had forgotten her phone number and needed it again. “Who?,” I ask. “Your neighbor,” she laughs. “Oh.”

“A year ago, I had a dream,” I say. Lynne stares at me blankly once again, pondering what comes next. “I mean, I had a dream about them a year ago,” I say. “What happened?,” she asks.

“This was like a week or two before you moved in. In the dream they were arguing or something and Deana just went nuts.”

“That’s weird, Deana is so sweet,” she says. “It’s Mike who yells.” Of course I’d known of that truth, but there are worlds beyond ours where the truths bend and the lies blend.

Now there are credits rolling before us and the movie has finally ended. For a while there is complete nothingness, Lynne and I don’t really say much to each other. A therapeutic silence that is comfortable.

Lynne leaves a short while after to wait for Sarah and David to arrive at the bus stop. Not too long after she comes back and tells me that one of Sarah’s friend’s mother needed a lift to work, and that she wouldn’t be able to come back over because by that time she too would be headed to work. I had always believed that showing someone kindness would lead to that someone’s own doing of kindness, and at least in this case, I was right.

Later on it is Sarah who comes into my home and I find that she is currently under the supervision of Alundra. She has a piece of paper in her hand, and she hands it to me. I look it and realize that it is her math homework. For the next ten minutes I am a teacher, and in her eyes, I can see the globes of a distant generation.

Kathy and Karuna return home after taking a long exercisal walk through the park, some advice that had been given to Kathy by her doctor to help treat her diabetes.

During the walk, the two would talk about both the clear past and the hazy future. “When I was around your age,” Kathy says, “I loved being around animals. Any kind. There was just something about them that made me feel so calm.” Karuna asks Kathy why she doesn’t own any pets now, especially since she lives alone. Kathy tells Karuna about Max, Ema and Aster, and about how they had all passed away. About how after Max died, she felt she could never replace him. Never have another.

“I wanted to be a vet, but before I knew it I met Harry and soonafter we married we had Joseph,” Kathy says. “Every year just got shorter, I guess,” she finishes.

Kathy and Karuna then decide to sit down on a bench to admire the decreasing amount of snow on the ground. Not really. But nonetheless, Karuna begins to tell Kathy about how she is finishing up her schooling on childhood education, and about how she wants to teach children.

“Of course I’d like to be doing something around kids right now so I can start building my portfolio,” Karuna says, “but right now I’m stuck working at a department store,” she laughs.

The two would later find themselves back at Kathy’s home. Karuna would sit in her living room while Kathy took care of her diabetes, and eventually Kathy would ask Karuna if she wouldn’t mind attending church with her one Sunday, and Karuna, while

she is a keeper of her own faith, says yes, as to keep an open mind.

The next day, Karuna would visit Kathy again as to keep schedule. Karuna would read the last chapter of the novel to her, but because Karuna started reading towards the end, she would not completely understand the story. However, Kathy would tell her that it was really a book that started and ended in the first chapter.

Daylight disappears when I find myself sitting in a corner of my bedroom. The lights are off, yet through the darkness I can see. I begin to wonder, once again, about how I had gotten here in life, but more importantly, how far away I was from death. The window blinds are down, but there is a street light that pierces through them, and even though it does not blind me, it stains my vision.

I am now beginning to remember my very first dream as a baby. No, just kidding. Instead, thoughts of my childhood ring through my head. There was a time in my youth, a time before I started writing down my dreams, when I would spend hours walking around town attempting to fill a void that I did not yet understand.

You know that feeling of incompleteness, unfulfillment. You walk until your legs give, actually believing that you might see something you've never seen before. Wondering if there is more to life than eventual death.

I would later tell the therapist about this part in my life, and we would discuss it in full. He would ask me if I still felt that void, and I would say no, I would tell him that I found my dreams, but of course he would tell me that they wouldn't be enough. He would encourage me instead to live in the natural world, but you and I already know the end of that story.

So instead we discuss another story. The week before I had had a dream about a scorpion and a lizard. Simple dream, really. I told him about how I watched as a lizard found a home deep underground. A few days go by, and as the lizard is out and about, a scorpion finds that same home deep in the ground. For years, the two live there without knowing that the other had taken residence in the same home.

During the daytime, the lizard would leave the home, and almost at the same time, the scorpion would come home. Of course, when the scorpion left home in the night-time, the lizard would come home.

One day, however, when both residents were not home, a natural disaster would come by and fill up the hole in the ground with rocks.

The scorpion would be on its way home from a troubling night when it realizes that its home had been plugged up with rocks. Angry, yet needing sleep, the scorpion would begin to remove the rocks, one by one.

After some time passes by, the lizard would be on its way home when it would run into the angry scorpion. "What are you doing to my home?," the lizard asks the scorpion.

The scorpion is confused, then says “I live here.”

The two would begin to converse and they would eventually find out that they had both been living with each other for quite a while without knowing it.

“Well, what do we do now?,” the lizard asks. “I suppose we play a game, and the winner keeps the home,” the scorpion suggests.

The two play their game on a beach nearby, and as competitive as it is, the scorpion wins. The lizard then makes its way as the scorpion continues to remove the rocks from its home.

“Some of the dream has some truth to it,” the therapist tells me, “scorpions are nocturnal creatures while lizards are diurnal, but as for the other elements in the dream, I’m not sure what they mean.”

The therapist, because he finds the dream so interesting, decides to log onto his computer and searches about dream analysis. Somewhere, he finds information on what a particular animal may mean if you see them in your dreams.

He begins to read out loud, “Seeing a scorpion in your dreams may indicate self-destructive feelings.” He skims through the rest before saying it out loud, then tells me that it’s pretty much irrelevant. He then goes on to read about the lizard, “Seeing a lizard in your dreams may indicate creativity.” Just like the scorpion, he skims the rest and also deems it irrelevant, then says, “A lot of this is just opinion.”

Instead, we decide to dissect the dream ourselves with our own “may indicates,” but we don’t get too far. “Maybe you feel as if someone took something from you?,” he asks me. Maybe he was right, maybe he wasn’t, but you could give this dream to a thousand different people and get a thousand different interpretations.

I get up from off the ground and go to the window to lift up the blinds. Staring at the street light outside, a fury of ideas begin to swarm in my mind. This prompts me to go to the room that houses the composition notebooks and sit down at my desk.

In a drawer I find Notes, a spiral notebook that I had previously taken from the basement of my parents’ home.

I open it up, and while I don’t flip to a random page, I do however flip to the first blank page I can find. I begin to think of flies, and how they are attracted to light. How they get sucked right into it.

I turn on a nearby lamp and then start writing, this is when the mania truly starts. I begin to write about dissociative identity disorder, and how well it can be compared to a dissociative reality disorder.

Personalities split and your identity becomes lost, and with the complex, worlds split and your reality becomes shaken. If it can be touched, does it exist. If it can be seen, is it there. If it crosses your mind, can it influence.

How easy is it to be absorbed by mental illness? By modern decay? By troubled times? Escape velocity is the direction and speed required to break free from the gravitational pull of a physical body. Say you're hurtling through space and you pass by Earth, if you're not going fast enough you'll be pulled in by Earth's gravity. If however, you are going fast enough, you'll simply pass by it, unaffected by its attraction.

When a fly flies and it is sucked in by the light, is it because its escape velocity is too low. Does this apply to the darker themes of life? Is it possible that we can be defined as human beings by how strong our escape velocity is? If yours is strong, when you fly past certain things such as depression and temptation, you are not drawn in by its force. If its weak, you'll find yourself troubled, or maybe in trouble.

Often times I'll wonder if there are things that we cannot escape in life. The gravitational pull of a black hole is so strong that even light has a hard time passing by without getting sucked in. The density that creeps.

You get sucked into the darkness, and unfortunately, sometimes you can't come back. As time goes on, I feel more distant and more detached from the world and the people in it.

I finish writing and then put the notebook back in the drawer, laughing as I do it. I think so much that some of my thoughts end up spilling onto paper. A sort of experimental narration.

I leave the room and enter the living room, and this is when I begin to hear conversation. The couch, the door, the television, they are talking to each other. I ask them what they're talking about, and to my surprise, it's about me. They are talking about how I need to move on. From this place, from these people. From these streets, maybe even from this city.

"This is getting old, leave already" the door says. "And you already know you won't last. How long can you just sit here like this?," the couch says. "Just look at your life, it's so black and white. Add a little color!," the television says.

"But I'm fine, I know I'm fine," I reply, "this is my home." The conversation ends when I hear keys walking through the apartment building hallway. I wait for a while, and soon enough can tell that the person went to Lynne's apartment. She probably just got home from work.

I decide to go into my bedroom and put on classical music in an effort to drown out the voices. Those three don't know what they're talking about. They're completely insane if you ask me.

I lay on my bed and think about how even though no chains surround my feet, I'm not free. You genetic apathetic. Prophetic prosthetic. Prosthesis negative? No, probably not. Definitely not. Not in those words and not in that expression.

I remember that one time when Sid waited for someone to sober up before killing them. He wanted them to understand that they were dying, so for a while we stuck around and played chess.

Later on someone would find the body and phone the police and they would send two detectives. “This is the sixth body,” the lady detective would say. The gentleman detective stares at the body while someone outlines it in white matter.

“Exsanguination,” a nearby doctor would say. At this point the two detectives would kneel down to further study the body and the clues around the body. They would realize that the victim had her veins literally plucked out of her body and died from blood loss.

The lady detective would notice something under the left leg of the victim and would have it delicately removed, and when she reads it, it'll say “She had it coming to her.” The lady detective would read it over and over again and would begin to suspect that the murderer was someone who was close to the victim, or at least knew her. After enough thinking, she would notice an unfinished chess game way back in the corner, and so this brings us back to the beginning.

Sid begins the game by moving his white pawn from E2 to E4. I move my black pawn from C7 to C5. He then moves his white knight from G1 to F3 and this leaves me thinking. I end up thinking for a while so Sid gets up to get food from the fridge. I tell him to check if she has chicken.

He comes back with food and by this time I have moved my black knight from B8 to C6. “She fell asleep,” he says as he moves another one of his white pawns from D2 to D4. I then move my black pawn from C5 to D4 to capture his white pawn, to which he captures my black pawn when he moves his white knight from F3 to D4. “Fearing death means you're alive,” he says to me while I think of my next move.

I move another one of my black pawns from G7 to G6. Sid thinks for a moment, then moves his other white knight from B1 to C3, so I move my black bishop from F8 to G7. In response, he moves his white bishop from C1 to E3 and then begins to laugh. Why? I'm not sure.

I move my unmoved black knight from G8 to F6 and then begin to laugh for no reason and this is when Syd gives me a straight face. His deception is lost on me.

After a long while, Sid decides to move his unmoved white bishop from F1 to C4, keeping his straight face, but now is scratching his nose. I think for just as long and then decide to castle my black king onto the kingside. I move my black rook from H8 to F8 and my black king from E8 to G8.

Not too long after, Sid moves his white bishop from C4 to B3, and then begins to smile. Exactly in those words. I think about what he has said, and then I move my black knight from C6 to A5.

This is when we hear someone walking around in the other room. We leave our game and find the woman walking around, and when she sees the both of us she becomes frightened, and this is when we know it is time.

We would eventually restrain her and of course she would yell and yell until we duct taped her mouth shut. Afterwards, Sid would pluck out and cut many of her veins one by one with a small knife. He would then leave a note under her left leg in attempt to spread disinformation.

Sid and I would then leave the house and he would tell me about how in the chess game we played, he had lured me into a trap and that he had already won the game. “The first mistake in committing a murder is killing someone you know in a place that you live without any real plan,” he says to me. With each passing day, he was becoming more and more like a father to me.

“Hurry up, I'm tryin' to get outta here by midnight,” Raheim Johnson says to Marcus Mosley, an affiliate of Malcolm Carson. Marcus continues to count away the day's prosperity, but more importantly, its profit. He counts quickly and accurately as to show his recent promotion is well deserved, and then he finally leaves with other members of his crew.

Marcus, along with four friends, walk through the parking lot of a car dealership, but back inside the dealership's main offices, Raheim and his top officers remain, discussing both life and the needed solutions to their daily problems brought on by the law and those who enforce it.

Just a little while after the conversation begins, shots ring out and yelling ensues. Raheim and his officers arm themselves but do not leave the office. Instead, they are soon greeted by their subordinates, but the difference is by one.

“They got Buckweed,” Marcus tells Raheim. Raheim asks who “they” is, to which one of the others replies, “Them west side dudes.” Outside, chilling more and more into the cold, is the body of Buckweed, and about a mile west of where we are now, Wallace and Travis make their getaway.

The next day, Raheim decides a forum must be held with his enemies in an attempt to resolve their conflicts. Raheim contacts other businessmen from the north side of the city who are like himself, and who will be able to act as mediators to bring peace between the west and east, and possibly, God willing, allow these parties to prosper together.

Miles away there is a sale going on for heroin. Get your “Earthquake,” buy one get one free. Derek works in the cold, supplying his customers and fulfilling their daily urges. At one moment, Derek yells out to an associate of his and flashes three of his fingers at him, then sends the customer off towards the associate to receive what they had purchased.

Sometime into his shift, a friend of Jamal begins to speak to Derek, talking about how he is low on money now, but also about how he is good for it. That if Derek could just “hook” him up, he would be eternally grateful. The problem is that Derek's not the one in charge, so as much as this man begs, as much as he pleads, Derek denies.

“Yo, who was that,” Wallace says to Derek as he walks up to him. “No one.” The two begin to talk about the weather and eventually find themselves thinking about food. “Aight call it in the air,” Wallace says. He then flips a dime into the air, “Tails.” It's heads.

“Two out of three,” Derek insists. Wallace gives him a look, and then flips the dime once more. “Tails.” It's heads.

Wallace begins to laugh, then nods his head. He hands Derek a few bills, and then Derek begins to walk towards the closest fast food restaurant. When Derek returns with the food, he sees Wallace talking to an older man. Perhaps an addict, perhaps not, but when Derek reaches the two, he hears the older man talking about chalk lines. Telling him not to get caught up in the life, mainly because it is not a rewarding one.

I found myself picking at my thumb when the time came for me to select which brand of water to purchase. Chase Mart always had a nice variety.

I go to the register to pay and notice that the young man had recently favored himself a new tattoo. It seems to be a few characters, but I can't be certain of the language, so I ask him what it is a tattoo of. “The number forty-five in Korean,” this is what he tells me. I wanted to ask him why that number specifically, but there was another customer behind me.

I walk home and when I get into my apartment building, I check my mail. Nothing unusual except for the fact that I had received mail that wasn't mine. This particular envelope belongs to 3E, a Ms. Amy Steinbrenner.

I go to her door and give it a knock. When it's opened, I realize that it's the large woman I had seen so many times before. I give her the mail and she gives me her thanks.

When I get in front of my door, I can hear the phone ringing, but I'm in no hurry. I walk inside and put the bags down and then walk over to the phone, walking more and more slowly hoping it'll die before I get there, but it doesn't. “Hello?” “Hey.” “Lynne?” “Hi.”

Lynne begins to tell me about how she is visiting her mother for the weekend with the kids and about how Claire had been staying there for the past few weeks.

It turns out Claire had been dating someone who lived in the next state over, but of course when she realized that the man was not as pleasant as he appeared, she left. This is not one-sided, however, as Claire also wears duplicity. Don't we all.

Either way, the split harmed Clare mentally and she became unusually depressed, so much that she felt she needed to stay with someone. “Yes, and she knows that we're here

for her no matter what,” Lynne says.

The telephone call ends and on the television there is a documentary playing. I'd heard of black sheep before, but I never actually saw one. Here you have an animal in a herd with others who are of the same type, but not the same appearance. A black sheep traded among shepherds. To me, difference was always murder, and these were always my words.

They can lock you up and throw away the key, but in your dreams, you will always be free. They can put you in a cage, but they cannot imprison your mind.

You spend so much time trapped in that space, and then it gets to be so that when you dream, these abstract concepts such as passion and individuality, they start to grow, and then it gets to a certain point and you can actually hold them in your hand. In your dreams, you can literally hold your freedom.

Everyone has had a dream where they are flying, where they soar through the clouds and the image of the world below them becomes enchanting, but in the off chance that you have not, I'm sure some day you will.

Chapter 63

DESENSITIZATION

1:2:7:63

EARLY one morning on a windy autumn's day, in an urban and peaceful town off the banks of the Mississippi River, the storyteller, who we'll refer to as "the carpenter" for all intents and purposes, wakes up to find a missing nine year-old half sister.

The carpenter had been taking care of the half-sister after their father had passed away. When the carpenter awoke and went to go check on the half-sister, the carpenter realized she was missing and called the police. By the time the police had arrived, the carpenter had already asked several neighbors to assist in the search.

"We all knew each other and it's a really small town, so we figured we would find her within twenty minutes at the very least, but when the search dragged on for an hour, we started to get worried," Nicole Clements tells the interviewer.

Block by block, the peaceful town is searched with no avail. Several hours later, the search was concluded as it was too dark to continue searching. The carpenter was in disarray as the neighbors attempted to comfort, but this too, was to no avail.

The next morning the search continued, and despite the fact that it was a larger searching crew, there would be no success in finding the missing nine year-old. Shortly thereafter, an investigation was launched.

"It was a sad ordeal. I hated to see the carpenter go through that. The carpenter had already been through so much previously and had a difficult time talking about family, so this only made it worse," Peter Thomas tells the interviewer. Would the nine year old ever be found? Or, was she already dead.

What if you died tomorrow? Who would take care of your loved ones? Tomorrow isn't yours but today you can start planning for the future. Get life insurance now!

Investigators walked through the carpenter's home searching for anything that might help them in finding the nine year-old. The first place they checked was the nine year-old's room, where they found nothing unusual or anything of any importance. They went on to check the rest of the house, but all attempts were futile.

Investigators then went on to survey the perimeter of the house, but there was nothing out of the ordinary here either.

"She was such a sweet girl, you know? Bright, always smiling. She was sunshine on a rainy day," Sherry Woodland tells the interviewer.

Days went by and the peaceful town was beginning to lose hope of ever seeing their sunshine again. "Normally if a person is not found within the first couple of hours," analyst Roman Stroganov says, "there's a forty-five percent chance increase in the likelihood that the person will be found dead and a sixty-seven percent chance increase

that the person will simply never be found.”

Were investigators already too late? Was too much time already wasted? Weeks went by and still there was no sign of the nine year-old. Streets all over town were plastered with the little girl's photo and neighbors continued to do whatever they could in their spare time to help find her, but it wasn't until a jogging couple came across a shallow grave that the investigation truly went underway.

For just fifty cents a day, you can help buy a child food and water that will last them a week. Please, consider looking into your heart and doing the right thing for a change. This may be the most important thing you do today!

“Me and my husband were running along a jogging path when we saw something unusual in a patch of dirt. We didn't know what it was exactly until we walked over to it and began to dig a little,” Rosie Winchester tells the interviewer.

Rosie and James had found the answer that the peaceful town was looking for; the nine year-old had been killed and buried in a shallow grave a few miles south of where she lived. The raining during the night before had revealed this gruesome and unthinkable murder.

Panicking, the two notify the authorities, and this information is relayed to the carpenter. The carpenter, who is shocked by the revelation, has a difficult time accepting the findings and is unable to digest completely what has happened.

“The death of a child is always a hard obstacle,” psychologist Renee Perreault says, “and is so much more impactful because it's always unexpected. It's not right when a guardian has to bury a child.”

The body was dug up and sent to a laboratory for examination. There were no signs of struggle or any markings on the body to indicate foul play, but a closer look revealed that the nine year-old had been suffocated.

“Asphyxiation kills over 9,500 people each year; strangulation, autoerotic asphyxia, hanging, smothering, drowning, these are just some of the types,” Roman Stroganov tells the interviewer.

During the examination, the examiner found what looked to be like a piece of fiber inside the nine year-old's mouth and hoped that this would be vital in solving the murder of the nine year-old.

A day after the examination, investigators question the carpenter, asking the carpenter if there was anyone who may have had ill will directed towards the nine year-old, but there was no one. The questions continued for about half of an hour, and investigators became increasingly suspicious of the carpenter's presentation.

For days, there were no suspects to this heinous crime. It wasn't until investigators began to question the neighbors of the carpenter that they realized the carpenter may not

have been the grieving guardian that the carpenter set out to be. It was at this point, that the carpenter became the prime suspect.

Hate bugs? Insects? Pests? Then what you need is the all-time best selling best killing best smelling spray killer! Call now! Be the first caller and receive two extra bottles free! Limitedsuppliesfirstcomefirstservebasis.

“She wouldn't hurt a fly. I never saw her angry. She just really loved to smile and play with the other children,” neighbor Susan Fleece tells the interviewer, “The carpenter had a tendency to neglect her, so much that there were times when she came home from school there was no one home and she had to come over to our home until the carpenter came back.”

Investigators quickly learned that the carpenter seemed to feel as if the nine year-old was more of a burden than a blessing. According to stories from the neighbors, the carpenter would often neglect the nine year-old, often to the point that she would be left with neighbors for several days.

Investigators brought in the carpenter for questioning, but the carpenter vehemently rejected any notion stating involvement in the death of the nine year-old. A few days later, however, investigators received a chilling phone call.

Rhaelyn Harris, who was somewhat of an acquaintance of the carpenter, called investigators and told them that she believed that the carpenter was responsible for the death of the nine year-old. When investigators probed for further information, Ms. Harris revealed that herself and the carpenter were romantically involved for some time, but when she broke it off, and told the carpenter that she couldn't be tied down to a child, the carpenter threatened to commit suicide. It was only a couple of weeks afterwards, that the nine year-old went missing.

What is even more bizarre, however, is the fact that the carpenter, only one week after the nine year-old went missing, would phone Harris and ask if they could get back together.

With a red moon high overhead, investigators continue relentlessly to solve the crime, but meet a brick wall in their efforts.

Investigators ask to speak with the carpenter once more, but the carpenter refuses and threatens to file harassment charges against the police department. At this point, investigators attempt to get a search warrant believing that, with the information provided by Harris and the neighbors, as well as the unwillingness to cooperate by the carpenter, and finally the piece of fiber found in the nine year-old's mouth, would be enough to grant one as the item that killed the girl could be in the household.

After a search warrant is granted, investigators and a search crew search the entire house and leave with a number of items. Among the items is a pillow that matches the

color of the fiber found in the nine year-old's mouth, and this becomes the prime item. Is it possible, that this could be the very item that killed her?

Want to be able to cut through a shoe? A quarter? Well then what you need is the Kindu Knife collection! Cut through raw bone, tough meat, even walls!

After testing is complete, examiners conclude that the fiber found in the nine year-old's mouth matched exactly a fiber taken from the pillow. But, how could investigators prove that the carpenter did the killing? What was the motive?

“You can have a lot of circumstantial evidence, but it's very difficult to convict on it alone. You need forensic evidence,” one of the investigators, Donald Salinger, tells the interviewer.

Doctor Akira Yamaguchi had determined the time of death, but due to the rain, the estimate was broad, but the best possible time table was that the girl was killed sometime after midnight and buried shortly thereafter.

After several failed attempts to speak to the carpenter, investigators visit the carpenter's home and arrest the carpenter under the suspicion of murder. The carpenter is held for thirty-five hours and questioned intensely, but no confession is made.

Though the investigation stalled and ultimately went no further, investigators believe this is what happened:

The carpenter had become met with heartbreak after Rhaelyn decided that she wanted to break up to the point that the carpenter would threaten suicide. After seeing that Harris was unaffected by these words, the carpenter then sought to eliminate the one obstacle in the way; the nine year-old.

Harris had told the carpenter that she couldn't be “tied down” to a child, so the carpenter, cold-heartedly, planned to murder the nine year-old and bury her miles from the crime.

The evening would past, then the night, then midnight, and this is when the carpenter went into the nine year-old's room as she layed asleep. The carpenter takes the pillow she sleeps on and presses it against her face, waking her. The nine year-old fights back but is unable to remove the pillow from her face.

Panicking, she scratches the carpenter and bites into the pillow, extracting a piece of fiber from the pillow into her mouth, but it is not too soon until she is dead, lifeless, and without breath.

The carpenter then removes the pillow from her face and takes the body outside and into the carpenter's car, where the carpenter drives several miles south of the carpenter's home. There, the carpenter buries the nine year-old, unaware that she has a piece of fiber in her mouth that came from the pillow.

The following morning, the carpenter would wake up and phone police and declare

that the nine year-old was missing in an attempt to cover the crime that had been committed in desensitized brutality.

“You know, I think it was Hitler who said 'The bigger the lie, the more people will believe it,' and that applies here. No one wants to even think that a person could do something like this. Kill a child over love, it's ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous,” the other investigator, Daniel Springer, tells the interviewer.

The carpenter was never tried nor the case pursued, but somewhere along the Mississippi River, in a peaceful town filled with truth, a lie lays dormant in decay.

Chapter 64

THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON

1:2:7:64

SOMETIMES dreams splinter, sometimes they connect. More often than not, I've had dreams that seem to stand alone as if they were single short stories that never go beyond their end or never preface before their beginning. However, enough time passes and I find that this dream does not in fact stand alone, that it has a sequel, or a prequel, and suddenly connections can be made.

In the same regard, there are times when a trilogy seems to be going one way and without warning, it diverts. It splinters in a new direction and you find yourself in a place you've never been, around people you've never known.

Many times I've come across people I'd never seen, and after waking and thinking for a moment, I wonder if that person exists somewhere in the real world. Even if the person isn't exactly the person in my dreams, I wonder if there is at least someone like them somewhere in the world. Someone who resembles their appearance, someone who mimics their voice, someone who reiterates their beliefs. A duplication of some sort, hidden away in reality.

I'm standing in The Basement of my parents' home, putting up new lists of words next to old ones, all the while thinking of the concept of randomness, about how each night when we lay down to rest, we never know what we will end up dreaming about.

I look to my right and see a long set of words that I had put up six years ago. All the words are in different colors, appearing as a rainbow, ranging from black to white.

Written in black is the word "alpha," followed by words written in red, "beta," "gamma" and "delta." Next are words written in orange, "epsilon," "zeta," "eta," and "theta," followed by words written in yellow, "iota," "kappa," "lambda" and "mu."

Succeeding are words written in green, "nu," "xi," "omicron" and "pi," followed by words written in blue, "rho," "sigma," "tau" and "upsilon." These words are then followed by the color purple, "phi," "chi" and "psi," and finally, white, "omega."

Just under this list is another, dated back four years ago. This one moreso seems to resemble most of the other lists; only three colors which seemingly represent negative, positive and neutral connotations. "Jannah," green, "Manhaj," green, "Wudu," green, "Iblis," red, "Zalimun," red, "Manzil," yellow.

Now I'm putting up a list of words to the left of them, words that we see throughout the year. These words, like the other many lists, are also written in colors, however they are all the same color, the only difference is that some of them are in darker shades of blue while others are in lighter shades of blue. "Winter," darkest, "Spring," lightest, "Summer," second lightest, "Autumn," second darkest.

Just two hours ago, I had a dream. I was in a small room where the walls were painted a type of “mystic” blue, and on one of the four walls, there was a dial with four options. The dial was somewhere in between Winter and Spring, but more so towards Winter. When I walked closer to attempt to turn the dial, I found that it was immovable, and that instead, my index finger and my thumb had become mildly frozen.

The somewhat tilting and diagonal-ness of the indecisive dial reminds me of how the Earth rotates on a tilt, and how this is the reason why we have these seasons.

Exactly why the Earth rotates on a tilt remains a mystery, but these thoughts again remind me of another dream I've had where I'm looking down at our universe, and in the middle of it all is a huge gray sphere. Calling it a star would be a gross understatement, but I'm honestly not sure what it should be called. Either way, all of the galaxies in the universe revolve around this gray sphere, of course ours included.

As I look down at this intelligent design, I notice that the universe has two halves; a side where space is black and a side where space is white. From what I have gathered, I've assumed that our galaxy currently resides in the space that is black, but I am sure that given enough time, maybe a few hundred trillion years, that our galaxy will continue to revolve around the gray sphere until it crosses over into the space that is white.

What I've written down somewhere in my notes is the theory that our galaxy had already once passed through the white space phase long ago, and from that passing, Earth's positioning was affected by that white space, as well as some other celestial bodies in our solar system, some more than others, some less, possibly depending on their composition. From that white phase, due to matter reactions, perhaps each body in any system underwent tilt settings, among many other settings. Perhaps in a few dreamyears I will go back there once more to explore with more ambition.

After I finish putting up the piece of paper, I take one last look at Sanctuary and then I decide to leave. While leaving, I catch a glimpse of sheet music. A theme from a film I had seen long ago. The notes, of course, remind me of the film, but more so a certain transition that I've had in my mind for a long time. An old man laying on a bed which soon fades into a scene shot way out in the country side. In this shot, we see the old man's son traveling with two other men as a farmer directs his herd in the distance.

Eventually I leave my parents' home and walk out into the dying daytime. There I see a neighbor across the road and he waves at me. I wave back, and make my way back home.

During the walk I come to a crosswalk and patiently wait as a bus drives past. A bus that has an advertisement on the side of it that says “Everything will be all right,” and is accompanied by several children.

Perhaps a note. Something telling me not to worry about the troubles found in life.

About the grief found in death. The pain found in abuse and the injustice found in nature. About the lacking found in youth, and of course the dissatisfaction found in old age.

Before I enter the apartment building, I take time to look at the dead Peace Lilies, and I also take time to think about the zinnias that also used to roam this region. Is it better to have dead flowers than no flowers at all? If dreams can turn into nightmares, do we take that risk?

I enter the building and check my mail and soon see that I have another letter from Derek. I am pleased that he is keeping up appearances.

I take my mail and walk up the flight of stairs, and similar to before, I take the time to look at Lynne's door. I wonder about Silvio and his actions. I've seen the effect it has had on Lynne, but I wonder more about what effect it has had on their children. On Sarah, David and the people they will grow to become. Children tend to dream shorter dreams, and almost forty percent of their dreams are nightmares. If the world you live in is nightmarish already, how much does that increase? Decrease?

Does David attract and get his night terrors because of his father? Is this why he is so reserved? Does Sarah repel and have enchanting dreams because of her father? Is this why she is so sweet?

I enter my apartment and find something to eat in the refrigerator. After the search I walk into my bedroom and sit down to eat. As my teeth serve their purpose I notice a half Moon between the window blinds.

On August 13th, 1947, a total solar eclipse had been recorded and was of course quite a show for observers from Earth. Total solar eclipses occur when the Moon appears to be larger than the Sun and blocks all of its light, effectively turning day into night. Tonight, this is not the case, however as time passes by and as my plate loses more and more food, I notice how as the half Moon sets and gets closer and closer to the horizon, its glow increases as it changes from white to yellow. Though the Sun itself is not visible, it has many ways of telling me it is still there.

I sit here watching as the Paper Moon itches closer to the Paper Sun, but eventually I find myself back on the Sculpture Earth when I begin to stare down the street. I see footsteps in the snow, but who they belong to I do not know. This is when I begin to daydream about a flood coming down this very street, taking the trees and the cars and buildings along with it. Natural disasters, they become a part of life.

After my plate is empty I get up to turn on the radio. Soft rhythmic music that you could only find in dreams. Melodies that remind you that you could hear something over and over again, but still not hear it for what it really is. That you can see something, but never see it for what it really is. You can stare at a homeless man sleeping on a piece of cardboard for hours, but ultimately your eyes never capture the meaning of the image.

You can spend centuries watching moons turn into different colors and never realize what it all means. Muscidae.

A man who seemed to always forget to comb his hair once said that imagination is more important than knowledge. That the echoes from the Moon, no matter how inaccurate or illogical they appeared to be, would ultimately stand their ground because they removed the shackles from our ankles and gave sight to those of us who could not see. Those of us who spent our days wandering through a forest, lost, with no place or purpose.

The yellow Moon is gone now, but I cannot stop thinking about it. This is when I begin to remember a dream I had two years ago. In the dream I am standing on the Moon, watching as a full Earth begins to rise.

I had been tasked with observing and recording the many phases of the earth for a period of four months, five if I enjoyed the pleasantry so much that I could not leave.

Every day I would see earthrise, and then earthset. There were days when I saw a full earth or a quarter earth, but most of the days I would see an earth in which one half was not visible. You could call it the dark side of the earth, if you were so inclined.

Rarest were the days in which the earth did not appear at all, hiding in complete darkness, void of all colors. I'd known it was there, somewhere out there, but the image failed me. On the days when the earth had gone fishing, I instead saw a smaller body that we had named Mercurie.

When we first found Mercurie, we believed that it and the Sun had a tidal locking, or a bond of some sort. We had theorized that Mercurie's rotational speed had matched exactly that of its orbital speed around the Sun, causing any observer who is standing on the Sun to always see the same side of Mercurie. In the 1960s, however, a scientist here debunked that theory. Those on the Sun who wished to see the dark side of Mercurie had been looking at it all along.

When my four months were up I would be assigned a new task, a much more interesting task. I was to be part of a crew that would dig into the the core of the moon to see what was hidden away so far below. As I am looking at my schedule, I see that it is Eviana who will be taking my place as the observer of the earth. I give her advice and tell her to pay attention to the far Mercurie, because it is more than it appears to be.

Now I am on the dark side of the room, looking through yet another set of blinds into a dark blue setting. I select a composition notebook at random and flip to a random page to find a dream titled "The Midnight Train To Baltimore."

This one you could consider a classic as it is dated from eight years ago. For a reason that I have still not yet discovered, I had been struck with grief when I found myself awakened in the middle of the night on a train headed to Maryland. To the left and right

of me were town buildings showing off their town's lights.

The train eventually reaches its destination and there I had decided, due to pure impulse, to get on a ship. A ship with a captain who had a fascination with humor, but more on that later.

The ship sails the Atlantic Ocean, and this is when I am met with the black silence I had spoken of so long ago. When I came to, I saw that I was traveling through a desert, searching for a chaotic place that I had yet to find. In my hand, I continually rotate two dice as I seek my fortune, but often times we mistake fortune for doom.

Part of the chaos theory will tell you that small changes in initial conditions can completely change an outcome. A person is born in an unnamed town and later in life becomes a cartoonist. The same exact person is born under the same exact circumstances, except for the fact that they are instead born in the next town over, and later in life, they become a real estate agent.

I've sometimes wondered if as we age and as we develop our identity, if this identity information is stored anywhere. Say, mainly through experiences and the external forces that affect us through out our lives, a person develops; a paranoid personality, becomes extremely athletic, is unusually prone to mental illness, prefers a certain kind of music, has a distaste for authority and has a tendency to keep their hair long, will all these properties be stored somewhere biologically as identity information?

As time goes by and we change through the years, is this same information constantly being overwritten? Updated? Can this same information, from a specific save, be copied to sperm or egg cells so that when fertilization is in process it considers all traits? Is there such a thing as an identity cell?

Sometimes chaos was the only thing that calmed me down. Knowing that there was no order in the universe, that everything was meaningless and without purpose, that in itself brought a kind of peace to my being.

Days had passed and eventually I came across a forbidden city that seemed to be closed off to the entire world. I entered through the gates, asking for bread and water as I had none remaining. They allowed me to enter, then they fed me. Not too long after, they brought me to the person who was in charge. They called his chamber a holy chamber, and that I was to never look at him directly.

For a while I stayed with him as he enjoyed my company, but in all that time I was prohibited from ever seeing who he really was. He asked me many things about the world from which I had come, but what seemed to interest him most was the idea of anarchy. "Si vis pacem, para bellum," I would say to him almost every day.

Initial hour; Mr. Freyman walks into a city police station for the second time in almost as many months. A uniformed officer, Tobey Garrison, brings him to a room

where he awaits detectives Wilson and Rousseau.

Before Mr. Freyman can get comfortable, Rousseau walks in and greets him, then thanks him for finding the time to sit down with them. Freyman asks Rousseau where the other detective is, and Rousseau lets him know that Wilson will be with them shortly.

Rousseau offers Freyman a cigarette, however Freyman had quit years before and politely denies. As Rousseau attempts to create small talk, Wilson enters the room with a box of paperwork and closes the door behind him.

“Alright Freyman, we just want to get the facts straight so we can eliminate you as a suspect. That's all there is to it today,” Wilson says.

Freyman nods his head and this is when Wilson asks him to reiterate his account of the day when his vehicle died in the abandoned part of town.

The details remain the same, and while this is mostly good, it poses a problem according to the findings of detective Wilson. “You said someone came out and repaired your vehicle, but I have paperwork here that suggests otherwise. Not one person from the roadside assistance company has worked that area. Not in four years.” Wilson says.

“Maybe they have poor documenting skills,” Freyman replies. For the sake of the argument, Wilson accepts the possibility that they may indeed have sub-par documenting skills, but then tells Freyman that he looked deeper and found that not a single phone call was made from that area for the past sixteen months. That the last call that was actually made from way out there was recorded eight months prior to June 23rd, which was around the time that Freyman says he called the company.

“I don't know what to tell you, other than technology is not the most reliable of things,” Freyman says. Rousseau cuts in, “We actually went out there and tried to make a phone call, but we couldn't even get service.” Freyman shifts his focus to Rousseau and tells him that perhaps it was time to change his service.

Second hour; “Mr. Freyman, you saw what we found in that apartment. Why do you think those boys were killed?,” Rousseau asks. “Your guess is as good as mine,” Freyman replies.

Rousseau speaks, “Maybe it is. One guess that I do find interesting though is my partner's guess. He seems to think that this is more than just gang violence. More than just drug violence. He actually believes that there's a person out there going around trying to clean our streets. I laughed when I first heard the idea, and I told him that this city is a lot more simple than that. We aren't unique. Our sewers smell just as bad as any other city and we all pay taxes just the same, right? You're not a killer and this is all just a big waste of my time, his time and more importantly, your time. We want this to be over, but the problem is that it won't be until you start making sense.”

“Every thing that I have said has been truth, and I simply cannot account for

technological errors or poor job skills,” Freyman replies.

Wilson interrupts, “What do you think God might do to the person who killed all those people?” he asks Freyman. Freyman shifts his focus to Wilson, “I don't know, you'd have to ask him.”

Third hour; time passes and more questions about both the crime scene and personal questions about Freyman are asked. Eventually both detectives leave Freyman in the room alone and converse outside. Wilson asks Rousseau if he noticed Freyman's fingers. How he had his right thumb going back and forth between his right index finger and his right middle finger while he talked.

Wilson tells Rousseau that Freyman is compulsive, and that the movement of his fingers probably have something to do with the broken toothpicks he found.

A few minutes later Garrison brings take-out to Rousseau and tells him that he owes him twenty-four dollars and fifty cents.

Rousseau brings the food into the room and places it on the table and splits it between himself, Wilson and Freyman.

Final hour; “Did you kill them?,” Wilson asks Freyman. Freyman does not reply, so Wilson asks him a second time. Then a third time. “You suddenly don't want to talk? Okay, I get it. You didn't kill them, but you're glad somebody did right? They were drug dealers, murderers, scumbags, and you're glad that someone washed off the streets even if it was only for a day. You're glad someone showed them that they weren't the only ones with guns, and there were consequences to be paid. Right? Look, we don't want a dog and pony show, we just want answers that don't collide with logic.”

Freyman remains silent for a while, but eventually asks detective Wilson if he is under arrest, or if he was free to leave. Wilson tells him that he is free to leave whenever he pleases, but that he has more questions to ask him. Wilson takes out several photos of identified victims and shows them to Freyman. At first, Freyman does not react, but when he sees a picture of Rondo Mac, he scratches his nose.

Rousseau notices this and asks him if he's ever met Rondo. Freyman grabs his long coat and says if he is not obligated by law to be here, and if he is not under arrest, that he would like to leave. “Wait wait, wait a minute,” Rousseau says, “look at the picture.” Freyman does not look at the picture, but instead attempts to get up from his chair. “You leave now and think about how bad that will make you look,” Wilson says, “so how about we stay here and talk so we don't have any future trouble.”

Freyman looks at Wilson and then sits back down, “You want to talk? Alright, let's talk. Let's talk about your job. Both of your jobs. Let's talk about those red names on the whiteboard. Let's talk about your clearance rate. About the shit that smears the sidewalks. The smell in the air that almost prevents you from breathing. Let's talk about racist cops.

The games that go on in here and the politics that enforce them. Let's talk about Cody Cooper. Yeah, you remember him. That young kid who shot up that city school last year. Let's talk about him and his dependence on drugs and your inability as enforcers of the law to keep those drugs off the streets. I didn't kill those boys, but you're right, I'm glad someone did and I wouldn't mind if the government sent them your paycheck."

"Everybody saying he left town," Omar's right hand man tells him. The long search for Rock continues but seems to be one of futility.

"That motherfucker. First thing anyone tells you is that you never rat. You never play sides," Omar says, but before he can continue someone walks into the room and tells him about how Raheim wants a forum. He is surprised at first, but his better judgment prevails as he does not immediately deny the request.

The intruder leaves and Omar begins to speak to his right hand man again, "You been watchin' Spider?," he asks. Right Hand lets him know that nothing is out of the ordinary, but even so, Omar insists that he watches both Spider and Derek closely, considering they were both friends of Rock, and that Rock's main motive may have been the unfortunate demise of Jamal.

"I like Spider, you know, he has his problems but he's okay. If it comes down to loyalty though, you ain't gonna find me in the defendant's chair. I'm not about to let someone else spin that little wheel they be spinning at the casinos, you know," Omar Says.

The passage of time refrains and we find ourselves thrown into the middle of a discussion between the westerners and easterners, who are monitored by northerners. The two opposing parties, mainly Omar and Raheim, argue about dead soldiers and lost currency. Eventually the discussion ends with bridges left unbuilt and both men knowing that either or is lying about thirteen bodies.

My door sings soft notes and it doesn't take long to realize that the singer is Lynne. I don't bother to get up and simply tell her to come in.

When I see her I notice that she has a pink shirt on that I've never seen her wear before and a type of card in her hand. I ask her what it is and she tells me that it's for me. I stand up and she hands it to me, and this of course is accompanied with one of her smiles, but it is also accompanied with yet another little feather in her eye.

The card is actually an envelope and it seems to have something drawn on it. "Ladybugs?," I ask her. "Ladybugs?," she replies. "These little insects," I say pointing to one of the drawings.

"Ladybirds," she responds. What the hell is a ladybird? I'm pretty sure these things are ladybugs. Then again how many things actually have only one name.

I thank her for whatever it is this thing is, and this is when she moves in closer to give

me a hug. Unfortunately for me, this is no normal hug; it seems to be a bit extended in time. After a while I put my arm around her and this is when she begins to thank me for being who I am. She thanks me for doing the things that I've done. Still in hug mode, this is when I lose the tunnel vision and for the first time actually see what she's gone through.

The sincerity of her gratitude can only be matched by her actions. She could have spent money on me, given me a gift or taken me somewhere, but instead she gives me a piece of her soul; little doodles and a small paragraph of writing. The sound of her closing my door reminds me of something a woman said over a century ago. How she said when you laugh, the world laughs with you, and when you weep, you weep alone.

I sat down and opened the envelope and found a page that seemed to be torn out of a diary. Such neat handwriting. Maybe I should ask her for lessons.

The letter is about how I stood up for her when she had no one else to. Not physically or mentally. And even though the action was fruitless, it said volumes. Much of the letter is to the effect that even though she went through hell, without it we would have never met. In a way, depending on what you believe I guess, that's true.

After reading the letter, tears begin to flow from my eyes and my heart begins to ache. I flail around the apartment until I reach the curtains of the window and I grab them, asking why. Why must I feel such intense emotion! I go to my kitchen and I take two cups and hold them against my cheeks so the tears don't soak the ground. After the tears stop, I put the cups in the fridge so I have something to drink later.

Lynne is an incredibly strange person, but I suppose you know that by now. I've never had anyone who lived a few feet from me write me a letter and then personally hand-deliver it to me, but I guess you could argue that the world is a more interesting place with people like her in it.

Holism is an idea that states that it is very difficult to explain a system by observing the parts of the system individually. That we should attempt to bounce parts off of one another and see the system for its entirety, and through this we can understand why a particular part of the system works a particular way.

Lynne has a part of her that is artificial, but the fake foot is as real to me as any other part of her. Maybe it's the foot that makes her who she is, or maybe it's who she is that gives the foot life.

I remember she had told me that a pink rose symbolized appreciation, gratefulness; it only made sense that this was the color she decided to wear when giving me the letter. At the end of the letter, it is signed your friend, L.J.P.

The letter reminds me of the purpose rose she had given me not too long ago. The enchantment she felt. It also reminds me of the time when her mother was visiting, and

how Emily told me that even as a child, Lynne smiled all the time.

Although this rose is out of place, in an apartment where no type of flower would ever be found, I've come to realize that both this rose and Lynne herself are like a train that passes by in the night while you try to sleep. It's annoying for a long time, but eventually you get used to the sound and can sleep simply because it's constant. It may even become that trying to sleep without it is what's the hard part. You get so used to a life that was based on a true dream.

We have dictionaries so we can all agree on what a word means, and if you burn up the dictionary we get confused. The same thing applies to character, personality, identity, whatever you want to call it. If you set fire to who you are, or even if you just simply allow yourself to remain a mystery, other people will have a hard time agreeing on what makes you, you. When you don't open up and let people in, it causes confusion and this benefits no one. These are the words of a therapist I was suggested to see many years ago. "You can be a king or a street sweeper, but everyone dances with the Grim Reaper." Those are the last words of a murderer.

I've been mad for fucking years, absolutely years. I've been over the edge for yonks. I guess I've always been mad, and I know that I've been mad, like the most of us, and it's very hard to explain why you're mad even if you're not mad. This is why I ended up asking the therapist about beauty. Perception. Subjectivity. Insanity.

I asked him why a man who did not have leprosy would always find a woman who did so unattractive; why after years have passed and after the very same man has contracted leprosy himself, why he now finds that same woman now bearable to look at, perhaps even possible to fall in love with. I ask him what part of the human psychology is at work.

He tells me that it doesn't have so much to do with psychology as it does sociology. Maybe it's a stretch, but I don't think astronomy is too far from the discussion, either. Pluto and Charon, two small bodies in our solar system, orbit around each other with the same rotating speed. This causes them to be tidally locked to one another and therefore the same side of either planet always faces the same side of the other planet.

It's like two thieves who don't trust one another; they constantly face each other with their hands on the top of their guns, circling around waiting for the other to make the first move.

In ways people are tidally locked to each other, showing only one astronomical fragment to those around us. If this astronomical fragment falls short of its glory, it of course will be reclassified.

“yo thanks for writing back. i wrote another quick story. i had northern novas (under space) in mind so you might see some same stuff. also i think i might be able to crash at

my uncle's for a while. lives in the next state over. he used to write stuff too, just have to get in contact with him. anyway, busy days. ima let you get to it, peace.”

I begin reading Derek's tale and find that like so many other space exploratives, it is set in the distant future. A painter, a piper and a prisoner who have now been exiled from their nation are cursed with triple vision. In addition to their own sight, they have the sights of the other two they were banned with. This curse is done primarily to confuse the victim as to which sight is really theirs.

The curse, as annoying as it is, becomes a bit more interesting after the piper dies. The painter and prisoner assumed the visions would subtract to two, however this was not the case. The painter and prisoner retained the same amount of visions and instead were gifted the ability to see the afterlife. Of course this was only the afterlife of a piper, and of course it was still his story, but the painter and the prisoner would find inspiration and freedom through it.

It is not a story of Heaven or Hell, or even Purgatory or Hades, but instead a story of roam. The piper flies like a spirit through all of the universe, discovering galaxies and planets, and portals to the unknown.

Derek's literature is captivating to say the least; I write down my dreams so my stories aren't exactly my stories. These things, he comes up with by himself. He has no one to teach him how to write, or even how to be creative, but if you asked me, I'd tell you that these were things that mostly came from within.

Detective Fields and detective Samson walk onto a shoreline that has temporarily been turned into a burial ground. Out from the waters washed out the body of Wayne Bradshaw, known mostly to his peers as Buckweed.

The two detectives walk closer to the crime scene and find the body surrounded by litter that others had left behind. Samson takes a final sip from his cup of coffee and tosses the cup alongside all the other garbage and waste that populate the shoreline. “What's one more cup?,” Fields asks.

Samson takes out a carton of cigarettes and Fields tells him to “pass him a square.” Samson lights both cigarettes and it's not too long until both detectives begin scanning the nearby area. They find nothing and eventually sergeant Chavez calls them back to the car.

“Get shot, wash up with all the other garbage,” Samson says on the way back to the car. Detective Fields flicks his cigarette onto the pavement, “It's an unfriendly game Michael.”

On the other side of town, Maya Jackson stares at a board full of individuals who may be players in this said game. Terrell, otherwise known as Rock, has been declared “MIA.” Darius Browne, most commonly known as Triggerfinger, has long since been classified

as deceased. Wallace has been re-ranked as an underaged gunman. Deion Jennings is now known to be second in command and does not have nearly as blank a criminal record as Omar Robinson.

Mya now removes Derek's current photograph from the board and replaces it with an updated photograph. A photograph depicting Derek standing outside a six-story apartment building, as he waits for an associate to drop new product from a fifth-floor window.

ANTHOLOGY COMPLEX, THE

1:2:7:65

SILVIO Parker comes home to find his mother-in-law, Emily, deep asleep while his newly wedded wife and high school sweetheart, Lynnette, gets ready for their night out.

“How'd it go?” Silvio asks her. Earlier in the day Lynnette was to interview for a job at a local flower shop. Despite her lack of knowledge, the interviewer would recognize her love for plants and would eventually tell her she was hired.

After some time, the couple leave the apartment and drive to a restaurant not too far from where they are now. Lynnette admires the scenery and the lights as they drive pass, and even though she's seen the vision a thousand times before, she can't help but want to go back home and paint the memory.

A couple of hours later, the pair return home and Silvio tells her about how excited he is that they will be having a baby, and sooner or later they lay down to sleep.

Days pass and now Lynnette is headed to her first day of work. She runs through a harsh and bitter snowstorm assuming she will be late, but strangely finds that she is early. She stomps both feet on the mat before she enters and finally begins her first day.

When the time comes for her break, she goes into the backroom and eats her lunch, but also takes a few minutes to scribble something into her current diary notebook, humorously nicknamed by her, “Diaria.”

12/9 - Today is my first day working a job I think I might actually like. My trainer is very nice and is teaching me all sorts of things. Maybe I can teach you when your old enough. Today was especially special to me because I also got to plant my first flower. They are anthurium flowers and I can't wait to see how they grow. Before this I only read about how to do it, and its so different when you actually get to do it yourself... Your so small right now but I can't tell you how much I love you. Sometimes I get overwhelmed just by the thought of you, and it scares me a little bit. I don't know if I'm the only one, but sometimes I feel like I'm too sensitive. People have no idea how much a small simple smile can change my day. They are so small, but I feel changes in my body when someone says hi to me, or gives me a hug. I feel so much, sometimes I don't know if its a good or a bad thing. Your father and I have already decided on your name. Sara, for a girl, and Daniel, for a boy. I can't wait to show you the world. Love, your mom, Lynnette Jones Parker.

Today, I am a mailman. Not only have I received mail for one Tao Cheng, I have also received mail for someone in the next fucking building.

I open the front door to the apartment building and head over to the adjacent property and make my way in. About twenty-four surnames total, but I only have to look through

several of them before I find Gary Miller's buzzer.

I press the buzzer for about a second because you never know with these things. Sometimes they work like a doorbell with a single chime, other times they ring in your ear for as long as you hold it down. I hate that sound, and I'm sure Gary does as well.

I wait for a while, but Mr. Miller never responds. Who is it never comes. Who does come, however, is Lynn's friend. A neighbor I had seen many times before but never took the time to talk to. Last I heard, she had lost her car, but every now and then Lynne was able to give her a ride to work.

When she gets closer I recognize her two children, the little rascals who actually believed they could defeat me in a snowball fight.

She introduces herself to me, telling me her name was Olya and how she had heard so much about me. You could guess from who. They'd become friends and very often Lynne would take herself and her children over to their place of residence.

I tell her about Gary Miller and she does me the favor of taking the mail and letting me know that she will make sure it gets to him. "Tell Lynne I said hi." A messenger of words, I am.

When I get back to my apartment building I head for Tao's apartment to see if anyone's home. Tao's cousin, Tian, eventually answers and I tell him about the mix-up. His words stumble a little, but he finds the sentence that thanks me. That's one thing I always liked about Tian. Maybe it was because his English wasn't as good as Tao's, or maybe it was because he was always busy, but he always seemed to keep to himself, and he kept his words short and sweet and to the point.

After working for the postal service I find myself finally back in my own apartment searching for the remote. I look everywhere but it isn't until I look under the couch that I find a remnant of my past. A receipt from Chase Mart with Julia as the cashier.

One thing she always seemed to stress in her writing was not to use big words, but to use big ideas. To forgo complex sentence structures and to simplify anything she could. Maybe the composition would seem bland, and sometimes even underwhelming, but I suppose "every book is wrong for someone." Some words I had seen way back when on a poster while in her apartment.

I wonder what she's doing now. What she did yesterday. I wonder if she has relapsed. Made her way around the circle to find that she is back where she started. Or, I wonder if instead, she has found her escape velocity and is far away from where she used to call home. Gone and far away from this place.

I stare at her name, thinking of the letters that print the paper. We all know how powerful words can be, but sometimes you don't truly realize something about yourself until after you've written it down or said it out loud. I crumple the receipt and throw it

into the garbage. That void black space. Years pass, and even now, all the truth in the world adds up to one big lie.

An hour goes by and the anthologist finds a documentary on the television about color blindness. Another hour goes by and it isn't too long until I hear something outside. Sarah and David playing with Olya's two sons. With an unusual green day-moon high over head, I watch as the four play with what snow remains from the winter which was fast ascending.

Schools, workplaces, prisons, divisions, institutions like these all call for socialization. In school, Sarah and David are surely receiving an education, but even moreso they are developing the ability to socialize. Teachers, classmates and the homework to be done. I think of Lynne, of David, of Sarah, and then I think of their new friends.

We socialize to better understand the world we live in and the people around us, and through this, we can become contributing members to society, whether the contribution be finding a cure to a disease or giving a struggling neighbor a ride to work. Of course, contribution to society has a flip side; a bump in the night. Socializing that leads to disillusionment. Dream wonders that turn into night terrors. This corrosion that rots and smells something wicked just beneath my bed.

It seems there are no simple answers. Do right and only good can be withdrawn, but I'm not sure if this is truth. Do wrong and only bad can be withdrawn, but I'm not sure if this is untruth.

When you try to watch the snow fall, you sit back and watch all the little pieces, but you've found that when you watch one little piece, every thing around it seems to slow down. Nothing has really changed, not speed or direction, not anything except perspective, but that alone can make all the difference.

Because of the complexity of a snowfall and all the pieces that make it, each one you watch will be different in some way or another. This seems to pair with the human genome. A countless amount of things that identify us. Pieces that alone, may leave clues, but when winded together to see in its entirety, tell a story.

Imagine all the different windows that view this snowfall; all the different angles, the different levels of blindness, even color blindness, the varying degrees of a person's ability of perceive depth, the rods and cones and their ability to convert light, all these different things that will make an already unique snowfall even more subjective to his or her senses. Relativity is as real as the knife that stabs you in the back.

Dreams ago I found myself in a place where only the privileged wore shoes. In the dream I woke up to find that I had given away my shoes so I would be able to walk more freely. I was not one to die someone else's death.

Kathy and Runa traverse through the mall and sometime later enter a bookshop. Or bookstore. Whatever. They enter the store with a plan to buy at least two novels to continue their reading.

Runa tells her that she wants to browse the fantasy section of the store, but Kathy says she was never one for magicians and wizards. They end up parting ways and Kathy soon finds herself in the contemporary fiction department.

Runa looks through a few novels but doesn't find anything she likes so it's not too long until she ends up in the horror section, but we soon pass again from horror to humor.

On the other side of the store, Kathy walks through an aisle and notices a non-fiction book about the past of the Chicago White Sox, a baseball team. She walks up to it and looks at the price then decides to purchase it, at the same time wondering if her son would be interested in it.

Back to the other side, Runa walks across an aisle and enters the land of poetry. While she did love the subject itself, she figures it would be wiser to stick to prose and continues further down into a place of short stories.

Kathy leaves the sports section and bumps into Runa and asks her if she's found anything. Runa says no, then asks her what she has in her hand, to which Kathy explains that it was to be a gift for Joe when he wakes up.

Kathy then continues on and eventually reaches romance. She looks through several novels and comes across "The 27 Thanksgivings," and begins to read through.

Chapter One; Page 1: Thanksgivings weren't always hard for the Holloways, in fact, in the early years they often embraced relatives they would only see once or twice that year. The home was lively, lovely even, and all around, lacey. Twenty-seven thanksgivings, but with each Thanksgiving times got harder. Hurtful. Hasty even. Mister and Misses Holloway would collect their damaging vocabulary throughout the year only to express them during Thanksgivings, or at the very least days surrounding the holiday. It wasn't always like this, though, there was indeed a time when times were swell. This, of course, brings us to the very first Thanksgiving. The Thanksgiving that started it all...

Runa passes mythology and turns into audiobooks, but spends absolutely no time and soon leaves to find mystery. The first novel she picks up, "The Lady Misdress," sounds interesting as she reads through.

Episode One; Page 1: In a super dark attic located in a forgotten home on a crackly street there is a gown in a golden chest. But, no one has been to the house, in years, so no one knows it exists. But, one year, a young couple buys the house and the wife wanders into the attic and sees the gown. She takes it out of the big golden chest and tries it on, then takes it off and returns to her husband and tells him about it. The next day, when she goes to work, she notices her male co-workers acting strange when around her. She

senses a type of lust from them. At the same time, when she comes back home, she senses that her husband is no longer attracted to her. But, things get even weirder when she is walking down the street and notices that every man can't stop looking at her...

Not too long after, the two find each other and walk to the checkout to purchase a total of three books. Finally they enter back into the mall and before time knows it, they spot a food court.

The anthology complex. It plagues your thoughts like a viral infection. Sure, there are some who have a natural immunity to certain viruses, and there are others who eventually build and develop an immunity, but for all of the others, this same virus enters your being through your thoughts and makes it its home.

You're walking home from school one day and you see a child get hit by a car and die instantly. In your mind, you replay the video over and over again, to the point where there is even a version of the footage where you are able to save the child. You rearrange it 'till you're sane.

On the news today there is a story about corruption. A company franchise that has been taking advantage of its entry level employees. Call it capitalistic intuition, sophisticated slavery, it doesn't matter, at the end of the day it's the same thing and it's always been here. It reminds you that slavery has nothing to do with race and every thing to do with class.

People often lose their most fundamental rights to life, but I'm wondering if these rights actually exist. Are there any truly immutable laws? We declare these laws knowing that over time, they may change, which is almost a direct insult to the nature of laws themselves. I guess it's always good caution to remember that you are not entitled to anything.

A year and fifteen days ago, I had this dream. My partner and I park our van in the New York City Hall parking lot. Our plan was to employ reconnaissance to the entire building to gain a better understanding of its infrastructure, but more importantly, to figure out how to get into the mayor's office.

We put on our electrician suits and walk through a crowd of protesters. Dissatisfied with the work of the mayor, they voice their concerns, but how often does this method actually work. "Socialism Is Evolution," one of the many signs I'd seen.

We get to the front desk of City Hall and explain to the receptionist that we were here to repair a power failure. Maybe in those words.

We gain access into the building and begin our logging for a future revisit. Poster paper is never enough. Words are never enough. How can you beat someone at chess if you allow them to move your pieces for you. We never held picket signs, we held shotguns. We never waved words in the air, we fired rounds into ceilings. We found that

these methods were the ones that were most effective at gaining someone's attention.

I had just finished taking David to Chase Mart to buy some supplies he needed for school when we'd see Lynne drive into the parking lot. We wait for her to exit the car, still in uniform and still attached to her name tag, my mind begs me to ask her how her day went when I see an uncommon straight face.

We walk into the building and enter her home where we find Sarah, Alondra and Anthony. Lynne attempts to relieve Alondra of her duties, but Alondra requests to stay, claiming she was close to beating David's high score in a game of puzzles and blocks.

Lynne doesn't mind, so when Sarah sees this she asks her mother if I could stay as well. Lynne and I look at each other and the next thing I know I'm sitting on their floor playing cards with Sarah. If you don't pay attention, you'll often find yourself in a place that you have no idea how you got to.

Lynne had momentarily retired to her room while David and Alondra continued to go back and forth in 2D domination, but ultimately David retained his high score and left Alondra asking for tips.

"What are you guys playing?," David asks us as he walks over. "Crazy Eights," Sarah replies. Eventually David and Alondra join us and the game gets a bit more interesting.

A few minutes in Lynne comes back out, without a uniform and without a name tag, but with the same straight face. I'm sure now that she has had a long day.

"What game is that?," she asks us. "Crazy Eights," David beats Sarah to the punch. I ask her to sit down and play, but as soon as she goes to sit, Anthony begins to cry and now we truly have a full house.

Lynne tends to Anthony and takes him from his resting place. The very moment she picks him up he stops crying. After a while she is able to get him to laugh, that hysterical laugh I had heard before, and like a virus, it spreads to Lynne and changes her mood. Pendas.

I sit there analyzing the image, wondering how simple laughter can be so contagious. Darkness seems to appeal more to me, even though it is the light that I seek.

Lynne never comes back to us, instead she receives communication that Mary will be coming home late. Though much of the day is gone, Alondra insists on staying, and because I am paired with her indirectly, I too must stay.

As I the teach the younger ones a new game, I notice that Lynne had gone back into her room and then came back out with materials that told me she was in the mood for art. She sets up the canvas in the kitchen nearby and begins to stare at the whiteness.

When she actually starts painting, she begins with the borders. She paints the corners and the borders a type of sky blue, then begins to paint the actual painting inside of it.

Composition is everywhere. The way we start, the way we end. The order of it all.

Where we choose to place something, where we choose not to place it. Each piece is meant to be where it is for a specific reason. Or maybe it's not. Maybe you can randomize everything and still express the same idea, just so long as the actual pieces themselves remain what they were before.

I eventually leave the younger ones to see one small island with fruit trees on it, and then ask Lynne what it was she was painting. Her facial expression has changed. Not much, it is still very straight, but enough to see that Anthony and art can affect her very own composition.

“I had this idea a while ago about an old woman who had a bunch of garden islands that were connected together by bridges,” she tells me. She talks about how the old woman had planted the trees and built the bridges herself and starts to talk about all this backstory. I tell her that she's crazy, but that it was a good kind of crazy. “The Bridge Garden Overpass,” that's what she wanted to call it.

Alondra finally leaves, which is also my ticket out and back into my apartment, but as I'm going to my door I hear John coming up the stairs. “Hey buddy,” he says, “you have a minute?”

Once again memory fails me and this time I find myself in Jack's living room. He goes into his bedroom and then comes back out with a pad of paper that he hands to me. “What do you think, man?” They were some lyrics he was writing. He tells me that he couldn't trust his other friends because they liked every thing that he wrote, that he needed an impartial party to judge his work. As I begin to read, he lights up a cigarette and enters his kitchen.

First Stanza >> her face, fills up the sky / and puts me at peace, blue and white lullaby / shes got clouds and rain and sunlight, in just one eye / and in the other, shades and stills of a distant life

Second Stanza >> vowels change sounds throughout the night / and when i reach for her, shes not in sight / but softly her voice remains, it repeats and it stains / and she guides me through, this troubled life

“the shades of a distant life” seemed to be the working title of the song, and on another page I found guitar tablature to go along with it, a small segment that said “13a > slide to 15a (bend up and back down) > 13a > 11a > 13a > 11a > 8a (vibrato) / 11d > 13d > 11d > 10d > 13d > 10d > 8d > 10d > 8d (vibrato) / 20a (bend up and back down) > 16a > 18a (bend up and back down) > 16a (vibrato) > 13a (vibrato) > 16a (vibrato)”

“Who is she?” I ask. Jack tells me about his daughter and the girlfriend that took her away. He'd written song after song for his daughter but music doesn't seem to replace the empty feeling. “She says I have a drinking problem, man, but that's bullshit. I'm not reckless or anything, you know?” No, I didn't know, but I did have an easy time

understanding.

“The song is nice,” I tell him, “it seems like you're going for a 'gone and far away' type of feeling.” Jack nods his head and agrees, putting out his cigarette. “I think you should change 'repeats' to 'echoes' though, it would be like it's gone but it's still there and has a chance of coming back,” I finish.

Jack pictures it in his mind then nods his head once more. “It echoes and it stains,” he sings aloud. As he is changing the words I ask him if he also sings, and he goes on to tell me about how much he hates his voice.

How many people do you know like this. I've met a good amount of people who hate their own laugh. They hate a certain feature of their face or their own body. You spend days and nights wishing on insecurities, but most of these things, you don't get to pick. I guess you could say these are the things that make you unique, but that's mostly packaged drivel. Spend much of your life desiring perfection, then die and take it to the grave.

Not too long later, Jack tells me to follow him into The Room, and there he shows me his anthology complex. An uncountable amount of records, a musical paradise. I begin to look through them and he tells me that I can borrow whatever I want. Going through them, I realize they are in alphabetical order and that he has just about every genre of music at his disposal.

“A February Star,” “A Hybrid Culture,” “A Prince In Kabul,” “A Silent Icarus,” “A Sweetwater Compromise,” “Alaska, 1867,” “Arbitrary,” “Atlanta Nights.”

As I'm still looking through, Jack lights up another cigarette and then notices that I am currently on “A Urinary Burning.”

“Lost love,” he says, filling the room with smoke, “I pursued and she withdrew, then she pursued and I withdrew, and... And so we danced,” he laughs.

Some of these albums, I recognize. Songs from my youth. Songs from today. Songs even from before both of our time. I suppose, that regardless of the era, we will always have a room that needs to be filled and a song that needs to be sung.

I leave Jack and finally make it home without any interruptions. It's pass midnight, but I guess the day before wasn't entirely lost. I turn on the television and find something to watch, but sooner rather than later my phone begins to ring. Who would be calling at this time in the night.

When I pick up I learn that it is Brandun, calling me to let me know that business would be picking back up soon. “That's great,” I say, and for now the call ends.

I sit back down thinking about how an apartment building, or maybe even an apartment complex, is sometimes really just a small community. I guess for the most part, though, it depends on whether or not the people around you are sociable or not.

Hours pass, and along with it passes thoughts of yesterday. The people you meet in

this life, in this cycle, what are the chances they will be born again, or die again, on this same cycle? Is it possible for you to meet someone twice? Someone you knew long ago dies, and later in your same life you come across a replication.

In fiction, this person would almost qualify as a doppelganger; a paranormal double of a living person. It makes you wonder how many times a person like you has lived. It makes you wonder how many other people out there are exactly like you. How many snowfalls fall exactly the same way in the same place over an extended period of time. The arbitrariness of life.

You wake up, and you are born again. You go to sleep, and you die again. You must sleep because you woke, and you must wake again because you slept.

Around midnight becomes around noon and I find myself wide awake from a good night's rest. The garden islands cross my mind, and this is when my mind begins to fiddle with the idea of painting something myself. Looking at the purple rose in my kitchen, I think about the consequences of painting something for Lynne. How she would react. I like her, maybe a lot, I don't know, but you already know what I mean when I say that I am the rock that propels.

Later in the day, on the news, I hear a term that reminds me of the dream I had last night, and the fact that I had forgotten to write it down. "The Cradle of Civilization," a reporter says.

Sterling and I had been traveling back to the camp with Gary, Stephanie's brother, after we were able to help him escape from a civilian prison.

During the walk back, the three of us run into a body of water that we hadn't seen before, as if it rose up from underneath the earth to settle here, in this place and time. Coming out of this water were figures that seemed to be shadowed in darkness, and they walked forth into a neighboring forest.

We followed the dark figures with stealth for a while, until we came across a wide field. There we gazed upon the Lamb and several seals. And we saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and we heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the dark figures saying, "Come and see." And we saw, and behold a white horse; and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him; and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

Chapter 66

THE DARK BLUE SETTING SUN

1:2:7:66

SILVIO Parker opens his apartment door to find his children, Sarah and David, sitting on the couch watching cartoons on a cartoon network. As he walks by, he notices that this particular cartoon depicts a cat chasing a mouse all about.

In another room, Lynnette is on the phone speaking to her brother, J.D., who was in another town in another state. What they talk about is of no importance, though you may find what Lynnette had written down in her diary notebook just one hour earlier very interesting. Or not, who knows.

While her first notebook had been humorously titled “Diaria,” this one seems to have no title, perhaps because at this point in her life, there is little humor to be found.

7/21 - The heat is starting to get to me. When will this summer end? I glanced outside my window a few minutes ago and saw Helen walking home with her daughter, and it reminded me that David was finally going to be starting school next month. He's really excited and this will give me so much more time to get more things done. I'm hoping me and Silvio can start over maybe, we are in a really bad place. I'm so tired and it's really the only thing I want anymore. Just to feel safe and content in my own home with my own family. I don't think that's too much to ask for. I read somewhere that irises and tulips symbolize “starting fresh,” so I planted some just around the edge of our building. Maybe it will help... I hope so! If not, I'm sure the neighbors will at least appreciate them... I'm really running out of things to write here. Sometimes I hate that I'm not as easily inspired as I used to be. I used to be able to write pages and pages about a single experience with a butterfly but now that all seems gone. Like I've lost a part of me that I'll never get back. It's like that dream I keep having, where I'm standing on the top of a cliff looking into the ocean, and once I really start to look, I can see a ship way out there leaving without me. It always makes me think of my mother and how Silvio basically forced her out of our lives. I'm not afraid of change, but sometimes I just feel like some changes are unnecessary. I wish some things could just stay the way they are forever, but I guess I'm old enough to know that that's not how it works. If none of this works I'm not sure what I'll do, I was never good with plans. I'm really not sure if I ever will be.

Silvio opens the door to where Lynnette is and asks her who she's talking to. She tells him that she's talking to J.D. and that she would be out in a moment or two.

The subject of conversation changes and Lynnette begins to tell her brother about a few new paintings she had painted since they last saw each other. Paintings that were, for the time being, located with Emilie.

She tells J.D. about five paintings in total; one depicting a Sun rising over a farm, one

of a woman's face, one of black and white spots, one of a family walking down a beaten path, and the one she didn't get to finish, a painting showing a few wooden houses near a shoreline. There were suppose to be trees behind the houses and a distant blue moon in the background, and on the beach a couple of people walking. This painting has yet to be finished, though she has kept it in the back of mind for quite some time.

Clocks move their hands and a moment or two turns into fifteen minutes and we see Silvio open the door to where Lynnette is once again. She tells Silvio that she's almost done, then Silvio asks her if she called to get the estimate on the car repair. She hesitantly says no, that she forgot, knowing that things were about to go from bad to worse.

Silvio walks over to her and snatches the telephone from her hand and hangs it up. "What the hell?," she asks. Silvio doesn't reply. He looks down at the table and sees her diary notebook, then leaves the room, slamming the door behind him.

Lynnette stays in the room for a while and it's not too long before she begins to write again. This time the words are dark, bold, and before the flowers have even begun to grow they are affected.

Sometime later, Silvio opens the door again and tells her to get out of the room, but Lynnette says no. "Stop writing in that damn book and get out here," he yells. Leave me alone.

They go back and forth for a small while until both stop speaking and Silvio simply stands in the doorway, staring at her. She can feel his eyes, but she doesn't move, she simply keeps writing unaffected.

An unknown amount of time passes by and he finally walks over to her, grabs her notebook and throws it across the room. Lynnette gets up and slaps him across the face, but this slap is nothing compared to the slap that she would receive back. A slap that would bruise a cheekbone and cause damage to a hand. A slap that would echo into the living room for David and Sarah to hear. A slap that would add to the attracting and to the repelling of two children who were in more than just a bad place; two children who were in a setting that was inspired by a true nightmare.

Lynnette presses her hand against her cheek that was in throbbing pain, "Fine, you don't want to come out? Then stay in here," Silvio says as he walks out of the room, and once again, the door slams.

About half an hour later, after lying on the bed and after thinking enough thoughts that would drive anyone else insane, Lynnette gets up and picks up her notebook and goes over to the closet. She places the notebook in a box way in the back of the closet that would also house three other diary notebooks. Maybe she hid them so far away because she didn't want Silvio to read through them, or maybe she didn't want anyone in general to ever find them.

The thoughts that she'd written down were so private to her that she couldn't bear to have anyone else knowing what was truly inside of her. Growing inside of her. She could never let anyone know that darkness was filling the light, much like a cancer that spreads slowly and indiscriminately.

Stanley Mandelstam, who very seldom does field work, stands in front of a board of suspected criminals. You might say his ability to recognize patterns and his ability to crack codes were handed down to him from God himself, but you may or may not be wrong. Regardless, when Frank Mainor briefly visits the other members of the task force, Stan asks for his attention concerning something he had found after studying what Rock had left behind.

"You see, here, and here," Stan says as he points to pictures and a piece of paper. A piece of paper which contained several addresses that correlated with several pictures that were taken by Mya and a few others. "It might seem like they are dropping the packages from a random window each time, but they're not," he finishes.

Stan goes on explain to Frank that the pattern is simply correlated to time. "The packages are brought in, usually from two p.m. to seven p.m., and when the recipient comes for the drop-down, you subtract one from the hour the package arrived and that's the floor the package is stored."

"Why not just randomize it?," Frank asks. "That's what I was asking myself, I'm assuming there is some hidden element of communication I'm not seeing that disallows for arbitrariness," Stan answers.

Frank continues to look over the piece of paper and the pictures and notices that some buildings have more floors than others and that the suspected criminals are constantly switching the times of arrival.

"Ryan and I checked a lot of these addresses and it doesn't look like any of them are still being operated," Frank says. "Of course," Stan replies, "they know you have their scent. There's no way that they've completely stopped all operations though. Maybe some, but there have to be others out there still."

A moment goes by and Stan tells Frank that he had no intentions of busting any of these package buildings; most of the people operating this compartment of the organization are just kids or low-level players. The main reason why Stan notified Frank of this was because he theorized that this was how, on some level, the entire organization worked. That if they are given more information and if the organization is indeed time oriented, they could predict when Omar Robinson will be "in the wrong place at the wrong time."

Lieutenant Stoddard, who had recently been promoted and was searching for Frank, finally finds Frank and pulls him aside.

Stoddard speaks of budget, among many other political aspects, and soon implicates that the Sun will be setting on this operation soon, so they needed to wrap things up and make some arrests. It was clear from the start to Frank that Stoddard only read, wrote and spoke in numbers.

When Frank reunites with Stan, Stan tells him that he also noticed some other things. “Maybe Terrell hadn't realized it, or maybe he did, but some of the information he provided implicates a couple of cops.” Frank isn't surprised, but for the time being subtly tells Stan that they will suppress these details and not subject any of the other cops to submission.

“Wait, so you're tellin' me some things are tied to fate and other things aren't?,” Wallace asks Derek. Derek tells Wallace to imagine a pen sitting on a table, and explains that while the pen was destined to be in that exact location, the table was not, that the table was mostly tied to chance.

“Okay, but what does that have to do with a hockey player who has a half-metal brain?,” Wallace asks. “I haven't figured out the metal brain part completely yet but that's not really the point. The point is that he was breaking records and winning championships, but even though, he still decided to retire early because he didn't believe he was suppose to be there. So it's like, his body is from the chance world and the part of his brain that's metal is from the fate world, and even though he's one of the greatest of all time, he was never suppose to be doing those things, so he just walks away and vanishes, and no one ever hears about him ever again,” Derek finishes.

Wallace speaks, “I don't know man, that shit sounds strange... You know what would make a better movie I think? Take your idea but it's a black guy playing football, and there's no metal brain shit or chance and whatever, it's just straight-up. Dude is breaking records and making cash and all that shit. All the cheerleaders are on his dick and shit, like he's a fucking king.”

“Man, that is the stupidest fucking thing I have ever heard of in my life,” Derek comments. Wallace, “Bro are you kidding? I would rather see some dude make it than watch some sad ass movie about a dude who gets fucked by fate or chance or whatever the fuck you were talking about. People don't want to go to the movies to fuckin' cry. That's what funerals are for.” Derek, “That shit still sounds stupid.” “Yeah whatever, my movie still make more than yours, believe me on that,” Wallace says.

Moments pass by as the night threatens the Sun, “Did you see Tina come through here?,” Derek asks Wallace. “Yeah, I seen't her just a minute ago, why?” “Cause she owes me money and I'm about this close to beating her ass.” Wallace laughs, “Beat her ass? I've seen handicapped flies that can take you.” Derek resents. “You ain't beatin' no one's ass,” Wallace says as he cleans the grip of his handgun.

Cylinders, half-spheres and one-fourthed cubes. The only thing I'm missing is something that would measure up to a prism.

I never particularly liked washing dishes, but I can't complain; I'm also the one who chose to live alone. While scrubbing the three-dimensional shapes, even from deep inside the kitchen I can hear the weatherman speak of a dense fog that has yet to come. I started again to think of weather changes, even beginning to predict them, but as I've said before, I've never been that great at predicting these types of things.

As I walk away I hear the sink utter a large gargle, pipes speaking to me in a language that was all too foreign. It doesn't stay with me for too long, and after I use the bathroom I grab my coat and leave the apartment.

The moment I step outside I feel the Sun's rays. Discernible clouds in the sky. I think about the weatherman and about how he had it all wrong. I could see for miles and there was no fog in sight.

I walk up to my car and for a brief moment I rejoice in my mind, finally returning this piece of past from my presence. Too long into the drive and I find myself at the edge of the city, and unsurprisingly, the first thing I see is a man getting arrested. For what, who knows, but the law enforcer and the possible criminal seemed to be playing their part and the city landscape appeared to be their stage. Tall buildings, people, cars, noise, you could almost suffocate from it.

The scene reminds me of a dream, a dream I had four years ago. Stuck in row 2, block B, solitary confinement took a lot of time getting used to. Worse than the punishment itself was the mental disorder you would suffer from, and the single fact that the people who monitored you would not tell you why you were there. What it was you had done that was so wrong to be here in this space and time.

A priest comes by from time to time, but even he won't shed any light on the subject. Enough time passes by and you begin to remember a small part of your past, but the remembrance only brings forth more questions. "Back where I use to live, I kept a small journal," you tell the priest, "it had all my repulsive thoughts in it. Things I wanted to do before I died. Bad things that I wanted to do to other people. To other men, other women, things I craved to do to children, sometimes even to infants. The possessive evil that day by day forced me to think of violating the basic rights of childhood. To rip out the innocence and to stuff it with my being."

I figured that it was in this grand list of repulsion that I would find my crime. A week later, the priest would come back to me, telling me that he had read every line in the journal, but he would also tell me that I was beyond his help, that I instead needed to see a man who was far more religious than himself. A man who many would call "multi-religious."

I make a left turn at the light. The majority of us will spend our lives practicing one religion, and a percentage of that majority will spend its life blindly denying any other religion. The irony you'll find in this is that every religion, every philosophy, every system of thought, they all encourage you to seek knowledge.

It doesn't make sense to me. It's about as smart as believing in one crazy scientific theory and completely rejecting an other crazy scientific theory; you live and die by that one theory, but in all that time you could have studied both of them and in each of them you may have found parts of the truth. Maybe not an objective truth, but at the very least a subjective truth, one that may have curled your life a better path in that complete void of darkness.

I stop at a red light. Next to me, I catch a glimpse of a man picking his nose, but he is none the wiser. Completely oblivious to my extensive existings. Is that a word? Anyway, I look at him, wondering if he's real. If he has a family, an occupation, hobbies. Where he might be coming from, and where he might be going to. I wonder if he suffers from disease, if he's rich or poor, or somewhere in between, if anyone he knows has recently died.

The light turns green and he drives away, leaving all of my questions unanswered. I think to myself, if he had caught me picking my nose, would he give my existence the same respect? Would he see me as a person who has this completely other life separate from his own? Or in me, would he only see flashes of himself? Would he only see me as a person living in his world.

Left turn and I learn that I was wrong. The weatherman was right. I could see the misty fog beginning to settle in now, slowly coming down, but down none the less.

Through the clouds and in the sky I can see a dark blue rising Sun, and as my drive continues, the fog gets more and more dense. What was left of the last snow was losing its golden glow, going from white to dirt to nothing so.

Continue for one mile. On the radio a voice tells me about weather conditions that might impede my daily activities. About a fog that might be thicker than expected. The one day I decide to go more than a hundred feet from my house and this fucking happens.

The stage of life, as I look around, is no longer looking like the stage of life. It's beginning to look more like a stage from a dream and the most expensive effect is the smoke. Right now, if you looked up at the sky, the star that sets in the west would no longer be visible. The prop that struggles to come back, but for the time being is of no use.

I finally get to the parking garage and park the car, existing it and closing the door with authority. Good riddance. I pull the blue tarp over it, hoping to never see it again, and this reminds me of Lynne. Of her asking if she could depend on me.

I don't have to tell you that your mind takes a longer time to heal than your body. You can't see it, can't touch it, can't hear it, can't taste it, can't smell it, so unlike the physical wound, you can't ever really tell if it's fully healed. Years pass and you think you're fine, you're ready to be normal again, and the very first experience you have after all this mending tells you that your body hadn't quite finished the healing process. This experience and realization, it leaves you hopeless, wondering if who you were, who you used to be, is completely gone forever.

In Lynne's eyes, as bright as she may appear to be, I can sense these things. I'm sure you can too, even though you've never even seen her. I'm sure you've seen it in the eyes of others as well. You're probably nodding your head right now, saying yeah, yeah, even thinking of a person in particular.

For a split second, they show you that psychological fragment, they let you see that darkness inside of them. Sometimes it's an accident, a loss of control, but sometimes it isn't, sometimes it's what they want you to see.

It is often that I'll think of Silvio and the last time I saw him. The nightmare I had right before he actually showed up. Often that I'll think about what may have become of that family in the worst case scenario.

That nightmare came so close to reality that it begs a second look, even a third and maybe a fourth. Not only did it come close to a specific physical location, it came close to a moment in time. The chances of the nightmare occurring right before? I don't even want to do the math.

With these things in mind, I begin to wonder if our location in space, or the place we exist, combined with the current time, if this compound determines which dreams we can unlock and see.

That is to say, if I had instead been living in Nigeria, telling you these stories not now, but a decade ago, would I be telling different stories? That seems to be so. The dreams I have written down now might be inaccessible, locked away and hidden, and could only be discovered by meeting certain parameters. Where you are and when you are in the day more than likely has an impact in what you experience during the night.

I leave the car and make my way to the street, and there I find that the fog had completely settled and was probably as dense as fog could get. The vision that saw for miles could now only see a couple of yards.

People came out of the fog like ghosts. Demons. Ghouls. Devils. Nothing, nothing, nothing, then a being that passed by in a flash.

I eventually found the bus stop, but after more than an hour of waiting, someone came by and told me that the buses had stopped running. I should have been able to see that no one was going to be driving in something like this. I could go back to the car,

drive back home, but what are the chances I would make it back home alive.

I didn't bring enough money to stay somewhere for a night, and I couldn't go home. I was basically stranded in what felt to be like a dream, playing my part on an abandoned stage. No longer the master of my fate, and no longer the captain of my soul.

Mary, who had just returned home from what may have been one of the most difficult workdays in recent time, walks into The Room to embark on even more work. Shuffling papers, opening computer files, signing papers, it all came with the life of a determined individual.

Ten minutes into the second period, Mary receives a phone call from the hospital, or more specifically, her physician, doctor Rotobnhick.

Mary had visited the hospital sometime before as she was stressed with one of her bodily functions; urination. Her bathroom use had increased and in turn caused her to wonder if there was something wrong with her kidneys.

Doctor Rotobnhick was calling to tell her good news, that her kidneys were fine, but also called to tell her something else, something that may or may not have had a positive reaction. Rotobnhick explains to Mary that she is pregnant, and knowing she had no children, he offers his sensitivity.

Days pass, and like any person who was unprepared for this type of news, she runs through her options. Abortion? Adoption? Adaptation? What she knew, and what couldn't be changed, was the simple fact that she was not ready to take care of someone else. She could barely take care of herself.

A month passes and she finds herself sitting home alone yet again in the room, looking all around it, wondering if it was time to change its interior. To make way for a smaller part of her. The options continue to cycle, over and over, tape to tape and back again, wondering if she was ready for a daughter, or for a son. Her mind storms, and all the while, denial begins to seep into her unconscious brain.

The fog was relentless to anyone trapped by it. For a while I walked, hoping it would let up sooner rather than later. I walked for what seemed to be hours, but I couldn't really be sure of the time until the Sun began to set. What was a mere dense fog became an intense fog. The ghosts stopped, only to be replaced by barely visible street lights and faded colorful traffic lights. Stage lights, by any means.

The fog effect seemed to cause the combination of the red and yellow traffic lights, leaving me with the memory of an orange rose.

Lynne told me that orange roses were like evening skies and best symbolized desire. The desire to gain a better understanding of something, or the desire to acquire knowledge about something you don't quite understand.

When someone moves to a new place, it's hard for you to completely understand how

foreign every thing is to them. Their surroundings, the culture, the people; the fisheye mechanics grab hold of your mind and distort that reality. You can never truly understand how lost they feel, but somehow they adapt. They learn and they evolve to survive, to learn a strange and foreign language.

A time ago when I was conversing with Jack, I asked him about the calluses he had on his fingers. He tells me he got it from all the playing he did when he first started, and explains that a little pain back then saved him from a lot of pain now. His body adapted to the wire that his fingers had to press against and all the pain from playing soon vanished.

I continued to stare at the orange illusion until up ahead in the distance, I saw another shimmering light. Something that seemed to be between green and yellow. A lime illusion.

As I walked towards it, my head grew heavy and my sight grew dim, and when I got to it, I saw that it was an abandoned building. I gazed back at the immense fog behind me, then decided that it was time to stop for the night.

I entered the building, walking through the hallways looking for a place to sit down. For a while, I believed I was alone, but after walking far enough, the ghosts that I had seen back out there had turned into physical beings and I found that this was their haunted house.

The fog in here was a dispense fog, definitely more tolerable than the one outside. Seeing as how this floor was occupied, I went up to the next, only to find that it too had owners.

I walked through the dark hallways peering into each room until I found one that was vacant, and there I had my rest. I sat down, periodically looking out of the window wondering if the fog had gone, trying to stay awake in a place I did not trust. Had it not been for the door that constantly creaked, speaking to me from afar, my goals may not have been met.

Half-way anxious, being in a building I knew nothing about, my thumb would begin to bleed again due to my unconscious picking at it. It's been too long now and I'm guessing it will never heal properly.

The creaking door is opened and I see two young men look inside, and seeing it is only me, they allow themselves in and sit on the opposite side. No words are exchanged. Instead, they experiment with heroin. They let their ghostly bodies fly, and though neither of them said it to me directly, I could feel them think it, "We are all just prisoners here, of our own device."

The feeling reminds me of a time before, where I spent weeks at a downtown hotel. All the floors, all the rooms. It reminds me of my solitude, and in turn, my own addiction. My own obsession. In them I see myself, experimenting not with substances, but with my

own fluid mind.

The following morning I would wake up to look out of the window and find that fog had finally left. Walking through the building, I saw that everyone was gone and the building was my own.

Now I'm on the bus, thinking of yesterday and the time away from home. In my travels I hardly ever stayed in one place for a long time. Dissatisfied, I'd skip around often, but every chance I got I'd stop by a body of water. I'd look out into the vast sea, seeing only as far as my eyes allowed me to, and in uncommon cases throwing rocks into it, attempting to hit the top of the incoming waves.

Were the rocks thrown in vain? Maybe. But even something as simple as this has its complexity. Newton's second law would agree.

The weight of the rock, its shape, what it's made of, the distance from the wave, its height, its incoming speed, these are all complex things that you have to calculate unconsciously. Dealing with uncertainty is one of our most powerful gifts, but sometimes we don't realize a story has an end until we are actually near the end.

Those who mourn are fortunate, they may one day be comforted. Those who can see both the darkness and the light, they may one day operate the dial. Those who are bound and chained, they may one day, in all their unjustified imprisonment, find solace. And in an instant of time, all those who cannot really see might be shown all the depths of reality.

When I got back home I sat down at my desk and stared at the reflection of the Sun on my wooden floor. Enough light to blind you if you stared at it for too long. I sat there reading about a dream where I lived alone on the top of a snowy mountain. Not too far from this reality, it almost seemed to superimpose itself onto this universe. The only notable difference being a wolf that visited me from time to time.

Afterwards, when I got up to leave the room, I saw that the reflection of the Sun had moved, and was now idling in the hallway, still blinding. I wonder, where else does it idle. Just here, or thousands of miles in any direction. Can it idle on words and imprint them into physicality, or will all of our written pages forever remain in the abstract realm, only to exist simply as our minds poured out on paper.

Chapter 67

IF 6 WAS 7

1:2:7:67

SOME eleven storied years ago, I used to have this recurring dream. I'm walking down a night street during what might be considered the windiest night of the year. I'm never sure where I'm headed and have no idea from which I came, but what is clear and ringing is the voice in my head.

The voice, I know I've heard it somewhere before, and it is everything except confusing. The voice tells me that change is the law of life, and that those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future. Each time I have the dream, I try to get more out of the voice, but it only has so many words, and before I know it, I wake up before I get to where I'm going.

Today is the first day of spring. I am awake at a time I am usually sleeping, over at Lynne's apartment watching David because his mother and sister were at the hospital. Sarah had an appointment, I am told.

After beating David over ten times at the video game of his choice, he finally gives up and shuts it off. "I don't know why I can't beat you," he says to me. I laugh, "You think just because you can beat Alondra that you're the world champion?" He shrugs. I see that he did truly believe he was advanced at the game but was now doubting himself, so I tell him that even though he lost every time, he was getting better at it simply because he was playing someone above his skill level. Something I'd learned at Sid University.

The only problem with this philosophy, and I told Sid this, is that if you enjoy murdering people and want to get better at it, you can't just raise the bar and try to commit a difficult crime. It's not the same as playing chess. If you fuck up even once trying to do something above your talent in something like this, you get caught and end up in prison or on death row. The only people you'll be killing there are guards, visitors and other prisoners.

Sometime after the games, David asks me if I could go home. I tell him that it was my responsibility to watch him, and his reply is that I would only be twenty feet away. It made sense, what was the worst that could happen. Even so, I didn't want to be the blame if something did happen, so I stayed.

I could see that David was a bit irritated by my presence, but the thing is I knew exactly how he felt. You could have had the entire house to yourself, but someone had to come and ruin your plans. I'm beginning to feel like Tao.

I wanted to ask him why he wanted me to leave, but being a kid, I figured I would have an easier time dissecting his actions than attempting to understand his words.

Among his actions was the need to lock the door to his room, accompanied with the delayed answering to my questions because he had his eyes and mind on something else.

Finally the time came when Lynne and Sarah were back from their hospital visit. Everything was fine and it was time for the phantom to go back home, twenty feet away.

Towards the afternoon I go to check my mail, and after doing so realize that the Peace Lilies are still dead. It makes me wonder how the spring had not yet rejuvenated them. I enter back into the building and walk towards a pot of flowers. Lynne had already welcomed spring by decorating each of the hallways of the three floors with different types of plants. I suppose her home is still her home.

When I get to the top of the second floor, I see Lynne in the distance kneeling in front of her door, crammed inside her jacket. It wasn't even that cold anymore. Either way, she was kneeling down, staring at two pots of plants she had just placed there, on either sides of her door. Her fascination with design was beyond me. What drives a person to decorate. To color black and white images. To do away with the mundane. In her I see the same repellent formula used by her daughter.

In time, maybe between three or four seconds before she realizes I am there, I wondered what Lynne had done in the past. Her occupation, career, and if she wasn't occupied with a career in the past, I wonder what profession she would take interest in now, or in the future.

Do our professions define us? I have no idea what Jo does for a living. I have no idea if he's bounced around from job to job, trying to find his calling, or just trying to find some way to make money. I have no idea what he said when he was younger and someone asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up.

If, however, in a universe with different dynamics, I learned of his profession, what would that really tell me about him? How much of the identity puzzle is attributed to the profession piece.

Some of us take the jobs we want, the jobs we strived for, and the rest of us take the jobs that are handed to us, regardless of if we want them or not. If this is the case, then the profession piece can be extremely misleading.

Taking a job you don't really care for is one distorter of the identity puzzle, but there are others. Resocialization is basically changing a person's personality by controlling their environment. You'll see this in two of the things that I dwell on often, two things that I've told you a time ago that fascinate me; warfare and prison.

If a man can be resocialized to be an effective soldier, and a prisoner can be resocialized to rejoin the civilized world, then surely, any one of us can be resocialized to adopt a new profession. If this too, is the case, then identity can never be captured into a definite form. We're all just shape-shifters, taking the form of the current year, current

month, current day.

After enough time passes by, you become a new person, or at least part of you becomes a new person, much like how most of the cells in your body died a decade ago and were replaced with new cells. Behaviorally, sociologically, psychologically, genetically, biologically; you are always changing, literally and philosophically. Maybe metaphorically, too.

“It wasn’t you that changed, it was the world around you that changed,” Child Satan says to me in a dream I had five years ago. Just as he’s finishing, Child God opens the door to a room that they had both nicknamed. The nickname was not in any sub-mortal language, but appeared to be moreso in symbols; an equal sign, an “O,” a line graph and a polygon within a polygon. There were other symbols, but there just wasn’t enough time.

“Where are we?,” I ask the two. Child Satan sits down, “Have you ever wondered what lies beyond the edge of the universe?” “Many times,” I reply. At this point, Child God is removing six letters from one of the four walls; A, E, I, O, U and Y. Something above these letters tell me that they had to do mostly with the engineering of sound and the use of language.

“You would be just as wise to wonder what is hidden on your Earth,” Child Satan continues. “This room we are in now, it is everywhere and is in everything. So as we stand here, we are omnipresent. However, unless you are the occupant of this room, it is unobservable and immeasurable in any way.”

Child Satan doesn’t seem to be making any sense to me, but I could see where he was going. A phrase I had heard often before was that “God is in everything,” and what Child Satan was going on about seemed to support this claim, but seeing as how Child Satan also had a hand in this project, one would have to consider that “Satan is in everything” as well.

By this time Child God had finished setting up his demonstration area, so Child Satan and I joined him in that corner of the room.

Child God picks up a piece of transparent paper and superimposes it over a piece of black paper. “What color is the transparent paper?,” Child God asks me. “It’s still transparent,” I reply, wondering if it’s a trick question.

“Correct, but does it not appear to be black?,” he asks me. Before I can answer, he moves the transparent paper over to another piece of paper, and this time the color of the paper is white. “And now, the transparent paper appears to be white,” Child God finishes.

“One of the most difficult challenges of the project was creating its framework,” Child God says to me, “so for the better part of the first millennium, we spent a lot of time developing and creating how the project would fundamentally work.”

Child God and Child Satan then go on to explain to me that everything is composed

of “cleanslates.” A cleanslate was basically the transparent paper, and depending on the cleanslate's location, it would either have no identity, or no color, or it would appear to have an identity, or a color. However, a cleanslate never actually changes, it is always transparent, despite its illusion of identity.

“How does a cleanslate assume an identity?,” I ask the two, “You're basically telling me that the door to this room isn't actually a door, that it's composed of cleanslates that aren't really anything but empty templates, but how did the cleanslates cease to be empty templates and come to steal the identity of a door?”

Child Satan leaves and then comes back with a rolling table. On the rolling table I see two plates, one colored a light shade of gray, the other colored a dark shade of gray. Child Satan tells me that the lighter colored plate has all of the real information, the “source,” so to speak, and the darker colored plate had a receiver that converted all of the real information from the lighter plate. Child Satan tells me that I lived in the darker plate, and that there were an infinite amount of dark plates in comparison to the only one light plate.

“There is indeed only one light plate,” Child God says, “and on this light plate there are cleanslates that are constantly moving around. The location of the cleanslate on the light plate determines its identity. That is to say, a cleanslate may remain an empty template, or a transparent paper, for a long time until it reaches a region of the light plate that transforms its identity into a door.”

“The cleanslate is not exactly a door because of its location on the light plate,” Child Satan cuts in, “it is a door because of the way the dark plate in question interprets it. There are many dark plates, and for any given dark plate, there are unique properties attached to it. One dark plate may interpret the location of the cleanslate on the light plate as “A” and convert the signal into a door, while another dark plate interprets the same exact location of that same exact cleanslate as “Y” and converts the signal to a roof. So now, if dark plate six turned out to be dark plate seven, or if dark plate five turned out to be dark plate four, there would be confusion and disarray throughout the entire project.”

Child God then reminds me that the essence of the project is change, transformation. That as cleanslates continue to move around on the light plate, they change their identity and transform into something else on the many dark plates, such as the transparent paper being moved by him from the black paper to the white paper.

The last thing I ask them before I wake up is, “Is there a finite amount of real information that can be interpreted from the light plate?” Child Satan answers, telling me that the light plate was designed to grow steadily, and that it had an indefinite shape. An indefinite shape meant that there would be times when regions disappeared, preventing the dark-plate-conversion of old information, and when new regions emerged, allowing

the dark plates to convert new information that was otherwise unheard of.

One thing that Child Satan made clear was that all information was never available at any given time, that if a region disappeared, you would have to wait until it re-emerged. Something like a white space on the far side of eternity.

When Lynne finally realizes that I am walking her way, she gets up and of course smiles, then tells me the name of the flowers that stood beside her door. We talk for a little while, about trivial matters, like the weather and other things, then depart.

I open up my fridge to see there is not much to eat, nothing except a couple of eggs. I cook the eggs, and while doing so I think about vapor. I think about the steam that you sometimes see from cooking, boiling, and how the liquid transformed into gas. Still a form of matter, but in a different state.

I pour some juice into a cup, and now I can't stop thinking about ice cubes and their inevitable transformation from solid into liquid if temperatures are high enough.

Everything goes to Hell and I lose my appetite when I begin to think about microwaves and the state of a plasma. These are all still forms of matter, but different states.

I think about the children and what they said. These simple modes of matter and their transformation are almost metaphors. This concept of transformation is everywhere and in everything. You can turn a thought into a sentence on paper. You can take that same initial thought and turn it into spoken words. Whether it be a thought, a written sentence or spoken words, these are all fundamentally the same product but in a different state, and are interchangeable in any direction.

Thoughts into writing, speech into thoughts, writing into speech. Ice melting into water. Water evaporating into vapor. Give it enough time and it falls back down as rain, returning to its liquid state, just as when you read something you had written long ago, the visible words are turned back into thoughts, to where they initially began. Our brain converts sensory information into items we can process and understand.

Everything around us is constantly changing, transforming, and some are things we can detect with our senses while others are not. Lynne is technically the same person she has always been and always will be, but even she is changing every second of every day, aging constantly perhaps until the day she dies.

Runa rings the doorbell to Kathy's home, and when there is no reply, she rings it a second and a third time. She eventually leaves, wondering where Kathy may have been. Morning, day, evening or night, she was usually home.

Runa returns the following day and receives the same exact result, but on the third day, a neighbor notices her visit. "Kathy's in the hospital, sweetie," the neighbor tells her. Runa learns that days before, Kathy had an emergency and was rushed to the local

hospital, exactly why was unknown, but she made plans to find out.

As the brown moon suspends during changes in the sky, Luna walks into the hospital and finds a nurse who could aid her in finding Cathy. After finding the room, she thanks the nurse for his assistance and then she sits down, placing down her purse alongside the bed.

Kathy had been sleeping for quite some time, so after a brief moment of staring out of the room's window, Runa takes out some reading material to pass by the minutes. The hospital literature, as captivating as it was, couldn't seem to replace the duplicate scene that she was in, and the thoughts of Joe and his being in another hospital on the far side of town.

What does replace the scene, however, were faint words being read across the hall and in the opposing room. "Made as if to strike me. The chaplain quieted them down, then gazed at me for a moment without speaking. I could see tears in his eyes. Then he turned and left the cell. Once he'd gone, I felt calm again. But all this excitement had exhausted me and I dropped heavily on to my sleeping plank. I must have had a longish sleep, for, when I woke, the stars were shining down on my face. Sounds of the."

Runa gets up to look out of her doorway, and this is when she sees a younger man who is sitting alone reading to himself. An empty bed beside him, he reads aloud. A strange picture, really.

"Runa?" Runa turns around to find that Kathy had finally waken. Stroke, heart condition, vision loss in one eye, these were the words you would hear had you been in the same room. Of course, Runa is not sure how to handle the situation, and is unsure of how to console her elder friend about her deteriorating health, but she is relieved to see it is Kathy who does most of the talking.

Kathy talks about laying in this strokebed and spending time to think about things. Mainly her wasted life and the very little she has done to serve God. She talks about some of the things she's learned from Runa, like certain aspects of that foreign religion and alien culture, and how it's given her a different perspective on some of the things she thought she knew so well.

As she's finishing her strokebed sermon, ending on a topic of seeking serenity, a light flashes into the room. It had begun to rain and thunder while the sky was still switching settings.

"I brought you something," Runa is reminded. She grabs her purse and takes out five items. "They're origami bookmarks." Kathy takes one and sees that it is a bookmark in the shape of a fish. The others consisted of a moth, an angel, a piece of gold and a raindrop. "They started selling them at my job," Runa explains. Kathy asks her what others they had, and she begins to list an assortment of designs.

Later that night, Runa makes her way out of the room to leave for the night, and as she is leaving she glances into the opposing room once again. The younger man was gone, and was replaced by a middle-aged couple and what seemed to be an ill grandfather.

Derek is walking home after a busy day when he feels a raindrop hit the top of his forehead. He realizes that each step produces more and more rainfall, so he attempts to pick up the pace. While doing this, a vehicle pulls up to the side of him, and the driver asks him if he wanted a ride home.

Derek looks at the vehicle, then looks around, and by this time he may as well have been taking a warm shower. Seeing as it was a woman who seemed to care about both animals and people, he took the ride that an off-duty, plain clothed but nicely dressed Mya Jackson offered him.

“You'll catch a cold running out in the rain like that,” Jackson says. Derek doesn't reply. “Are you coming home from after-school?,” Jackson asks. “No.” “Where are you coming from?,” Jackson probes. “Friend's house.” “He lives around here?,” Jackson annoys. “Nah.”

“You like short answers,” Jackson laughs as she makes a left turn. “Well this is a short ride,” Derek replies. Jackson begins to sense a bit of hostility, and not too soon after Derek tells her that they had arrived at his home, only it wasn't his home; they were still a few blocks away from Spider's residence.

Derek says thanks and gets out of the car and begins to run home as the lightning strikes, and at about the same time, sitting on his front steps only a block away, an associate of Omar sees Derek exiting a vehicle that resembled law enforcement.

Derek walks into the apartment building and sits down to watch television. Spider eventually joins him, and Derek begins to tell him a joke that he had heard from Wallace. “Yo you wanna hear a joke?,” Derek asks Spider. “Yeah what,” Spider replies. “Women's rights.”

Rock, who had been hiding in a town that bordered the city, walked out of his temporary residence to visit a corner store to purchase a carton of cigarettes. He walks in and notices that they don't carry his particular brand. He begins to converse with the clerk about this when a man and his son enter the store.

After a while of browsing, Rock has found all of his items and returns to the checkout, where the man and his son had already been checking out their own items. As he is standing there, waiting his turn, he hears the door to the corner store open, and when he looks to see who it is, he realizes that his assassins had finally found him.

Rock runs through an aisle and at the same time pulls out his handgun. Parallel to this, one of the two assassins takes aim at the man and his son, and without thinking, ends

their lives. Perpendicular to that, the second assassin takes aim and ends the life of the clerk. Adjacent to these two points, Rock looks up and begins shooting at the two assassins.

After shots are exchanged, there is a brief moment of silence. However, one of the assassins gets the idea to attempt to shoot through a gap and through a metal divider. The bullet cuts through and success is found when the knee of Rock becomes badly wounded.

The assassins get up and run towards Rock to finish him off, and while Rock does get a round or two off, it does nothing as they are body shots that were protected by bullet-proof vests. The assassins eject into Rock and eventually leave him where he lies. Eyes are everywhere.

They run out of the corner store and into their vehicle, driving away in the drizzle from a red and silver scene that told the tale of a working man, a family man and an assault man.

A dream may not always be factual and in tune with the real world. Fabrications that we see in movies, misconceptions that we read in books, they enter our minds as truth and follow us into our dreams where they settle as lies.

A teenager watches a courtroom drama that is exaggerated way past what would actually take place in a real courtroom, and later that night dreams of receiving a sentence for a crime he committed, a sentence far worse than any that would be handed out in our world.

This amplifier is played on all of us and on many levels. Sixes and sevens begin to play into your mind, and so they enter everything you do and everything you see. They slip into your subconscious and your subcomposition alike. Sometimes I wonder if it's possible for thoughts to affect reality the same way experiences affect dreams.

For some reason, you have the number thirteen stuck in your head and you can't stop thinking about it, and sooner rather than later it begins to appear not only in your thoughts but in the physical world. You start to see ones and threes and thirty-ones and thirteens and the power of your mind, or whatever you want to call it, is actually changing the world around you. L9? Sh? EZ?

I've heard that certain gene combinations advocate certain mental and physical illnesses. Perhaps if you switch six and seven, the result is mutation.

The phone rings as I'm watching my favorite channel, and before I can say hello a loud voice comes through the receiver. "You order skip to my lou?," the accent is obnoxious, "You pay order, we send now." I try to tell the person that I didn't order anything, but they just won't have it.

I eventually put two and two together and figure out that it's a prank call. From that dumbass Tao. He begins to laugh hysterically and tells me about how he just got Tian

with the same joke. Halfway around the world and he still manages to find a way inside my apartment.

Tao gives up the voice and tells me his trip was cut short and that he would be back soon. This gave me about a month or two to pack my things and find somewhere else to live. Maybe I could give Brandin a call and he'd set me up.

After hanging up the phone I decided to keep my plans and visit my parents' home. On the way there, thankfully, there was no weather that hindered my hopes. What I would see, however, was Mr. Nosleep, walking down the street with Ms. Nosleep. We nodded at each other as we passed and I couldn't help wondering how they had been.

Their appearance in my world reminded me of the time when I kidnapped a young couple and stored them in one of my rooms. It was quite funny, actually.

I won't bore you with the details, but I basically had them perform in front of me as a sort of entertainment form. I watched them as I forced them to have ordinary sex, and then asked the man to ejaculate on his girlfriend's breasts. When he refused, I didn't push, I simply gave the girlfriend a sewing pin and some wire and told the both of them if he didn't let her stitch close his anus, then I would just kill them both. Suffice to say, they agreed, and after the operation I let them both go.

Actually, no I didn't. I remember drugging them, and then cleanly chopping off the girlfriend's foot and the boyfriend's hand. I had a collection, you see, of women's feet and men's hands, stored in my freezer for as long as I could remember.

You would have to work for more than half of a year to buy bread for everyone to eat. Lawmakers will watch closely, waiting for your good intentions to go badly so they can condemn you. When you speak before the judge, don't babble like a crazy person, thinking your words will be heard because they are many. People will honor you, praise you, but they will have no idea what you truly mean. Numbers are everywhere.

I get to the home and walk down into the basement and continue working on a painting I was composing for Lynne. The composition reminds me of Jack, and the time he told me about his favorite effects. Distortion. Reverberation. Vibrato. Treble. Delay. Compression. Amplification. Resonance. Sustain. "Face the mirrors of your mind," some words I had seen not long ago on a poster while in his apartment.

I paint away, learning to paint in the process and wondering if this will ever actually be finished. If I won't just end up throwing it out because of a sense of dissatisfaction, or just stop because the purpose becomes lost to me. Like dreaming a recurring dream over and over again without any introduction or end.

Sometimes I wonder if I'll ever get any answers to the recurring dream where I am walking down a night street. If maybe I'll find out that I was walking home from work and that street was the street I always took. Or if I was walking to a relative's, and that

street was the street they lived on. I go back to that dream often, the same way a criminal or a detective goes back to a crime scene, reliving the moments from the wind and the voices or searching for missed clues.

At any given moment in life there will be much that we miss, and if we could capture that moment and go back to it whenever we pleased, when we review it in our later years we might be able to catch hidden elements and experience more than we experienced the first time around, probably because the things we learned in the gap changed us, and so it changed even the experience itself.

Chapter 68

1947

1:2:7:68

DETECTIVE Wilson walks across the street and onto the property of the thirteen crime scene. Still unsure of how to look at the stage, he sits on a bench in the neighboring abandoned playground and tries to see past his own limits. Though all of the bodies had by now been identified, he was no closer to solving the crime that might plague him for years to come.

As Wilson leaves the stage to continue looking through suspects who were closely related to the drug game, a purple moon could be observed in the sky, and when you looked back down from the sight you would find Bill Freeman sitting on the roof of the abandoned apartment building.

“Snap,” the toothpick says as it is broken in between his fingers. The toothpick says its final words as it is tossed into a nearby box. The desecration of the toothpicks go on for about an hour, then Bill decides to climb down the building and walk towards the abandoned playground.

As he is passing through, he opens up a recycling bin and tosses a few pieces of paper into it as a testament to his hatred for litter and his loyalty to the phrase; “Cleanliness is next to Godliness.”

As Bill begins to walk back to his vehicle, he hears a pounding coming from the building, so he makes his way back and enters through the dying door. When he peers inside, he sees his latest victim, Rondo Mac, still alive and crawling over another dead body, attempting to break the glass of a weak window.

Hours before, Bill had been driving around looking for those of the drug dealing type. When he saw that Rondo Mac was a fit for the type, he began to follow him, kept an eye on him, and when the opportunity arose, he made use of the blade.

Bill walks over to the wounded Mac and turns him over onto his backside, then firmly places his hand over his mouth. For a moment, Mac stares at his predator, and slowly his vision fades until he is finally dead.

Bill leaves the building, stepping carefully around bodies in the process, and finally enters his car. In his backseat there are pages upon pages of material he had written, one of them being a manifesto had anything happened to him.

I LEAVE THIS AS A DECLARATION OF INTENT, SO NO ONE WILL BE CONFUSED. ONE: AUT PAX AUT BELLUM. LATIN. AS A CHILD, MY UNCLE MADE ME RECITE IT LIKE A PRAYER. “AUT PAX AUT BELLUM.” EITHER PEACE OR WAR. TWO: BILL FREYMAN IS DEAD. HE DIED WITH THE REST OF THE WASTE. THREE: IN CERTAIN EXTREME SITUATIONS, THE LAW IS

INADEQUATE. IN ORDER TO SHAME ITS INADEQUACY, IT IS NECESSARY TO ACT OUTSIDE THE LAW. TO PURSUE NATURAL JUSTICE. THIS IS NOT RACISM. THIS IS NOT OPPRESSION. THOSE ARE NOT VALID MOTIVES, THEY ARE EMOTIONAL RESPONSES. THIS IS PUNISHMENT.

The manifesto was signed, W.F., and remained his most prized piece of writing, but it would never see the light of day. As Freyman begins to drive away, a purple moon could be observed in the sky, and when you looked back down from the sight you would find Freyman packing his things and on his way out, moving permanently to a different town in a different state.

As Freyman takes the last box of his possessions to his car, he notices the new plants that had been placed in his apartment building, and they soon become the last memory of this past home.

The chapters in your life will sometimes smash into each other, and you'll be unable to tell where one chapter ends and where another one begins. Last night, I had a dream where I went back to 1947. The same clear air, but a different place altogether; a wide animal farm.

I sat atop a small hill, probably about a hundred yards from the farm, and observed the mannerisms of the livestock ahead. After a while, I noticed a brown solitude sheep sitting alone in a corner.

Outside the farm, maybe about fifty yards, there layed a brown horse and a brown goat. They didn't seem to be residents of the farm, but you could tell they wanted to join the society.

A few hours go by and nothing really happens, so I end up falling asleep. When I wake up, I see that I am still in 1947, and when I look out towards the farm, I see the goat and horse approaching the farm. When they get to the fence, the solitude sheep notices them and walks over to them, and it almost seems like they begin to have a discussion.

"We would appreciate it if you could ask your master to take us in," the goat says to the sheep, "we have been without decent food for days." That would have been my guess if I had one. "The wildlife out there is harsh, and survival is barely an option," the horse continues to plead their case.

I guess it was time that I finally realized that there are some with no home, not a nickel to loan. Could it be, really me, pretending that they're not alone. "We will carry our load and do our share, we will do what is asked of us," the goat says. "You can understand our pain, you are like us, casted away, marooned," the horse again continues. The picture reminded me of a widow deeply scarred, somebody's broken heart and a washed-out dream.

Again, time passes by and I fall asleep, and when I wake up, again I find I am still in

1947. The Sun must have set and risen again, and when I looked out towards the farm once more, I saw that the farm was now empty, and the goat and the horse was again fifty yards away. This is when I got up and began to walk towards them. When I got close enough, I began to notice something strange. With each step, they adopted the form of a humanoid.

First it was feet, then legs, then a body and finally arms and a head, but being a dream, this somehow all felt normal to me. When I reached them, they were in full human form and dressed in sharp suits.

“Did you notice anything strange?,” one of the men asks me. “Something unidentifiable?,” the other man cuts in. I tell them that I hadn't seen anything strange. “We received reports about something out here; and came to make sure it was safe for the nearby residents,” they both assure. Yeah, and when your hand is on your heart, you're nearly a good laugh, almost a joker.

They ask me to follow them into a car, and after sitting I begin to grow tired, falling asleep once again, but this time when I woke up, I was no longer in 1947.

When I look out of the window, I see that it is still night time. Nine-twelve p.m. to be exact. It was going to be a long night. I'd later raise the blinds to look at the dark sky, but it wasn't as dark as default. Instead, the clouds covered the sky in full so that no stars were visible. This cynical life.

And it came to pass, that in the succeeding hour, I would do away with the dust in my household. It had been ages since I really cleaned.

I started with the bathroom, more specifically the toilet, then went on to the tub and the sink, the cabinet and the walls. I don't mind the dirt in life, but I suppose it doesn't hurt to make way for purity.

The arms dealer, who did wrong before he did right, often spoke of purity and the deathbed that he found it on. Twenty-four months passed and he became to me the man who stood at the end of the road and told you how terrible of a life you led.

“It seems as if no matter which time you are in, people are alike all over. The culture may change, the language may change, the things they do for recreation may change, but the basic human behaviors and instincts, they remain the same,” the arms dealer says to me.

By the time he died, the arms dealer had found that purity that prophets often speak of, that sight that so few people see. “Honesty is the first chapter in the book of wisdom.” He'd say these words, but more importantly, he'd now begun to live by them.

I know I've told you this before, but the mind is a fragile thing. A commercial tells us that a certain toothpaste will do a certain thing, and even if it's mostly bullshit, we buy that product and we use it and it begins to do what is advertised. The placebo effect. Call

it what you want.

The arms dealer used the same method. He tells me about how it was so easy to tell someone that they needed a gun. When he got really good, he was able to sell even war, but the time came when the lives he took began to haunt him.

“Humans are destructive. Both men and women, sometimes even children. Life is a cruel joke, and more often that not we are the punchline,” he finishes. He was right, “Both men and women,” I’m sure somewhere out there, there are Silvias who abuse and manipulate their husbands.

I’m in the living room now, digging into my couch for any garbage I can find. I soon move on to the television and its screen, the windows and their walls. On a section to the far left, in small print, I find the words “brain,” “hopes,” “time,” “high” and “damage.” I can’t be sure if I’m the one who wrote them though, Brandyn used to visit all the time.

After cleaning the composition room and the bedroom, I take the two garbage bags that I had filled up and walk through the back door and down to the garbage bin. Still the clouds are covering the sky, I throw the bags into the bin.

I decide to go around and check my mail, and while at first there was nothing unusual, I became a little interested when I saw junk mail that featured the image of Jesus Christ. I throw the other pieces of mail in a wastebasket by the corner, then exit the building and begin to read a quote on the Jesus Junkmail.

“I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves, therefore be as wise as snakes and as harmless as doves.” Wise words, I guess, but in the world I see, the sentence seems more like “I send you forth as wolves in the midst of sheep, therefore be as wise as snakes and appear as harmless as doves.”

The same Jesus told us not to be as the hypocrites are, who pray in synagogues and on the street corners so they may be seen by men. My question is, how many of his followers are willing to give up everything; their possessions, their loved ones, their health, to follow in the footsteps of Christ and live the way he did. To doeth all these things in his name and in his honor, in secret, receiving no worldly reward, but instead suffering until the day of an untimely death.

You have a better chance of seeing a man use his name to instead gain riches, and to see this same man defile the way Christ lived his life with the way he lives his own. You’ll never see him sneer as a wolf, but he will manipulate the sheep, being as wise as a snake allthewhile appearing as harmless as a dove. This pig and this dog, fucking pigdog; much like the arms dealer, he will not realize what he has done until death speaks to him and at the same time shrinks his riches.

The air is nice, so I stay for a while and eventually decide to walk. I pass Chase street and reach Knox avenue. There I turn the Jesus Junkmail to another page and this time

find a quote about sheep and children.

"What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish."

The same Jesus tells us to be as humble as children. As we age, we lose sight, and sometimes along with it our wisdom. The day we regain these things, we might find that the world without children was graced with them once more, and that the first child we would see in this world without procreation would bring all people of all differences joy, because what was lost has been found, and what was lost was humanity.

I walk back into the apartment building and throw the Jesus Junkmail into the trash. I'm sure he'll understand.

I end up staying up all night being unable sleep, and it was soon that the Sun began to rise. The bright yellow rising Sun, accompanied by that bright yellow setting. I opened the windows as it was nice out, and let the fresh breeze through. Upon doing so I gazed at the early Sun, barely able to remember what I had done the year before.

It reminded me of the Pacific, and how it was often legened that it had no memory. It also reminded me of those people who many times dream the future.

For many things in life, you'll have to take a people's word for it. Where you were born, your given name, your first words, these things people will tell you and you just have to take their word for it. All mediums can be fabricated, as can reality when memory becomes unreliable or nonexistent.

When I first started writing down the dreams, after waking, if I took more than ten seconds to start thinking about what I dreamed, I couldn't remember it in full detail, if at all. Even though for the most part my memory improved, there were times when it got cut down, messed up, and the ability fluctuated like a wave.

I later learned that my memory efficiency was largely influenced by my mental state. Improvement, deterioration; longness, shortness.

Opening a random composition notebook, I find a two-dollar bill, seriesed 1984. A low mental state would explain why I had forgotten that I put it there. The same low mental state is the reason why I can't really remember Mariah's face. I try to often, but I can't. Her face has been washed away off the canvas and all that is left are scratchy contour lines.

"You handled it?," Deion Jennings, otherwise known as Right Hand, asks the two assassins. "It's taken care of," one of them replies.

"That's good. Good," Jennings pauses, "I got somethin' else for y'all," he finishes.

Jennings looks through a few papers, then talks about how they have a couple of “youngins” who they're trying to break in. The task at hand was for each assassin to pair with a selected youngin and to assist the selected youngin in murder. “This comes from the top.” The targets, of course, were Derek and Spider, and not one without the other.

The winter was gone, and with it replaced by noisy children. They ran all across the park, yelling and screaming as their parents watched on, playing “the tree game.” You had one chaser, and all other individuals were safe as long as they were touching an authorized tree. It was, however, unethical for an individual to stay at any particular tree for too long.

Of course, with any set of rules and regulations, you are bound to run into problems, as we would later see when the chaser and an individual begin to dispute whether the individual made it to the tree before the chaser managed to elect him the new chaser. Nonetheless, the playing eventually continued as the guardians watched.

“When was graduation?” Kathy asks Runa as she wheels her along on a path normally used for excising. “Two weeks ago,” she replies. Kathy congratulates her and tells her that she believes she will do a fine job educating children.

The two get to their favorite bench and Kathy tells Runa that she would like to sit, so she helps her out of the wheelchair and the two are added to the list of playground guardians.

“So you're looking into being a teacher assistant, or substitute teacher? To get started I mean,” Kathy asks. Runa lets out a sighful laugh, or a laughful sigh, and Kathy laughs along with her. The two had been able to develop an anti-corrosive relationship, even though the elements that founded it were anything but.

It is possible for social fragments to have counterparts? Is it possible that when one social fragment is alone, it can be more destructive than it is when it's combined with another social fragment from another party? Perhaps a double fragmented yin and yang.

Runa's cellular phone begins to ring and she answers it, and soon excuses herself from Kathy to speak with one of her former classmates. Kathy watches Runa as she walks away, and begins to wonder why such a young person would spend so much time with a boring and old-fashioned older person. Maybe the guilt of injuring Joe was the reason, maybe it wasn't, but what Kathy saw walking away was something that she once had in her own life. Youth, health and the illusion of time. Normally we hold up mirrors to see space, but maybe one day we will figure out how to hold them up to see time.

Runa continues to talk on the phone, walking about, while Kathy watches as kids run to and from the trees. She thinks of Joseph, and tries to remember what he used to be like as a child, what he used to look like. The moment you drive onto the road, you put your life into the hands of all other drivers; the moment you decide to live with others and join

society, you give them a part of control, and they control a part of your life, whether these were your intentions or not.

A little while later, the kids stop playing the tree game and decide to instead inhabit the playground set. On the way there, one of the little ones trips and falls onto a platform, then begins to cry on the stage. Another little one runs up to the fallen child and pushes his shoulder, and then runs away. Immediately the fallen child stops crying, gets up, and begins to chase all others.

Kathleen laughs at the child's attempt for attention. He was only just beginning to learn of identity and its many fragments, and deception was as good a place to start as any.

For a while now, Runa continues to talk, and shows no sign of a soon return, so Kathy readjusts her sitting to be more comfortable, then reaches over to grab a bag that contained her medication and some water. She takes two pills and a sip of the water, then closes her eyes, and all that remains is the sound of children, and the memories of her youthful 1947.

NORTHERN PLANETS

1:2:7:69

LAST week, I had an unusual dream. Lynne and I had been living in an unfinished cabin out in the woods, talking about several different stones and their unique densities, and how we might find them. What was strange, bizarre almost, as I realized soon after I woke up, was that the dream was silent.

She got up because she needed to use the bathroom, so she went outside and did her business while I waited for her, still studying stones.

It's about four or five minutes in and she's still not back yet, so I get up myself and decide to look out of the window to try and find some planets in the sky. No luck, but this is the time that the ground began to shake.

With each passing second it got more and more violent, so I ran outside to look for Lynne to see if she was all right, but the moment I stepped outside I saw why the ground was moving. Not too far into the distance, a two-hundred year old tree was falling.

In the corner of my eye I can see Lynne returning, and I wave her over to come look at the tree that was in mid-fall. She then begins to run over, and this is when I first notice that both of her feet are real. The quick thought bugged me, mainly because I couldn't figure out why it was weird that she had two real feet.

We watch for a while, until the tree completely falls, then we begin to walk towards it. We walk and we walk, that is, until we realize the tree is gone and that we were now completely lost in the woods, and the fact that it was getting dark didn't help.

After a while it started to feel like we were walking in circles, and at times it seemed like we heard soft piano music, but we couldn't be entirely sure. This could be attributed to memory loss.

“Bridge Garden Islands,” that's what we saw on a sign and we immediately knew that we were no longer traveling in circles. Above the name, we saw an arrow that pointed upwards, so we began to walk forwards. I shit you not, what happened next felt like it was taken straight out of a kid's fairy tale.

All of a sudden two planets begin to form and take shape to our right side, or more specifically, to the north. They have a certain glow to them, but the color is unknowable. We both decide to follow these planets of the true north, up until we found out that they led us to the beginning of a lake.

Lynne got to the lake before me and kneeled over to wash her face, and again I got sight of her feet. Why were they so strange. They were ordinary human feet.

She looks back and waved for me to join her, and when I get there I too peer into the waters. I notice her reflection, and also notice the fact that her reflection was a lie. The

color of her long sleeved shirt did not match the color that could be found in the lake's reflection of her, instead, the lake told me that she wore a shade of a certain peach.

The first time I ever spent more than ten minutes with Lynne, she told me that peach colored roses symbolized peace and harmony. I found it funny that I would be reminded of it in this way, considering she and the reflection were not in agreement.

The colors and sounds in dreams, of course, are open to interpretation. They vary from person to person, experience to experience, and any rose, be it black, white, peach or any shade of feces, will have a certain and possibly different meaning depending on the person. How do roselovers such as Lynne find peace and harmony in the trade when a red rose means twenty-seven different things.

We continue to look into the waters, and I'm guessing we must have been somewhere mystical or magical, because we began to see images in it. Gems and potions, but what was most striking was the image of two trees that had begun to fall and fell into each other, making an "X" shape. Behind these two trees was another cabin, much bigger than ours, and right above it, the same two planets that were in the sky now. We wondered if we could use them to find that cabin.

It's mid-May now, and on the clock it reads 7:21 a.m. The sleeper wakes up in Sanctuary. By now I had finished two things that I set out to do; I finished Rosalynnette and I finished packing the items that could be found in the basement of obsession.

Reality versus fiction, suicide rates by country, quantification of life, the temperatures of both Heaven and Hell, functions and compositions of blood. A desk, a chair, a lamp.

I was now waiting for the owner of some storage units to call me and tell me that my space was ready. I agreed to pay him more if he gave me a helping hand in moving all of these things.

I got up from off a couch that would be staying and walked around for a bit, then came across a book I had received years ago. It was free, and for the most part, it was bad. Then again, a free book is never as good as it sounds.

I walked up the stairs and got something to drink, seeing Mr. Nosleep in the corner of my eye, sitting relaxfully on a couch in the living room. "I can't believe that you can't see that a gesture like this will ruin your life," he says. "What life?," I ask him. He laughs, then begins to talk about how there is no light at the end of the tunnel for me. Pretty much in those words.

Many times I've heard writers say that the most important thing in writing is to tell the truth, but what does that even mean? Often I would feel like they were simply reiterating something they heard long before, something that they thought was true themselves, and maybe it is, but I know for a fact that I have met liars who've shown me the light.

One light that I've had the fortune of seeing, or maybe the unfortune, is knowing and accepting the situation that I am in. Knowing of my inability as a person to connect with others truthfully. Being unable to survive the hopelessness and the despair, unable to ease the sickness that I feel when I look at other human beings.

A lot of us do not understand the situation we've been put in, and sometimes this lack of knowledge and understanding is worse than the actual suffering. Worse than the actual starving, worse than the actual abuse, worse than the actual loneliness, simply because we cannot understand it. A life like this is always followed by "Why?"

I leave Mr. Nosleep in the living room and walk into my own room. The still air reminded me of David for some reason. Or maybe it was actually my little brother that I was thinking about. I couldn't be sure, nor did I have the time to; someone was ringing my doorbell.

The storage unit owner was finally here, and two by two, we began filling his truck. When we got to The Storage Unit, the one that was to be mine at least for this month, and I actually saw inside of it for the first time, I had a sense of *deja vu*. Almost as if I had been here before, or as if I knew something about this place already. It was like after you woke up from a dream, and hours later you saw someone that you dreamed about and suddenly that dream comes crashing down.

After we finish, I pay the man and go back home and begin to wrap Rosalynnette with brown paper as Mr. Nosleep watches. Shortly after I went to the bathroom, and like I've done many times before, I stared at my reflection. Of course, Mr. Nosleep was right behind me, making faces and laughing in weird voices. Lakes and mirrors seem to always cause the loss of sense in reality.

By the time I got to the apartment, I could feel my pulse rate increase. When I got to Lynne's door, it doubled. Strangely enough, though, after I knocked the first time, it completely shot down.

I felt as if in a daze, thinking of the time I first saw her over a year ago. The slight limp, the yellow dress, the joke. Don't read too fast now. "What did Claire's dog say after he accidentally drank milk? Meow!"

They say there are realms, hidden in the depths of reality, where you can sense abstract concepts with your brain. Where objects are more than they appear to be.

In this place, you can feel freedom in a man's shoes, and see beauty on a woman's dress. Hear passion from a musician's guitar, smell death from a corpse's rot. Taste life in a peach's bite, and understand sorrow from a writer's pen.

In the same place, I have been told, there are things that cannot be possessed. "Horses have no masters, only riders." "Money has no owners, only spenders."

After the second knock, Lynne finally answers her door. The narrator looks at Lynne

as she takes Rosalynnette. I walk into her apartment and she can already tell that it's a painting of some sort, and when she opens it, she sees that she is right.

A smile from ear to ear and she doesn't even know that I'm the one who painted it with all my blood, sweat and feces. When she does find out that it was all my work, she buries her head into my chest, and at the same time, Mr. Nosleep appears and sits on her couch. A berserk smirk on his face.

When she asked me what possessed me to do this for her, I told her the truth. It wasn't because I was in love with her, or because I had any feelings for her, but rather because she was the one person who didn't push me to become something I didn't want to be.

She says that she understands completely, and starts telling me about how she noticed that I wasn't the relationship-type person, so she half-backed-off but nonetheless wanted to remain friends. She wasn't about to risk losing a friend like me, like she almost lost before. "What friend?" Mr. Nosleep laughs in the background, "You're not her friend, she's a fucking experiment to you. A brain to pick."

She looks over Rosalynnette again, and I tell her that it's suppose to reflect her other pain, White Lights. It was basically a yellow rose during the night-time with a moon in the background.

"Silvio really messed me up," she says, "but I'm past the point where all I can think about is a nice house and a happy family. I'm learning that I can be fine without having someone to love me." She laughs, "The very little companionship that I get from you is more than I've ever gotten from anyone else. I'm happy to be alive and I'm happy that I found someone that I actually look forward to being around."

"Are you done?" I ask. She pushes my shoulder, then kisses me on the cheek, so I turn to her my other cheek, but I don't think she got it. The time she kissed me on the lips at the gas station was the first time she had ever done that, and was, thank God, the last time. I didn't mind kisses on the cheek, which she would have plenty of to give, but any contact with any orifice on my being was too much.

It was good that she understood, because if she didn't, I'm sure I'd have to kill both her and her children. I'm not sure how I would do it, though. Maybe I would tie them up or something, the only thing I know is that it would have to be a quick and painless death. I wouldn't be able to look at them and kill them any other way.

I leave her apartment and then the building with plans to go back to Sanctuary. On my way out, I notice the dead Peace Lilies once again. It really didn't seem like they were ever going to grow back.

The place is Switzerland, in a factory where a man monitors a type of metal that is being structured. The structures take the form of shotgun shells as they are sent to a lower level and land on a conveyor belt.

They ride along the belt as two women who are talking check through some of them to make sure their form is correct. One of the women picks up one of the shells, whom we will call #18524112, sees that it is fit for duty, and then places it back onto the belt.

#18524112 is now placed into a crate that contains many other shotgun shells and then the crate is hammered shut by a nearby man. The crates are then delivered to be shipped across the waters, and of course are checked before they are put on the ship. After they arrive onto the ship, they sail the Atlantic until they reach the Americas.

They arrive and land in the United States of America, where they are then distributed. Along the line, a couple of corrupted cops manage to get their hands on #18524112 and its siblings. It's not too long until a member of Umar's organization does business with the officers of the law and obtain the ammunition.

Fast forward, and we find two assassins and their pupils, Kendrick and Elliot, loading guns. Elliot is given a handgun while Kendrick is given a shotgun along with #18524112. They finish and go their separate ways.

Elliot and his teacher drive to a property not too far from where they were, as they were told they could find Spider there, doing some of the organization's daily tasks. With murder on their mind, they talk along the way, planning against wildcards. When they finally get there, they find that Spider had not yet arrived, and it only made sense to wait.

It wasn't that Spider was late, but more so that the pair was early. About fifteen minutes early to a four o'clock arrival time.

Spider, on the other hand, was at home preparing to leave. Finding his clothes, wondering where Derek was, eating something quick before he finally left. When he did decide to leave, the moment he opened his apartment building's front door, a man would run up to him. He didn't know it yet, he probably never would, but he had dodged a terrible misfortune.

"Get the fuck down," the man yells. Another officer appears as the yelling police officer handcuffs Spider for the murder of a fellow cop. Clark Winston had finally got his man.

They walk Spider over to the black and white, "I can't wait to bring you in," the unnamed officer says, smiling. Winston most likely wouldn't take part in the beating that Spider was about to receive, but he was able to find consolation in knowing that Spider would no longer be on the street, and that he would now finally be able to face the wife of the deceased.

On the other side of this story is Kendrick and his own teacher. The assassin tells his pupil to ride shotgun as they walk towards their vehicle, and several minutes later they arrive at the drug dealing lanes. There they find Derrick so they pull up next to him.

"Yo," the assassin says, "you Derek right?" Derek answers affirmatively. Derek had

seen this man before and knew that he worked with Omar, but he didn't know who he was or what exactly he did for Omar, so when the assassin tells him that Omar wanted the three of them to pick up a new order, he got in the car and went with them not really questioning anything.

Eventually they enter an alley in a strange place, but it isn't the strange place that gets Derek's attention; what makes Derek a bit suspicious is seeing Kendrick's hand shake, and Ken's attempt to stop the shaking every so often. That seemingly feel began to cloud his thoughts.

Once Derek saw that they were on a property that didn't have anyone anywhere, he figured it out, so he opens the car door and jumps out, and after a little bit of rolling he begins to run. Kendrick and his teacher stop the car to chase after.

They run and they run, but for Derek, getting out of a place like this doesn't appear to be possible. Knowing that he can't run forever, he tries to hide in a small structure at the end of the dusty road, hoping his killers won't see him. Moments pass, Ken and his teacher feel as if they are lost, and Derek prays for his life.

"Did you check around there?," the teacher asks. "Yeah man that shit is empty, I don't even think he came this way," Derek overhears the two as he hides. He then hears them walk by, and for a while they have no intention of checking the small structure, but that while comes to an end when the teacher knocks on it, then checks inside of it.

"Come on out," the teacher says as Ken runs up to them. Derek, confused, begins to ask all types of questions as he stays hidden inside the structure, but he gets no answers. Instead, the teacher drags him out onto his feet, then looks at Kendrick. "We don't got all day youngin, do your business and let's get outta here," he says.

Ken looks at Derek as his 12 gauge faces the ground. Being forced into a corner and trapped, this is what they both felt like.

Ken raises his arm and Derek stares down the barrel of the shotgun. "What did I do wrong?," Derek's voice cracks as he pleads. "Tell me what I did wrong," those are the last words of a drug dealer.

Kendrick wipes his red eyes, then pulls the trigger as the shotgun is aimed at Derek's chest. Derek falls onto the ground and lays flat out, still awake but losing blood. "You got one more of those in there," the teacher says.

Kendrick takes aim once more, and Derek once again stares at the barrel as #18524112 waits to be fired. Ken fires, and for the first time in what would be a long career, commits homicide.

The two pick up the body and place it into the structure that Derek had attempted to hide in before, and then go back to their vehicle and drive off.

Up above in the sky there is no moon to be seen, but it is there. A new moon dwelling

in the distance but unable to be captured by any human sight.

Back down below lies the lifeless body of a young man who probably never had a chance. Flip coins, play cards, roll dice, it's all the same. At the end of the day, there will always be factors you couldn't control, factors you didn't even consider. Factors that you saw, but mistook for something else.

Chapter 70

A LITTLE FEATHER

1:2:7:70

DEREK'S deceased body buried into infrastructure otherwise undiscovered for days. “Y'all seen Derek?,” Wallace asks his friends around the area Derek was stationed. Obviously, no one had seen him.

Omar was displeased upon hearing that one, but not the other, was murdered. Spyder learning of Derek's downfall was not going to be a pretty picture, and of course he would later figure out that the chances of he himself not being a target as well were very slim.

Omar sends a couple of men back to Derek's deathsite and has them bury the body six feet under, but whether or not they dig that deep and that well remains to be seen.

Back at the police station, Stan continues his decryption as the phone begins to ring. Mya answers it and receives intel that one named “Spider” had been apprehended and was being questioned. Mya tells them to hold on to him as she looks up at the board of suspected criminals, more specifically, a picture of Spider.

Mya relays the information to Frank, who relays it to Tim, and the three of them make plans to speak to Spider, however, on her way there she is interrupted by detective Richards, who tells her that the lieutenant was looking for her.

She goes into Stoddard's office and presents herself, and this is when Stoddard tells her that unfortunately, she was to be removed from the task force and to go back to working as a detective in homicide.

Mya, much like a former Omar, was displeased in hearing this news and begins to question her lieutenant, something she would learn to never do again as Stoddard begins to tell her that she was just a number to the people who ran the city. “Affirmative action,” he says. He tells her that the only reason she was promoted was because “they didn't have enough female detectives in the department.” Mya leaves his office, and from then on, much like most of the other employees, she recognized what type of leader Stoddard was.

Mya returns back to Stan's location and sits quietly, thinking about how her career was only loosely what she expected. After a while Stan asks her why she was being so idle, but she only nods her head, and then gets up to leave. Her appetite was finally beginning to develop.

“I didn't kill no one,” Spider says. “What do you mean you didn't kill anyone, we have you dead to rights,” Tim says as Frank observes Spider's black eye. “Forensics, DNA motherfucker. D, N, A.”

Frank interrupts, “We aren't looking for a confession. You're going to prison, there's no way out of this, a long sentence with no possibility for parole. But look, you have

information that we need on a stand and we are willing to work with you, even if you did kill a cop.”

“Nah, I didn't kill no one,” Spider insists. “You like that bruised eye so much you want another one?,” Tim asks. “We know about Omar, your whole crew, and he's not going to be able to get you out of this one, trust me.”

“I want some fucking food, I haven't eaten shit since I've been here,” Spider says. “We don't feed cop killers,” Tim replies. Tim and Frank leave the room for a bit and talk about how much they need Spider's testimony. “Everything we have is circumstantial at best, and it doesn't help that it's from a criminal source,” Frank says.

A moment later Tim and Frank head back into Spider's room once again to question him, and once again failing in the process. They simply did not know that it wouldn't be their words that encouraged Spider to testify.

“You know your pops did everything he could to get you to not be a smoker,” the corner store owner laughs as he hands Rock a carton of cigarettes. “Every time I saw him he'd talk about how stubborn you were.”

Rock adjusts his knee brace as he sits at the edge of a chair, staring at the wall almost blankly. He gets up for a moment to walk, but is bothered by a slight limp and sits back down. Once the lieutenant of a solid organization, now its main after-prey.

The owner hands him a lighter, which he takes, but has no interest in thanking him for his hospitality. In fact, it would be impossible for anyone to be able to tell what Rock was interested in now, what exactly it was that was going on in his mind.

The owner leaves the room at the back of the corner store and returns to his employment, finally leaving Terrell alone. For some time, Terrell simply sits, mostly thinking about the other victims from the red and silver scene. The families that would shed so many tears. He wondered, was his tattoo of a basketball a misbranding?

Four or five bullets is probably enough to kill most living things, but mavericks are often stubborn people and pay no regard to what others want. In retrospect, Rock died, but really, when you step back and look at the big picture, Rock will never die.

“I'm coming back in a few weeks,” Tao tells me. He asks me if I could pick him up from the airport, and how else could I answer besides positively. I hang up the phone and realize the day was fast approaching. I had to find a way out of here.

The same feeling of fear reminded me of the night terror I had two nights before. Probably the only dream that I had ever waken up from with a toothache.

It's night time and I'm in a desert, digging a hole into the ground with an old shovel. The more I dig and the deeper I get, the more soiled the shovel becomes with blood. It's not until I hit a skeleton that I understand that I had been digging for my younger brother.

I unearth him and take him back to sea-level, but I am completely unprepared when I find David there, standing just before the grave. He is mangled, from top to bottom, and even though his eyes are open he appears to have no life. Some of his fingers had been removed and his lower face was covered in bandage. Bondage had begun to take his feet, and they too were mutilated, one foot missing one half. His forehead had a marking upon it, of what seemed to be a spade, and his hair was gone and only stood behind him.

Waking up after this, I knew exactly why I dreamt it. Perhaps you do as well. David, who is not far off from the age my brother was when he died, is smothered by the guardians around him. Smothered by his mother, who seeks only to protect him. Smothered by his father, who seeks only to visit him.

I couldn't save my brother, and I don't think I really care to save David, he's kind of mean anyway, but dreams have a way to telling us how we really feel. What we're really thinking. Maybe I think David is in danger, physically and mentally, and maybe I believe he will meet the same fate as my brother of dying at a young age. The thought almost makes you grind your teeth.

There's no way of making sure he will be safe, that he will live a long and prosperous life, but even so I find David to be on my mind often these days, and the subject is always his own welfare. His need, much like mine, to be away.

As we all know, there is only one way to combat smothering, and that is to give a person their own space. In this particular case, their own Stasis. Sanctuary. Asylum.

I sat in Lynne's living room as she got us both something to drink. David. Sarah. David. Sarah. They were both at school, finishing up the school-year. When she sits down she begins to tell me about how happy she was that the winter was gone. I suppose someone her size did get cold very easily.

After a while she starts to talk about Father's Day, and how it was only three Sundays away. She of course brings up Silvio. Even though he was an abusive husband to her, he was almost a decent father to his kids. The problem was, Lynne tells me, was that he had so many sides that she couldn't dare to roll the dice. My words.

"What do you usually do for your dad?," the question catches me off guard. A year before but in the same place, I may have told her that I got him a watch, but I was getting used to her. "Cancer," the answer just as well catches her off guard.

She eventually understands that I was saying he had passed away, and like any other person, tells me she's sorry. "Your mother?," she asks. She clearly didn't learn the first time. "Suicide," I say casually. It takes her a bit longer this time, to decipher whether I was joking or not, but eventually she realizes that I wasn't.

"My dad died in the war," she tells me, "I was too young to remember anything about

him. And obviously, you've met Emily." I wanted to hear more about the war, but I guess she wouldn't have known too much herself, and the subject probably wasn't the best conversation.

Before he went on his deathbed, but after finding out about his cancer, he told me to always take the time to look back on life. The advice was wasted on me and would have been better going into his own ears rather than coming out of his mouth. Maybe then, my mother wouldn't have felt so under-appreciated. Then again it's her own damn fault for not being able to comprehend that the voices in her head were not real.

Commercials come back on and I finish my drink, then I finally ask. "What do you think about taking Sarah and David to my home for the weekend? I mean the one you saw that one time." The problem with extremely nice people is that they sometimes don't realize when you're trying to do something nice for them. They get so caught up in trying to please everyone that they forget they themselves even exist.

"We couldn't do that," she says. Why? Probably because she thinks it would be too intrusive on their part. Live your quiet little life and try not to bother anyone too much, because that's when every thing gets fucked. "We are a bit much," she laughs, masking her insecurities.

"It would just be for the weekend," I say. It started to look like she was getting uncomfortable, a little late in her reply. When she again refused, I didn't push. I told her to think about it, that I thought it might be something nice for David and Sarah.

A few days later, the school-year was getting closer to ending and I again found myself in Lynne's apartment. She had indeed thought it over and during the day told me that she changed her mind. Really that it was Sarah who changed her mind. Nonetheless, I guess she put her insecurities aside for the time being and trusted me. Trusted that I didn't feel like she was intruding.

I really didn't feel that she was intruding at all, at least not as much as Tao. That illusion that spun atop her head and told her that she wasn't wanted anywhere or by anyone, it was beginning to fade. I knew deep down she wanted to do it, it was just a matter of getting her out of that shell. The one that I put her in after I kicked her out of my apartment.

"But I have to ask, are you absolutely sure?," she says. Gaining the trust of someone after they have been mistreated for years isn't an easy thing to do. If there was an award for it, I should be considered a candidate. Or at least get an honorable mention.

So it came to pass, that on the last day of school, that Friday, we would go to my parents' home and stay there on Saturday and Sunday. I explained to her that we would have to be gone by Monday morning as Brandan was having patrons over. From time to

time he used the estate to make extra cash by allowing guests to rent the home.

Friday eventually came along and I entered the passenger side of Lynne's car and she drove us to our destination. Along the way, David continually kicked the back of my seat and every so often his mother would tell him to stop, but it was of no use as he would eventually start up again.

The one thing I remember about that drive, other than the kicking, was the fact that we never hit a red light. It was simply green the whole way through.

We get to the house and out of the car, walk towards the front door. I find the key and unlock it, then let them in. As I go to enter myself, I notice the mat on the floor. "Your home is your home." There's no way it could possibly be real, but still they are words I have not yet forgotten.

After we're in, I tell them all to go through the house and to take any room that they like best. As Sarah and David begin to run, I yell out telling them any room besides the basement, but I'm not sure if they heard. Lynne stands there, then asks me what's wrong with the basement. I tell her that I have dead bodies buried just underneath the boards, and that by now it's most likely haunted. She nods her head and walks away, touring the home.

Truth is it was alright for them to go to the basement, I had already moved every thing out, but something told me that something still wasn't right about it. Like there was some kind of bad luck down there that would possess anyone who saw it.

I follow Lynne around as she explores the house, and all she can really say is that everything is breathtaking. I didn't see it, though. All I really saw was an excess. I didn't believe that any family, especially one the size of four, needed a house this big. I resent the idea and I resent the home itself. I resent owning it and I resent ever having to be in it. If it weren't for sentiment and nostalgia, I would have sold it long ago.

Night falls and everyone gets ready for bed; Lynne sleeps with Sarah, and David, maybe for the first time in his life, sleeps alone in his own room. I got down into the basement and slept on the couch, after placing a composition notebook under it.

I am somewhat startled in the middle of the night when I wake up and find Lynne sitting with her back against the couch. "I don't understand you." That's what she says when she sees that I am awake. I really didn't know what to say to that, so I just didn't say anything. Man, I just wanted to go to fucking sleep.

Oppression is everywhere. When you oppress people you disassemble their dreams. You drag them down and you stop them from becoming who they can become. You stop them from being able to express themselves truly and freely without the fear of consequence. After it's said and done, they die a slow and painful death. Even if life is

without purpose, one desires to be happy.

Oppression is what causes even the most pure of heart to fall to dark things. Violence, racism, self-harm, armed with enough oppression you can do just about anything. What happens when the oppressed, for the first time, are no longer oppressed? How do they make sense of the world without oppression.

We ended up watching old sitcoms for the rest of the night until we both fell asleep. It was a bit strange to say the least.

On Saturday, everyone woke up before the novelist, and when I did finally wake up, I went down under to record my dream. At about noon we all went to a nearby department store. Like the kids they were they asked for half of the things they saw, but Lynne had the good heart to not spoil them.

She did buy them a few things, and she got herself some materials to garden as she had plans to bring life to my parents' home, things like zinnia seeds and tulip bulbs, and as for me, I left with a few packets of pens and some plain post-it notes.

When we got back home, Sarah and Lynne spent a lot of time in the backyard, and David, in his room. After a while I went to go check up on him and found him going through some old boxes in a closet. I asked him what he was looking for and he says "Nothing."

At the same time he pulled out an item and looked at it in wonder, then asked me what it was. It was a dreamcatcher, one my mother said she bought at a local mall. I was too old then to sleep with teddy bears, nightlights or dreamcatchers; by that time I had already met Kid Nosleep, and the first thing he taught me was to embrace the nightmares.

I explained to David what it was, and what its function was, then told him that he could have it. To my surprise he took it and placed it on the bed behind him, then started going through the box again. The next thing he took out was a small telescope, and began to peer through the objective lens. "Flip it around," I'd say. After looking through it correctly, he went around the house staring at objects, and I knew it was only a matter of time until he understood what telescopes were really meant for.

After he spent his time with the telescope, he put that aside on the bed as well, then went through a different box. There he found a book, one containing several children's tales, mostly about mammals and reptiles. As he sat down to read, he asked me to leave the room, so I left and he closed the door behind me.

Leaving the room I could hear Lynne and Sarah still in the backyard. When I got to them I saw that they were spying on the neighbors. Swimming in their swimming pool, having all the fun in the world. I wondered why my parents never had a swimming pool built into our own house, it only seemed reasonable.

Besides spying on the neighbors with them, I also saw that Sarah had written her name into a patch of dirt, but that it was spelled “Sara.” All this time, and I had been pronouncing her name wrong.

On Sunday, I woke up before everyone else, but only because I had never really slept. Once again, in an attempt to tire myself I walked a long distance through the wealthy neighborhood, a place where I believe I'll never belong. Something like a tale of two halves.

It's the human condition to suffer, wherever and whenever you are. No matter how rich, how poor, how sad, how happy, suffering hides in us all at any level, at any plane of existence. A poor man doesn't become rich and eradicate his suffering, just as a rich man doesn't become poor and find misery.

When I came back to the home, I saw that Lynne was awake and had begun the process of life-giving. For a while I watched her from a distance as she gardened, seeing a metaphor of overcoming adversity. It seemed like she had finally developed that green thumb.

Watching her, I thought of all the enslaved people I've seen in my dreams, and how some of them were born into imprisonment and knew nothing but chains and cages. Lynne, similar to these people, was like a caged bird, whose sole consolation in life was to fly. Taking away a person's individuality, this is the cardinal sin.

After they take away your identity, you might find yourself using your own tears to plant the few flowers you have left. For some people, those seeds might take decades to grow, for others, only years. Some will grow straight and others crooked, but nonetheless they will grow.

After the years have passed, others will find those flowers that you had sown, and many people will tell you to get rid of them, but it will be impossible. You'll find that trying to forget everything you've seen and heard is like asking a flower to revert back to a seed; it just doesn't work that way.

They'll continue to urge you to cut down the flowers, or to at least stop watering them and let them die. And there will be times when the flowers themselves bring you torment, and you'll wish you had never sown them in the first place, wanting to go back to a simpler time when chains and cages kept you in place so you didn't wander off into the wilderness to find yourself lost.

Then the day will come, you'll find your way out of the wilderness and back to your flowers, and you will see that they had fully grown, and were now actually beginning to produce their own seeds. If ignorance is bliss, then knowledge is a sad salvation.

The sad salvation, I felt, was looming over me. Still watching her, I knew that my

efforts were mostly in vain. You can save someone today, but they'll surely find trouble tomorrow. That's almost what life is, trouble, year after year. With this, I realized that the effect I sought was far from me, gone from me.

Sure, I knew I had done something kind, but I didn't feel anything. I guess I wasn't surprised, though. Sometimes you just have to draw out the emotion in others, so you can see it on their face, and then at least you can visualize what you can't feel. The people I kill, the look on their faces explain why life is to be so precious.

That's almost the language of insanity itself. If anything I've said has made any sense to you during this one sided discourse, then you might want to take the time to re-evaluate your mind, because someone I knew long ago once said that only crazy can understand crazy.

On Monday, I was back at home, sitting on my favorite couch watching my favorite television set. During the evening I received two phone calls. One from Tao, telling me that he would be back next week, and one from a mortuary, asking me to come down and possibly identify a relative.

I went down the next day and told them my name, and about the call I had received the day before. I was later passed on to a woman who took me down a hall and into a dimly lit room. It wasn't too long until we arrived to the structure that the corpse had been sleeping on, and when she uncovered the face, I saw that it was one of my uncles.

I positively IDed him and then asked her how he died. She told me that it was a heart attack, a quiet one alone at his home. I wanted to laugh, but instead I asked why they needed my confirmation. "It's just a precaution," she says. The next question I would have asked was how they were able to get a hold of me, but I didn't want to make this seem as if it were an annoyance to me.

Later she would tell me that I was the only one who picked up when they called for assistance from a long list. After this, I asked her if she would mind if I touched the body. She said she wouldn't, then left the room.

Once she was out of sight, I put my hand on his face and felt the same cold that I've felt before. He was now completely gone from this world, and all I could wonder about was the type of life he had led. Is it your past that eventually defines you?

Looking over his face, he tells me that we are always alone. Physically and mentally. We can be surrounded by people but it doesn't make a difference, it's just something we will never be able to escape. Matrimony, soulmatry, unity, call it whatever you want, the fact is they are just illusions and life is ultimately a funny looking one-seated car.

Enough time and I left the mortuary and got on a bus that took me back into town. By now, it was dark out and there were very few passengers. I had planned to go back to my

apartment, but something reminded me about the storage unit. Something reminded me about Asylum.

I got off the bus and walked out late into the dark, changing plans, and deciding to instead visit Asylum, the small space that would now shelter my reclusivity.

It was a windy summer night, with sadly dancing trees, and after a long while of walking I realized that I had misjudged the distance that I had to walk. Many more steps than I anticipated, and I probably wasn't even halfway there.

The wind continued to blow, almost seeming to get stronger as the minutes passed by. Once I saw that the Moon had begun to reflect off the rear windshields of parked cars, I knew that time was no longer on my side, and that my appointment with Ms. Nosleep at Asylum would be met with tardy.

It was no bother, really, my only intention was to decode a dream about a homeless man who left behind a piece of cardboard for me, and I assumed it wouldn't take too long.

I would have gotten there sooner, but as the Moon disappeared behind the dense and quickly racing clouds, I came across a stray cat. I noticed it before it noticed me, but when it did finally catch sight of me, it froze. We stared at each other for a while, probably pondering what the other was thinking, or where the other was going.

“There must be some kind of way out of here,” said the balladeer to the cat. The cat doesn't reply, but simply begins to walk off. I watched as it walked away, and as it turned into an alley and vanished into the dark night.

If a person walks in the night, and they stumble, was it because the light was not in them, or was it simply because their vision had not yet adjusted?

Once the cat was gone, I soon after began to wonder how I had gotten here, to such an apathetic and wasteful existence. “How did I get here?,” that's what I asked myself as I looked back on what was behind me.

It seems that from time to time, one often wonders how it is they ended up where they currently are. They try to pinpoint the exact time when every thing changed, but the point eludes them. The past becomes a blur, and the mind, it's scrambled. And toiling in strife, one simply can't help it but to look back on a misspent life.

I eventually looked back up from off the ground and continued to stand there for what was a long a while and I thought about the distance I still had to travel, and I thought even more about an Asylum that long before brought me here, but sooner rather than later, I began to walk again, and found that the wind was still here and was now blowing against me.

As I walked deeper into that night, listening with patience, I could hear the rustling of the leaves blowing in the wind, and I watched very calmly as the trees swayed back and

then forth and then back again. It wasn't too long from then that I found myself thinking more deeply about the past.

I thought about all the things I had missed in life, all the things I had missed because my mind was always somewhere else, and about how now, the only thing that made me even begin to feel was a sort of morbidity. A sort of laughing sickness, that echoed on and on, and forever into eternity.

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A single year in anyone's life, when written down, is a story that will last forever. It's a novel that captured a certain time and place that could be revisited, a time and place that was filled with the pages of inner-peace and the pages of burdening-strife. With the chapters of prolific freedom and the chapters of relentless captivity. Indents of joy and indents of pain.

And foremost, when one's experiences is embodied in words, it becomes a key that is designed to unlock the faded memories of a distant past. A key to remembering certain people and their tales, certain places and their atmospheres, certain events and their importance. A key to remembering times of triumph over adversity, moments of downfall by oppression, and accounts of apathy from disease.

And finally, when one writes down the year, they leave behind a book, a green light, for a stranger who might be in the same story. And in those paragraphs, there is no doubt that they will find at least these two things; a way to knowledge, and a key that liberates a human being from the circumstances that enslave them in life.